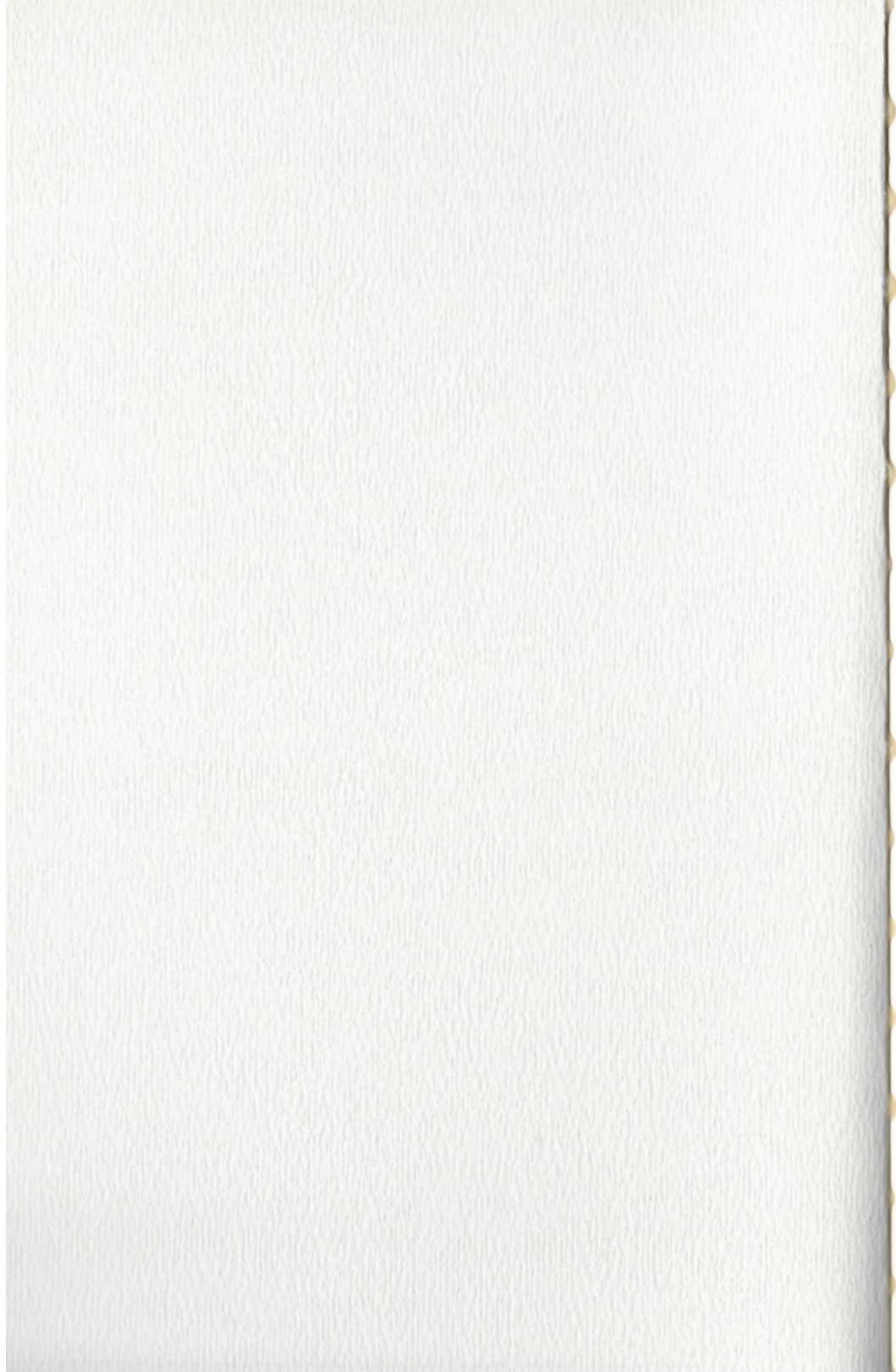




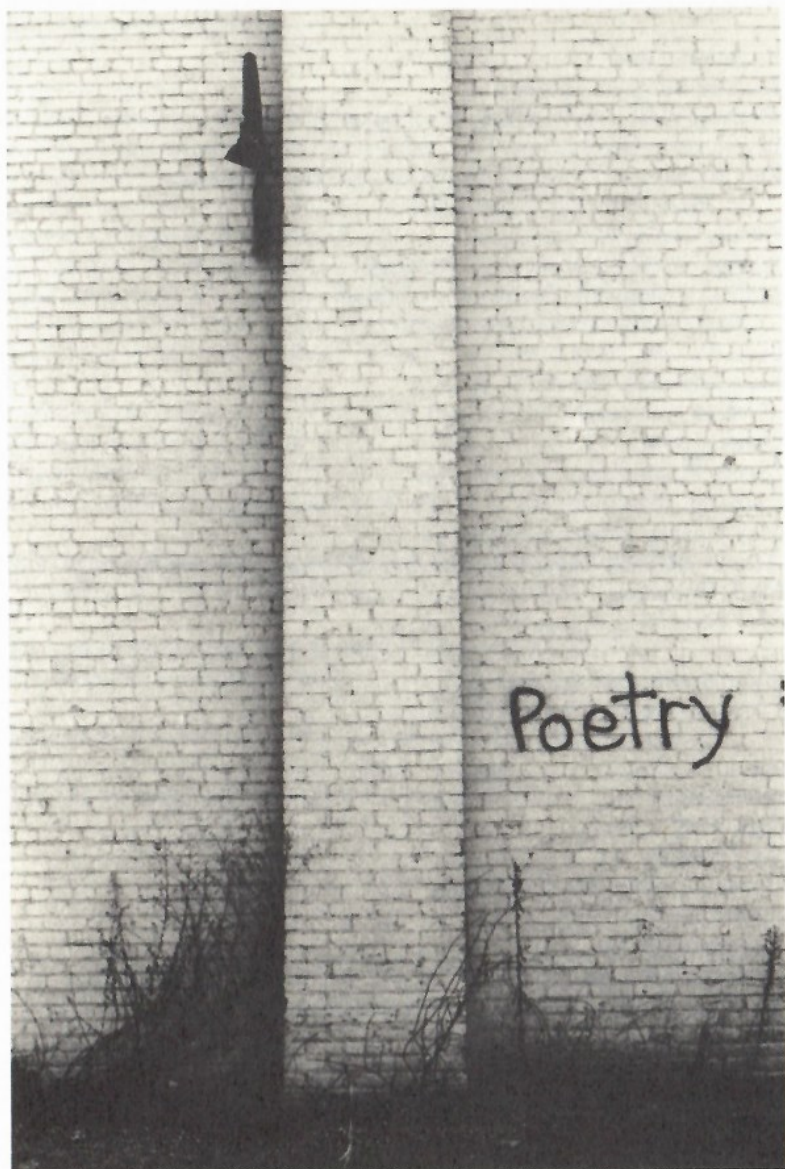
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JENNIFER GILLMOR

## Stripper

*for Lawrence Breavman, hero of  
The Favorite Game by Leonard Cohen*

Respectable regulars and I  
sit upright and observe  
the light colour her  
the smoke smooth her

Progression through  
fantastical silks and laces  
and passionate expressions  
in four four time  
More? she coyly mouths

More we whisper

From out of reach  
from our safe seats  
erections hidden under coats  
as the last determined frill  
slips gracefully to the floor

More? she coyly mouths  
sliding the shining blade  
cleanly into her belly  
More as I fall retching out the door

With nowhere left  
to put  
my faith

RICHARD BINGHAM

## Down Doing the Basement

I  
Eight-inch nails were used to hang  
rubber jar rings tied on strings.

Four-inch nails are bound round  
by cowlicks of string. No doubt  
these suspended something else.

Carpet tacks force masking tape  
to jam into crevices.

I have found she hated draughts.  
I have found she used to tear

blankets into strips, and fold  
them into Wonderbread bags.

These blocked cracks at doors' bases.

When I take these away  
for burning in the gravel pit  
underneath I always find  
a crackled wedge of dried flies.

II  
She painted  
the linoleum  
faintly more orange  
than linoleum.

'You can see how she always painted around the furniture.  
That squares where the woodstove used to be in the dining room.  
See?  
She was always puddlin round with somethin.'

70 this year, her niece  
yanks a chair up to stand on  
to look at the grid-worked map  
I've hung too high on the wall  
of where she has lived all her life.

'There was a mill at Chepstow driven by horses.

Sthere now but no ones usin it.  
Teeswater theres another,  
And theres that windy road to Hanover you drive the car carefully on.  
This is an interesting map.'

Her fingers are spread  
all over it.

III  
The rippled windows would give the impression  
that the lilacs' gangly bobbing  
was the lulling of subaqueous sways.  
But a gauze of dirt stifles the distortion.  
To be stung dizzy by lilac scent  
you must step outside.

IV  
In the final surrender  
of the last three hospital-

bound years, when her eyesight was,  
no doubt, failing, all irised

to a point, sparing this one  
hard gathering of effects.

Sweeping the stairs,  
I wish the broom

were made of iron.

I cloud the light  
with brown static.

I can barely breathe.

I imagine that just before death

she shut her eyes  
real tight.

MICHAEL WADE



*Frank was very intelligent, but there was something reptilian about him.*

BRAD WALTON



## R. Loves T.

The tension in her eyebrows should be plain.

Rustam had lived by this dictum for what seemed like several months now. Yet it was all so much abstraction. A waste of time. He secretly feared that the Classical Persian eyebrow was extinct. Exterminated by the tweezer.

Which made the vigour of his renewed quest for the elusive ābru, that ideally arched strip of fur above the lashes, look curious. His search brought him, quite naturally, to the municipal art gallery. It was usual for him to come here, often for an exhibition that he'd already seen countless times before. He didn't come so much for the painting alone, though. It was more for the delight of seeing a beautiful woman admiring a beautiful canvas. The painting by itself, like the woman by herself, seemed incomplete and diminished. Only the two together appealed to his sense of theatre.

And today, there was the added demand that the woman have elements of the māh rū, the moon-faced idol of the Persian literary renaissance, strewn about her visage. It was no small demand. The anxiety made Rustam slightly sick.

Almond eyes he'd already seen. Now, he wanted the works. Almond eyes, bows for brows, arrows for lashes ... My good man, you are asking for the unlikely. But he suppressed the doubt as he suppressed the nausea: by going straight to the gallery cafeteria and eating a swollen hot dog.

As he was tackling the hot dog, trying to contain the unseemly oozing of the garish mustard-relish paste, his eyes chanced upon something black, bent and out of focus. We all have some right to think that he'd seen eyebrows. Indeed he had. But they were of the wrong sort. They came attached to a pair of spectacles, a big nose and an exaggerated moustache. Someone in Groucho Marx disguise.

Rustam felt the dirigible of his hopes crash into a mountainside. There was a loud bang. It induced shock waves in people's coffee. It persuaded that odd person to take off those ludicrous spectacles.

Tahmineh, is that you?

Yes, yes. It clearly is you.

With Mr. Marx vanished to her coat pocket, she boldly revealed a face of classical proportions. The check list ran through Rustam's head. Eyes like almonds, bows for brows, lashes like arrows (with which she pierced my heart), a letter lām for a nose, a pistachio mouth, cheeks the red of enforced celibacy and hair the colour of a raven.

Nausea and doubt to the dogs. Rustam now felt the onset of vertigo. Within seconds, his conscious half left the gallery cafeteria as his head came down hard on the table. It missed the hot dog by three

inches. He was out cold, be-hosh, without intelligence, as an Urdu-speaking Paki-man may too politely say.

What pulses traversed his brain then? Be-hosh as he was.

All that can definitely be said is that Rustam revived a few minutes later sporting a large bruise on his forehead. Mullahs spend endless hours in prostration before the Almighty trying to earn the status that that livid circle above the brows accords. Rustam had earned the same status instantly by prostrating himself, involuntarily, to Woman.

She, however, had gone. A mild form of hysteria gripped Mullah Rustam. He leapt up and out of the cafeteria. His hot dog remained behind, looking cold and neglected.

Bounding up the stairs to the main floor, turning right after the turnstile, in a histrionic frenzy that the fifty-five-year-old golf player in awful acrylic pants couldn't comprehend.

But there she was. Standing, almost too significantly, in front of a Behzād miniature of the Shāh-nāmeḥ seduction scene. There she stands behind the curtain, drenched in colours and smells.

Poor bugger, Rustam. The poem's lines were hampering his vision. She was really (if you don't object to the objectivity) dressed in 1983 black. She smelt vaguely of some popular deodorant.

All of which didn't stop Rustam from blurting out her name.

Tahmīneh.

She turned and gave him a congealing, Aryan stare.

It's the sort of look that sells cosmetics.

FAWAD QURAIISHI



CAM WALKER



TONY HAUSER

## Tea With Leonardo: An Interview with Robin Phillips

Robin Phillips, an internationally renowned director of theatre and film, spoke to the *Review* about himself and his experience of directing in Canada in a room at the Toronto Sutton Place Hotel. Born and educated in England, Phillips trained at the Bristol Old Vic as a director, designer and actor. He has directed productions at the Chichester Festival, Stratford on Avon, the West End, Broadway and Los Angeles. Phillips came to Canada in 1976 to take the position of Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival in Ontario, and is widely credited with raising the international stature of the festival. More recently, he directed a film version of Timothy Findley's award-winning novel *The Wars*. He also attempted to found a repertory company in London, Ontario, which proved financially unworkable despite critical acclaim. This past season has seen two productions by Phillips at Toronto's Centre Stage, and he has just completed *Antony and Cleopatra* in London, England, starring Diana Rigg.

Phillips began with a discussion of his production of Canadian playwright John Murrell's *New World* which was to open that evening at the St. Lawrence Centre. The play is about the family reunion on Vancouver Island of a British expatriate who has been in Canada most of his life, his British sister, and their brother, who is an American citizen. As an expatriate himself, Phillips found similarities and differences between his experiences and those of the characters.

ROBIN PHILLIPS: I certainly understand first-hand quite a few things in the play, but not all of it. Take for instance the experience of the man, played by Bill Hutt, who has lived here most of his life and has had a very successful career. He's a very successful society photographer, and has been around much longer than I have been in Canada, so I don't really understand what it would be like to be him. I do understand, nevertheless, better than most what it is like not to be born Canadian but to emigrate here. Therefore, I at least have a starting point with the character, but not a whole feeling of what it must be like to be that particular guy. I have also been here too long to really know first-hand what Susan Wright's character, the sister in the play, is like. She has only just arrived, but she has arrived at the end of her life, which must be a traumatic experience. It wasn't a traumatic experience for me when I came to Canada because I came when I felt my life was just beginning to open up. It was a time when I was taking my strides away from my family anyway, and beginning to say, 'life is for me to live, and I don't have to live it with my family.' There are some things, nevertheless, that I obviously empathize with: the oddity of realizing how different nations can be when you thought that because we all speak the same language there would be

a huge similarity. There are similarities but the differences are colossal. I mean, it could just as easily be Greece or France or Germany; Canada is so totally different from any other country. So, in that sense I share some things with that character. But for her, it is a much more disturbing experience and a less stimulating and exciting experience than it was for me. The other brother emigrated to the States, became an American and has just come up from America to be with his brother and his sister. So they're all new-found, new-world countrymen. The experience for him is kind of weird, because he hasn't quite yet discovered his American self, although he's trying very hard. In fact trying much too hard. Now he's come into Canada and he's trying to be American in Canada. We all know what that is like. We've all seen a lot of that going on, but he's with a British sister and an ex-British brother and so his performance gets thrown a bit because they keep bursting his American bubble. I don't know what that feels like. So there are many starting points in one sense, to me, and I guess also for John, but it's taken beyond that experience and into experiences where one asks 'this is what I feel, and what I felt, what must it be like for somebody else?' It's that step really that the play imaginatively is about.

**THE REVIEW:** That leads into the question of what you find in Canada. You've been offered work in London and in New York, throughout the world, and you've chosen to remain here. Are there artistic reasons for that decision? Is there something you find in theatre here?

**PHILLIPS:** It's not so much what I find in the theatre here as what I sense is lacking. When you feel there is a gap somewhere, that there is something missing, you feel that there is a need for what you have to offer. In England very often I felt that there wasn't anything for me to do, that everybody knew what to do, and everybody knew all the answers. Nobody was asking any questions. The most exciting thing I find about Canada is that everybody asks questions, and that I am also allowed to ask questions. In rehearsal I am asked something and I say I don't know, so I ask a question back and they may say I don't know either, and so we start from a totally different basis. In England nobody asks the questions because everybody assumes they all know the answers, and I find that not very stimulating and not creative. Exploration, of course, goes on in England, but it goes on in a different territory. They start with 'this we know, this is assumed,' and I keep wanting to say, 'wait a minute, all this questioning that you're doing, all this interrogation that is going on to find new forms, new ways, whatever it is in the theatre, is starting at the wrong level, because this bit down here that you all assume you know and understand is extremely murky.' I think we're at the most terrifying period here in Canada.

It's not theatrical feyness, the use of the word, I believe. I have an enormous sense of responsibility about what I believe society is going to be like in 200 years time, and where I feel we are failing as artists. I think we have the politicians at the moment that we deserve, because we created the society that exists at the moment. We have people like our cultural ministers, who, when there isn't enough money, offer the cheap response, like, 'let's pour the money into the Wintergarden, refurbish it and put on a production of CATS.' Immediate gratification. Very important for the audience, because something like CATS should be seen, and of course they will go, and that will be exciting, and good. Then brownie points are earned immediately. There are immediate returns for the Minister of Culture. Miss Fish has immediate political prestige because of it. I am concerned as to whether she truly has any care for what's going to happen in 200 years' time. It's not her problem. I think we have reached a point where if we don't do something about it the results could be catastrophic.

REVIEW: Can you be more specific about the situation in Canada and the direction which you think Canadian theatre should take?

PHILLIPS: I am not sure of the direction that it should take. I mean if I knew I guess I would be a very rich man. It all starts basically with education. It starts at the university level, where it seems to me that journalists writing about theatre have an incredible responsibility, it is treated by many, not by all but by many, in such a shoddy way. The responsibility of teachers is colossal. By many it is taken seriously but not by all and not seriously enough. I don't think there is anything more important than how you teach and how you widen. I travel around and I look at drama departments in universities and very few, some but very few, have the slightest idea of what theatre is about, what drama is about, the importance of it and how you share that with each other to stimulate and enlighten. That's the bit that has to be changed. That is what we could be doing at the moment. Your generation could actually change the face of Canadian society.

REVIEW: Do you feel a sense of responsibility to your audience? For example, in the range of works you present?

PHILLIPS: I think the widest spectrum is important. I think it's terribly important that there be a mixture of the new works with the richest and widest classical repertoire. You can't really get an appreciation of furniture and paintings unless you are constantly able to see the great masterpieces of the world. You can only really start in your muscles and your pores to get in tune with painting, I think, when you have experienced as much as is humanly possible of the great things. You have to experience the Leonardos and the Michelangelos. It has to be part of your consciousness, part of your breathing, and I

think that's the same with your theatre. You have to have been through your Racines and your Shakespeares and your Molières. I think that it's like eating isn't it? The more you eat good food and the wider range of restaurants you've tried and in different parts of the world, the better the palate is and the more you appreciate the real flavour of what is an apple. If you only eat apples I don't think you would know very much about an apple, strangely enough, because the mouth would just not recognize all the subtleties. I think that's exactly what it's like with audiences in the theatre. You must be able to choose depending on your mood and the way you feel today. I usually tried at Stratford to make sure that whoever came on whatever day of the week, could see what they needed that day. There would be a comedy playing somewhere, a very light upbeat piece of entertainment. There would also be something that was more provocative and disturbing and unsettling. So that you never had to force yourself to adjust, to say 'Oh my God, wait a minute I am going to see a melodrama or an Ibsen tonight.' I mean, imagine if that night you had just got engaged. You would be tortured, absolutely tortured, by a bit of *Miss Julie* or a bit of Strindberg. I mean it would be desperate. Much nicer to be able to allow your life and the experiences of theatre to live together.

That's what worries me enormously about subscriptions. We buy theatre by the yard, opera by the yard, and every Thursday we go willy-nilly. That's the sort of thing that I had when I was a kid, when every Monday was cold meat left over from the Sunday roast. I think it's terrifying when you start to think 'Oh God, it's Friday and it's fish.' It shouldn't happen, there should always be the possibility of the new decision, of the new thing to be made. I think that all of that is part of our job. If we get the theatre right then I think people will want to read different books, they will say 'I'm going to go to a museum today. I have never been to a museum.' You'd be amazed at how many people have never been to a museum, or been to an art gallery. I think if we keep the spectrum wide enough, then minds get wide enough to want the new experiences, so they keep desiring more – broadening, broadening, broadening.

REVIEW: So you think theatre really should have that kind of leading role in the arts?

PHILLIPS: I think it should, and I think in the past it has.

REVIEW: But it doesn't at the moment?

PHILLIPS: I don't think it has, I don't think we have it here at the moment, no. I think it's very much a separate thing, and I think that's our fault.

REVIEW: Do you think Stratford has a special role in maintaining the balance and the variety of theatre that's provided? In recent years



there has been a lot of criticism regarding the amount of, say, Gilbert and Sullivan. Do you feel that because of being funded by the government and supposedly representing 'Canadian National Theatre', that Stratford has a responsibility to produce a certain amount of classical theatre at a certain level?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I do think it has a responsibility to do that. I don't object, nevertheless, to Gilbert and Sullivan. I think that that's fine, if that's part of it too. I think that the most important thing is that even if you are saying 'I want to attract people who wouldn't normally go to the theatre and I mustn't frighten them off; I want them to feel that this is just an easy and relaxing time,' the work nevertheless has to be of the highest quality. Even if you're doing *No Sex Please, We're British* that's all right, as long as it's done fiendishly well, so that it's the very best of its type.

REVIEW: I wanted to ask you about your policy of importing stars from Great Britain while you were at Stratford. Some critics claim that Stratford was no longer Canadian; it was just furthering the careers of a number of British theatre stars. What do you think about that?

PHILLIPS: It's an easy criticism. I think that you have to choose stars carefully. If you're working in a company situation you have to choose stars who are capable of being part of a company. I think it's terribly important in any profession that we constantly challenge ourselves with people who are better than we are. I like to be around people whose minds are better than mine. I had very little education, so being around educated people I actually find fascinating. They know a great deal more than I know. I think that consequently you can arrive at a point with a Stratford company where if you don't bring in stars, our game gets boring. It's like playing tennis: if there's nobody on the other side who can send a shot over that challenges you, then your game gets very rusty. Because it's easy, you just keep lobbing.

REVIEW: Do you think Canadian arts policies are excessively nationalistic?

PHILLIPS: I think that nationalism is important. It's okay to be nationalistic and say we must have Canadian content on the CBC. You've got to keep out some of these American programs, but then you must also supply the money, and the *correct* amount of money, to make sure that independent producers produce high standard productions to replace the American ones that you're now saying are not to be viewed. Otherwise, what you do is stab the Canadian identity in the back by saying no to these sleek little American products and then the Canadian product arrives and everyone says 'Oh God, we really can't do it very well, can we?' And that is unfair. You are

expected here, when you try to sell a production to the CBC as an independent producer, to do it on terms that you wouldn't expect Dallas to do.

Follow-through is the most important thing. It's exactly the same with the stars at Stratford. Once you've got them there you have to follow through and make sure of their commitment to the group. In the group itself you have Maggie Smith, yes, but because of her, Martha Henry, William Hutt and the other Canadian actors who have been there for a long time as the leading players suddenly blossom into much better players because they've got this startling challenge performing with them. Also, I have to have someone who's going to throw curves at me and keep me on my toes. People like Maggie did, so I was always at my best, because she demanded that from me. I think it's also important to know who you are partly through standing next to a foreigner, whether from Britain or the States or whatever. You have to invite people into the country with a hugely welcoming arm and then sit them down over dinner and interrogate the hell out of them.

REVIEW: What do you see as the respective roles of author and director? For example, what was it like directing the film version of Timothy Findley's novel, *The Wars*? Does the author get the right to come in and say 'No, no, stop doing that, I can't stand it!'

PHILLIPS: Oh, yes, absolutely they do. I believe that the text is the most important thing. It's the only thing finally that survives. I believe that the text is a whole series of signposts to help us discover what the original thought was. I think that Shakespeare's signposts allow us to understand his mind and allow us to understand his heart. And I think sometimes I can't read the signposts and so I have to work with the author, if it is a modern piece of work, to find out whether I've got the signposts right. Sometimes they don't know themselves and are fascinated by what you read as the signposts. I think that the overwhelming stuff of Shakespeare is, for me, being in the presence of his mind. I mean, wouldn't you love to actually talk to Leonardo – I mean imagine that man who painted those incredible pictures and Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel, and you look at that and you think that you would love to have been there to say to him, 'Would you like to have a break, would you like a cup of coffee.' And he'd come down from that ceiling, and I'm sure that he would have been exactly like us but behind the ordinary chat of saying, 'God it makes your back ache lying up there painting away with brushes in your mouth,' he would have occasionally said something that told you about his mind and his heart. And that would have been so fascinating and so inspiring – something that would have made you feel, 'I can cope with the next three weeks like you wouldn't believe'. And also that excitement of being able to say to

one's chums, 'I can't see you tomorrow, I'm having tea with Leonardo'. I feel that I have coffee almost every day with Shakespeare and it's really a very exciting way to live. You can find colossal support when the going really gets tough, through a lot of the things that he writes. Just amazing, where you suddenly think, 'God, I was about to commit suicide for worry over that problem and in fact, there it is, and it's so simple and the problem is quite remote'. That's just glorious. I think it's a wonderful confidence-making thing, it's a very peaceful and remarkable feeling to have and I think that is one of the important things about all the arts – that you can have a communication with a mind where you say 'I don't have to listen to you, Martin Knelman, (a Toronto drama critic) I don't have to listen to you, I can actually communicate all day long with Shakespeare. A mind which I would infinitely rather deal with....

The hideousness of the gossip and the trivialness of gossip. I sometimes look at gossip columnists and the people in them and I see this brain and this heart and this soul and it's sort of like a prune, you know it's shriveled ... And you think, what is the point of that? Because the more lemon juice you dip it in, the more astringent it is, your gums shrink, your teeth become exposed and your brain fills, and you think they must end up being wracked with rheumatism and all those things....

REVIEW: We have been talking a great deal about youth in this interview and their responsibilities to the future. What advice would you give to the young Canadian actor or playwright, and how does the young playwright or actor go about getting into theatre and assuming the responsibility?

PHILLIPS: Oh, God, I don't know the answer to that. First of all, I think that if you're a playwright, then you will be a playwright, if you're an actor, you will be an actor, if you're a novelist, you will be a novelist. I think the more you start off by just communicating, the more you will get to the point where what you're going to be just happens. The most important thing is that one talks, and that one shares one's head and one's heart and one's mind with other people as fully as one possibly can. Not because you're going to be a journalist, not because you're going to be a playwright, but just fully because you are a person. You are a human being and you must simply live and that means that you must say, 'I don't know one bloody thing about hockey, I am going to go down there and find some guy who's part of the Toronto Maple Leafs or whatever, and simply do an interview and find out,' as opposed to, 'This is my subject I'm going to find out.' Just simply say, 'Listen, I don't know anything but I really want to know about hockey.' That's what I do. You'd be amazed how many jobs in my life I have done. I wasn't good at them, in fact, I was very bad at a lot of them. But I have to know about other people's

jobs – I have to know about how you upholster furniture and I know how to upholster furniture – I’m not very good at it. I know about bookbinding – I went right through bookbinding and learned about all the sewing and the straps and the bookends and the glue and all that stuff. Carpentry, electricity, lights, making clothes, making wigs ... a lot of it’s around the theatre, but a lot of it is just living because I wanted to know about it. I don’t have to be a carpenter or a great artist in wood but I’m interested. I want to know what it’s like.

REVIEW: What else have you done?

PHILLIPS: I’ve written a play, oh yes, I’ve written plays. I’ve never written a book, oh yes, yes, I have. Indeed, I have written a book. I have written a book for children. Poetry, I’ve written poetry, oh it’s absolutely appalling but I’ve done it, because I wanted to experience what it was like. From an incredibly early age to be encouraged to come out, to explore anything that keeps the natural inquisitiveness alert, I think is of immense value. When all that has happened, then I think that the answer to your question becomes much simpler. When that hasn’t happened, then it’s much harder because then it’s going to have to be a mathematical solution. What you do is you go to a training establishment and you get trained and then they hold certain auditions at certain times of the year, and if you’re talented you get a job. That’s what happens and we all know that’s what happens. It won’t produce very much if living hasn’t happened first.

REVIEW: Why did you write a children’s book?

PHILLIPS: It was for my niece actually. She had asked us who God was. It’s an incredibly difficult question to answer, isn’t it? She was tiny and it’s not easy to get into a whole philosophical or spiritual interpretation at that age. It was very tricky.

But she needed an answer and my book was about a mouse who asked the question. The mother explained by asking questions in return. She asked him what he thought it was and he said he wasn’t sure and because he wasn’t sure, he’d asked various of his friends and they had all come up with answers, but none of them were quite satisfactory. It was always to do with feelings. So she took him by the hand – they lived in the church, they were church mice. And she took him up to the church and written across the ceiling above the altar were the words God Is Love, and he looked at her, and said, ‘Well I’ve seen that before and read it and never really thought much about it.’ She simply said to him, ‘I don’t know a lot about the first word.’ Then she said ‘the first word is the same as the third word and if you believe in the third word you’ll be happy.’ And then she takes him downstairs and she tucks him in and says goodnight. Then she gives him a little kiss and he snuggles down to sleep. She turns the light off, and just as she turns to the door she says, ‘I Love You’; Matthew, his name was. He looks at her and smiles and says ‘And I Love You’

and the last line is just simply 'and he understood.'

REVIEW: Did she like it?

PHILLIPS: Yes, she loved it, just loved it. They're quite funny drawings. They're all white drawings on black, white chalk drawings. But it was basically saying that you cannot get into the word God at that age. I'm not sure you ever can, but you can totally get into and she will totally understand, almost at any age, love.

REVIEW: What about the future?

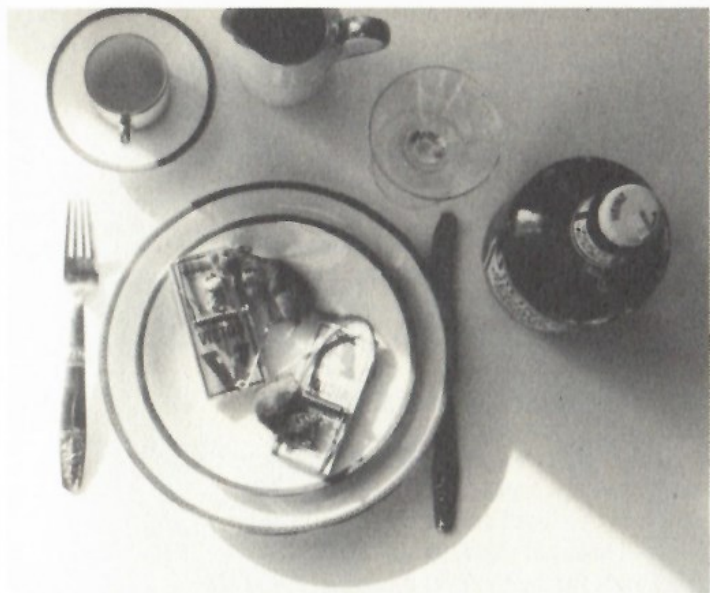
PHILLIPS: My future is three plays in England and then a play in the States. I doubt that I will direct again in Canada unless I get a company. I really don't function without a company. Company life for me is a very important experience. I think that it offers something quite special to an audience that you cannot get with one-off shows. I don't think that if we just had a diet of West End or a diet of Broadway in New York that our society would survive long. What actually makes society function and survive are the great companies like the RSC or the National of the Bolshoi. That's really where it all happens, that's where the great thought, when it has a chance, comes from. I think great plays happen in the West End or on Broadway but it's not the real base of what we're about. While I can enjoy the experience of going to the West End or the Broadway theatre, it's not the place that I was meant to work. I don't function well in it, I never have. My two shows at the St. Lawrence Centre have been, I think, rubbish. And that is difficult to say because it sounds as though I am belittling either the plays or the company's actors - the groups of actors I worked with in them. But I say that only because I have to judge it from the standards that I want to present. I know that had it been in a Stratford situation where we were doing six other plays at the same time, it would have been a triumphant evening. We wouldn't have put the same pressures and the same muscles to work because we would have been using our heavy muscles in the tragedies and we would have using other thoughts in other plays, so when we came to Coward, we wouldn't have felt that we had to use everything. It's like you've got people coming to visit for the first time and you don't know quite what to give them. You get in a panic. And if you're not careful, you end up with a really hideous meal because you try to do too many things to show that you can. I'll make the bread too, you think, or I'll make a special dessert and perhaps you should have a salad and you end up thinking, Oh my Lord.

REVIEW: And you've given up on any hope that you could form a great company here?

PHILLIPS: I don't think that there's a chance, no. Stratford is going to go its own way and its new way with John Neville and that will be very nice. And I think that for the time being that's as much as there will be and there will be little things that will happen in and around

Toronto, and I'm sure that will be very good, but it doesn't appear to have anything for me. I've been offered a nice job starting a theatre school at The University of Michigan and I am thinking very seriously of that. I like training very much, I like teaching. And I like the challenge of the young. I think that it keeps you on your toes, being interrogated and being asked why when you think you have an answer to something. But I shall live here. I think Canada is an amazing country and I find that it does a great deal for me, my head, my heart. But I think that it is too big a country to be able to do anything in return in the way I would like in my profession.

PIER BRYDEN and ELIZABETH ELBOURNE



THOMAS J. & PETER K. CZEGLEDY

## Games

A cold day like a glass bell-jar of wet leaves  
and a wind as grey as the sky, straying in  
the drift of fed people from the steamy confines  
looking brisk, and the ground green and misty.  
Through my own staccato footsteps I hear their  
spiteful voices, little boys' voices, bullying. But  
it's cold, and the sodden tree-tops chatter and  
rush around and anyhow ... Shrieks. His  
chubby raw-meat cheek sucked in the mud,  
torqued by a bigger hand, rolling eyes and feet  
and elbows and still the white mask stares in  
the mud. Me with my flaming sword: I turn  
back. Clickety clack, my stinging heels; my  
awful voice – the twisting boys hear 'cut that  
out,' and wheeze a little. 'You heard me, get  
off him, boy!' Air-bred authority. They writhe  
like knotted worms, their gemini forms divide  
and raise their flushed masks dying of laughter,  
prised from their game. Their game. Fool.

ADRIAN CHALK





CARLO CLAUDIUS

## Grey Day

Grey day. Wet snow falls.  
The earth is brown and cold.  
Amongst the sober shades, the evergreens  
with bright red berries  
Insist on recognition –  
And they win.  
How simple it can be.

SOPHIE EMMA AUGUSTA



BARBARA SELLA

## Gladwell on Dunbar: No Obituary for the University

If I didn't know better, I would call Gavin Dunbar a fascist. Certainly in his article 'Obituary for the University?' in the Fall '84 *Trinity University Review* there was an awful lot worth marching to. But I do know better. I know that Gavin Dunbar is someone who takes ideas very seriously, who is filled with anger at the world, and who has practically memorized the works of George Grant. These are impressive credentials for a self-proclaimed intellectual, but I wonder whether the passion of Dunbar's convictions has led him to confuse the individual's role in society with the collective responsibility of a democracy. To the unwitting reader, that sounds suspiciously like fascism.

If this seems a trifle strong, then it shouldn't. I am, in fact, in complete agreement with many of the themes of 'Obituary for the University?'. Much of academia is sterile. The culture industry is rivaled only by TASS for the sheer amount of garbage it produces. Further, many of the reservations I do have about Dunbar's article are relatively trivial. For example, I do not share Dunbar's unequivocal enthusiasm for Jacques Barzun's article in the *Atlantic*. It was, I think, unnecessarily provocative. Criticisms of the culture industry that may well apply to, say, the Sociology Department at Georgia Tech do not apply to Northrop Frye. Neither do I share the Dunbarian affection for George Grant, who, depending on whom you talk to, is either a professional crank or a Luddite. (Consider Dunbar's Grant-esque aspersion of our 'technologically-driven' society. What century is this?) As for Dunbar's summation of the goals of the teaching of History and Philosophy as 'the reduction of the unquantifiable to rational principles', that is, I think, a fine example of what is euphemistically called shooting from the hip.

But so what? I don't begrudge someone's desire to live in the Victorian era or to believe all he reads. No, my real argument is with some of the more fundamental themes of 'Obituary for the University?'. Inside that simple thesis are some profoundly disturbing implications. Dunbar begins by drawing a distinction between 'discursive' intelligence – that which is 'active and concerned with means' – and 'intuitive' intelligence – that which is 'receptive and concerned with ends.' For Dunbar, 'intuitive' understanding is necessary for the path to 'nobility' and, on a macro level, to break up the 'facade of pluralism [that] engenders tyranny in the most democratic of states.' The University in our society comes under heavy fire from Dunbar for encouraging discursive understanding and stifling any sort of intuitive 'contemplation'. Dunbar doesn't like a university that simply imparts information, that treats the liberal arts like 'parodies of the servile arts', that has a place for 'commerce, com-

puter science, and statistics', and that 'destroys thought about man's highest ends.'

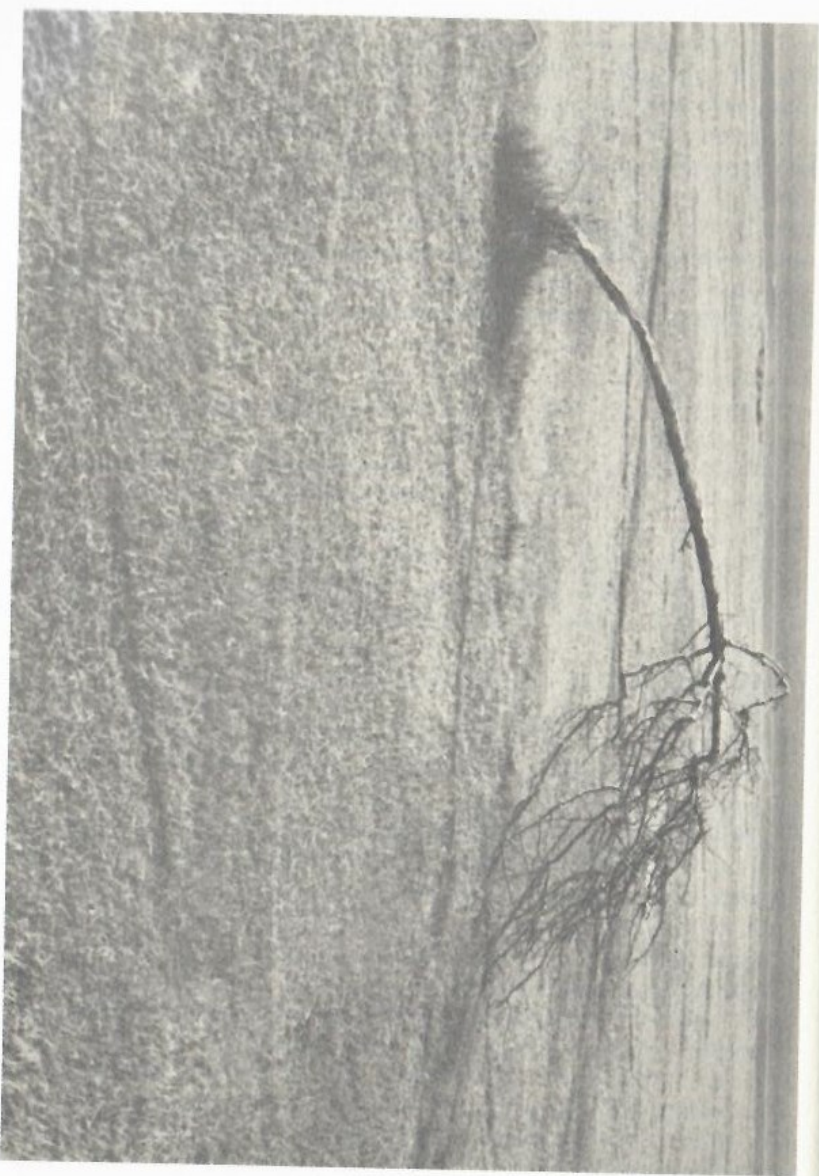
But I disagree. Why *should* a university do anything but impart information? Surely that is the whole point of gathering the country's best minds, teachers and books together in one place. Moreover, what is wrong with an educational system that stresses means-related rather than ends-related thinking? The difference between means-related and ends-related thinking is, it seems to me, the difference between teaching someone how to think and teaching someone what to think. Our universities generally adhere to the former because, in a modern society, they are conceived of as objective educational instruments. Dunbar doesn't even try to hide his distaste for this type of education. Indeed, he makes it very clear that it is precisely the *pluralism* that a relatively open university education produces that he dislikes. He deplores what he calls the fragmenting of our culture by the university. But who ever said that having more than one culture was wrong? He deplores the university's creation of 'outsiders' – as if we were all 'inside' to begin with. How tolerant and broad-minded is a vision that belittles 'mastery over a subject' and the 'act of knowing a great many useful things' as a 'dangerous waste of time and energy'? How open is a university whose single-minded goal is to give its students, as Dunbar says, an 'apprehension of the character of the whole and thus ennoblement'? (Whatever that means.)

The truth is that in a democracy we do not ask our institutions to 'ennoble' us, as Dunbar seems to want. Nor do we worry, as Dunbar does, that a state not concerned with ends-related thinking 'engenders tyranny'. Our state concerns itself with purely procedural questions because we believe salvation and ennoblement are matters best left to the individual. Our state does not soar to philosophic heights with good reason. Democracy is concerned with the mundane – with the next school board election, say, or with offshore fishing rights – because long ago we realized that the philosopher-kings and the visionaries were dangerous when they matched their 'apprehension of the whole' with political power. Even Dunbar's casual reference to the 'painful restructuring' necessary to rid ourselves of the 'culture industry' hits a little too close to the parlance of five-year-plans and final solutions. We have agreed on ends in our society. We have agreed that the legitimacy of our means is an end in itself.

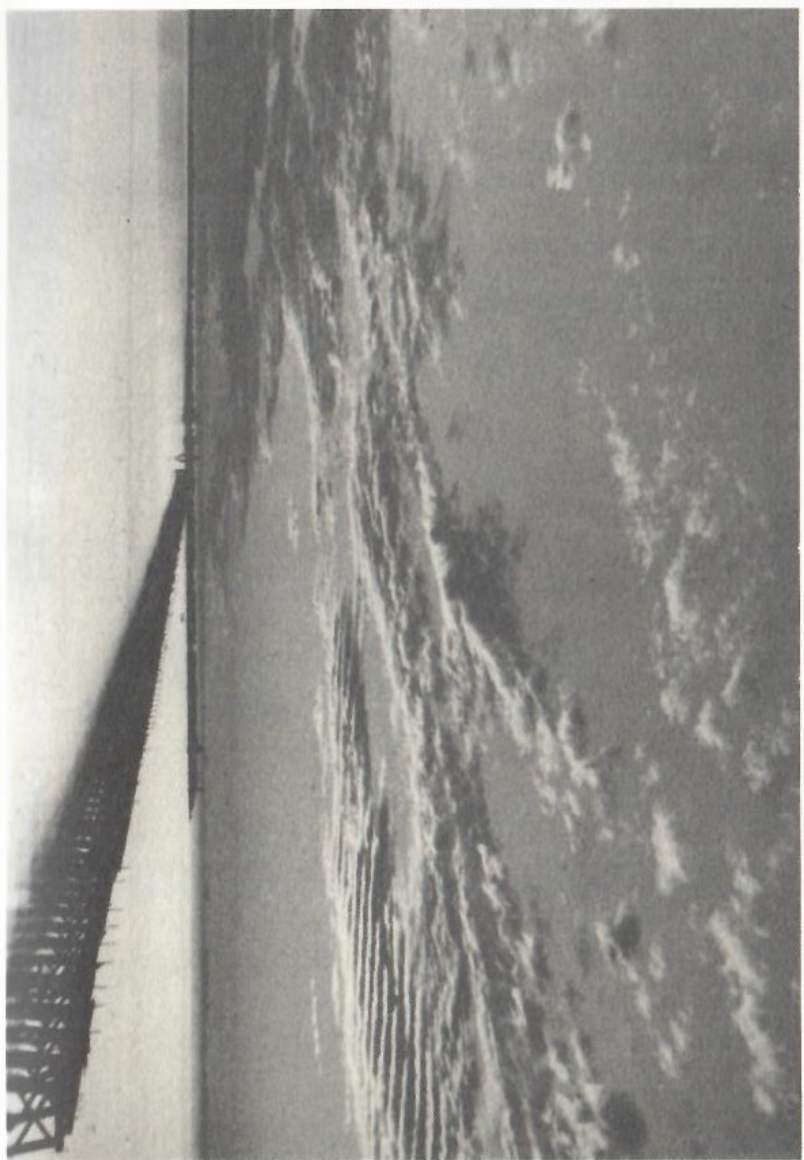
I hate to be an alarmist, and to take too literally what was probably only meant to be provocative, but I was perturbed by the article and all that it implied. Even if all of Dunbar's more fatuous prescriptions were removed, I would still find his most profound premises offensive. There is no nobility in knowledge, as Dunbar ultimately

believes. Those who have contemplated art or philosophy are not, strictly speaking, better people for it. Those who have practised the liberal arts properly understood are not more worthy of leadership or moral congratulation than scientists or plumbers or door-to-door salesmen. I'm not against intellectuals. In fact, in my more self-indulgent moments I imagine myself to be one. But I do believe that there is no special virtue in intellection, and unless knowledge brings humility it brings nothing at all. Real nobility lies in faith, in charity, and in service. That Mr. Dunbar does not understand this makes him easy to mistake for an intellectual fascist, and even easier to confuse with a pompous snob. But I know better.

MALCOLM GLADWELL



MICHAEL KARY



Sunset at old Castilian Bay

DE. PLASTIMU ENDORA

## Teen Love

She had blonde features and sloping, hairless thighs.  
She talked loudly about her period as if proving she was old enough  
to have one.

He, sucking on his fudge sundae was impressed.

He slowly slipped on his sunglasses, and from that point they were  
going steady.

She read novels where couples took showers together.

His hand was steady at video.

Both thought life was a drag.

SCOTT MOODIE





# Waiting for the millennium

JOHN IDE

## The Race

A shot  
I reach with my front paws  
My hind legs shudder  
with elastic release  
and propel me through the wet grass  
I could do this forever

Turtle is plotting her course  
I can see her in her shell  
I know the tidy scratchings of her imagination  
The ordered calmness of it all

She doesn't know this thudding joy  
is no better than a virgin dreaming  
of a tidy coupling

In the air above me Jay screams  
We have always understood one another  
Now he takes me to field  
studded with white clover  
Before I see it I taste it  
as I have so many times

While Turtle pondered  
a mucky embankment  
her tiny webbed feet  
creased and delicate

I always see Turtle  
I know when she is near  
I can feel her calmness  
like a clock ticking  
In a way I hate her

I hate her for not sensing me  
For not turning to look  
when I leap from shadow to light  
in the sun-coloured forest  
For Turtle the trees are sundials  
She does not need me  
Not the way I need her  
need Jay need anyone  
that will long after me

Jay calls to me  
where I lie fat and indolent  
I will get up when I want  
I will be up

But before I am  
Turtle will reach her destination  
and everyone will say  
Turtle has won  
and my comfort will be this  
that these are just beliefs  
and that here in this white field  
with my belly distended and content  
I can hear Jay jeering  
and feel the bees shivering  
with their own anxious excitement

ROSE RICHARDS



JOEY KARY

## Scrawling Child

She likes to draw  
(her eyes closed)  
the stick figures with their long fingers and little heads  
pulling their stumps along the red bricks in the most hurting way  
(their eyes closed)  
as if both shared the same dream and all tried to remember at once  
but each could only scratch at the floor.

THOMAS J. CZEGLEDY



*Young Robert concealed his enthusiasm for ichthology, fearing that the adults might find his inordinate zeal for the subject unattractive.*

BRAD WALTON

■

There are lots of animal noises, barking dogs outside. The windows are covered with dust as the train curves around the side of a hill so I can't see what's going on. I look across the aisle. A little kid is playing with a blue plastic giraffe about the size of his hand. No, he's not playing with it, he's pulling it apart.

He tears the head off, and then starts to halve the body, holding it by the two front legs, biting down on the rump. He cracks the spine and breaks the giraffe in half. Then with the front section – two legs, a long neck – he pushes his mother just below her breasts. She looks at him meanly, then sees I'm watching, so she pulls him close to her, tight. She squeezes him. His hand opens, and pieces of plastic catapult across the aisle and click on the floor in front of me.

DANIEL GARBER

## Stanley

There's a guy, an Eskimo guy, who comes from Holman Island, but he wanted to do better than that so he came to the Big Town of Inuvik. He's all right, young – nineteen when I knew him – good looking to the girls, funny, and he drinks too much. No, he doesn't really drink too much – the same as I do mostly – but it affects him more. That's nothing against him. That's just the way it is.

Because he's an Eskimo doesn't mean he lives in an igloo. He had lived in one when his father was alive. His father would take him out on the land to hunt and live the old ways. Everyone in Holman remembers the old ways, but they like their new government houses now. There are only about 250 people who live there. All relatives. Everyone is everyone else's relative in the arctic. There's a converted government warehouse that's now a frigid but popular gym. There's a Hudson's Bay store. There are schooners that no one ever uses anymore and a team of dogs that never gets a chance to run, alone and wasting on the frozen beach. That's about it. There is a hotel that charges \$150 a night but only government people can afford to stay there. Everyone else who goes there (but I've never met anyone, besides myself, who just went to Holman for something to do) meets someone and sleeps on their couch.

Anyway, Stanley told me stories of going out with his father to the rock hills around the settlement to shoot rabbits for dinner. Huge arctic hares – as big as cocker spaniels. They also did lots of caribou and musk-ox hunting in winter by skidoo. Stan remembered hunting seals in the spring for his mom to make into boots and mitts, and to feed the dogs. In the summer he would fish with his little sister for the dream-like arctic char. Stan would give me vivid descriptions of Holman whenever he was homesick.

Stanley's father committed suicide. Stanley never told me why and I never asked. I'm not too sure how well Stan did in school. He was one of the few who made it to high school, I know, but I don't think he finished. He is an artist too. Sometimes when he would be drinking he would borrow a pen and draw a picture of some of his Eskimo athletic games on a napkin to impress people. Someone would always pick up the discarded drawing and save it because it was very good. Stanley promised me a hundred times he would give me a good drawing, but all I have are some napkins.

Stanley came to Inuvik, the white-man's town, to work for a native newspaper as its graphic artist. That's a nine-to-five kind of job, and Stan's not a nine-to-five kind of guy. He loved Inuvik. The girls loved him. He had moved into a bachelor apartment beside mine and soon he had a tundra bunny or two visiting him every night. He would come to my room to borrow beer, wine, cash, or drugs if I had any.



It's expensive to be a Casanova. I would knock on his door at eight-thirty or nine in the morning to make sure he'd get to work but more often than not he would come staggering into my room about ten, ask for four aspirin, then go back to his room. By noon, he would be asking politely if I would cook up some extra lunch for him and Delma, or Mary, or Rose, or whoever, because he had no money or food.

Lucky for Stan he had a good job and a great boss. I don't know why they didn't fire him. He really didn't do much but doodle a few cartoons or drawings and drink coffee at the office. After work I would see him in the bar across the street trying to sweet-talk the white waitress into bed. In all the time I knew him, Stanley only made it with one white girl.

One image I'll remember of Stanley happened the day after I had given him hell for not paying me back for all the money he had borrowed. He burst into my room with this great big black garbage bag in his arms. He kicked apart an empty cardboard box, spread it flat on my kitchen floor, and dumped his prize – did he ever smile! It was a frozen char, a massive one, probably twenty pounds of gorgeous pink raw frozen flesh. He grabbed my cutting knife and asked for salt. With intense, inbred precision he sliced that fish on my floor into slivers, salted a piece of the raw frozen meat with a piece of skin on it, and handed it to me. His grin, squatting there on his brown flat face, was unforgettable. This fish was more than food. It was from Stanley. It was the only one he would catch all winter. I tasted it hesitantly. The fish skin was gruesome and I spat it out; but the rest ...! First it thawed in your mouth, then the taste shimmered into full life.

The other memory of Stanley, equally fond, is the day he was going to leave Inuvik for a much needed holiday back in Holman. He was so happy about leaving and had gone out drinking with me the night before. He told me how much he missed home, how much he hated Inuvik and the white-man's pushy ways. He hated his job. He wished he had more money. He promised to draw for me instead of pay me back. He wanted to go hunting in Holman. He wanted to teach his young sister about hunting and fishing. He said he loved his sister and showed me the same, fuzzy photo of her that he always showed me. He thought of old girlfriends he would impress with stories of life in the Big Town. I sat and listened and laughed with him. We got drunk.

Next morning I knocked on his door to make sure he'd make the plane. No answer. The bastard – left without saying goodbye. At ten when his plane was scheduled to depart, I got a call from another friend at the airport. Stan wasn't there and the plane was waiting.

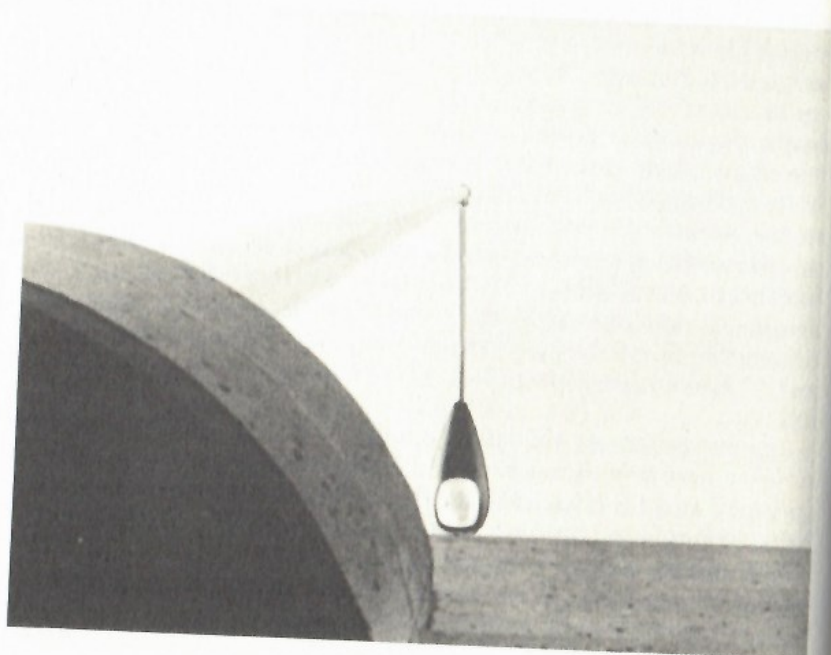
I kicked in Stanley's door, dragged him out of bed and started

stuffing things into his duffle bag. He moaned and didn't say a word. Stan stumbled incoherently into the morning sun and into the cab I had called. The driver was pissed off because Stan was hung over bad, and I had to pay the guy extra to drive faster.

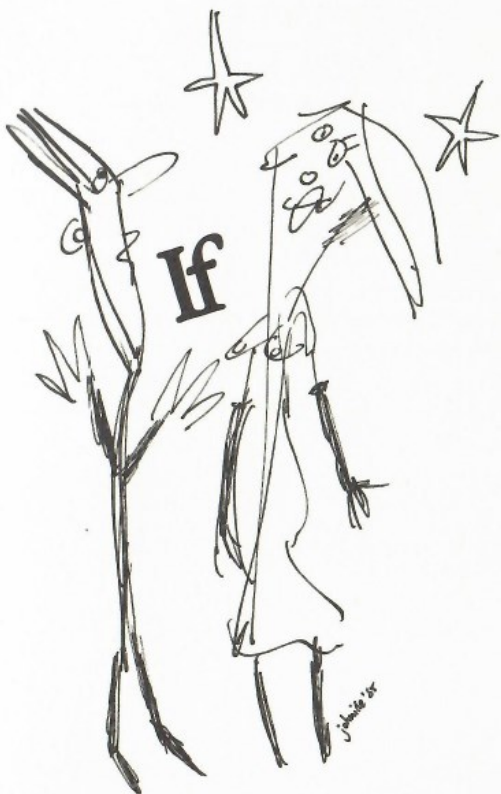
'Thanks, Stox,' Stanley said. 'I'll draw you a picture when I get back.'

I left Inuvik a month later. Stanley was supposed to be back from his two week holiday, but he never made it. No one heard from him at all. I got a letter about five months later. He was still in Holman. He had quit his Inuvik job. He was going to hunt like his father did. With his drawings, he hoped he could make enough money to rent a house, get married, and be happy again like when I knew him.

STEVE STOCKERMANS



CARLO CLAUDIUS



JOHN IDE

## Still Life, With Shakespeare

We enter and leave the room  
through the pale gold rags of autumn.

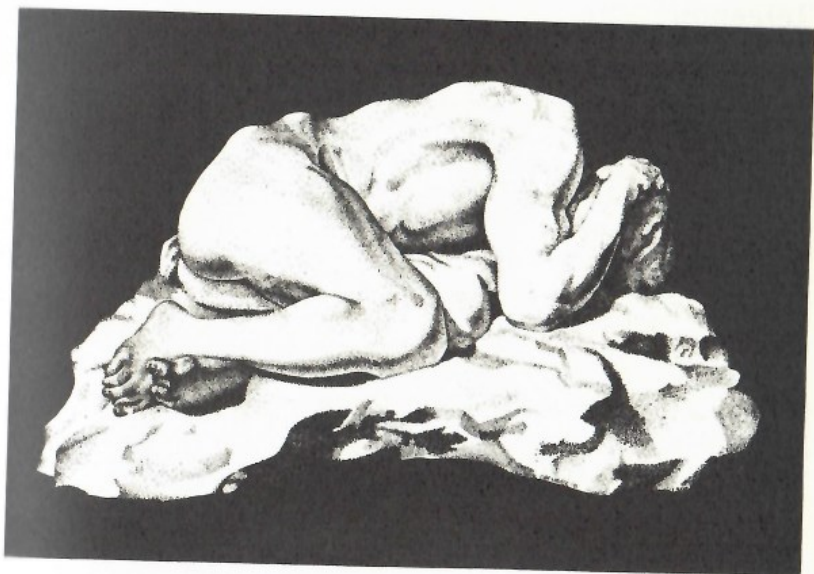
In the hallway  
leaves instead of letters.

We turn the pages on wars  
and weeping queens,  
strange words like flowers  
which grow in another country.

Candles flutter on a red tablecloth.  
The world touches  
the final winter edge of things.

November descends the year  
a piece of darkness:  
keeper of the deepest green  
and the first snow.

CATHLEEN WATSON-WHITE



CAM WALKER

## Telephone Talk

Words, over the phone, are said more easily,  
The solitary speaker never seeing the listening.  
In the space between the saying and the answering  
No face betrays a meaning, and the voice  
Has time to modulate, order and respond.  
Without the evidence of face, of lips and eyes  
The words alone convey the meaning.  
Removed to a distance, no response comes  
Too quickly to catch us unawares.

Strangely, caution revokes the danger,  
Safety disarms, and voices grow bolder.  
Words too cowardly to cross a room  
Suddenly fly great spaces, often thoughtlessly.  
I do not see my words return as you are hearing them.  
They remain invisible, formless, ostensibly aimless,  
And I am able to abandon caution,  
Even while anxiously, impatiently accepting your transgressions.

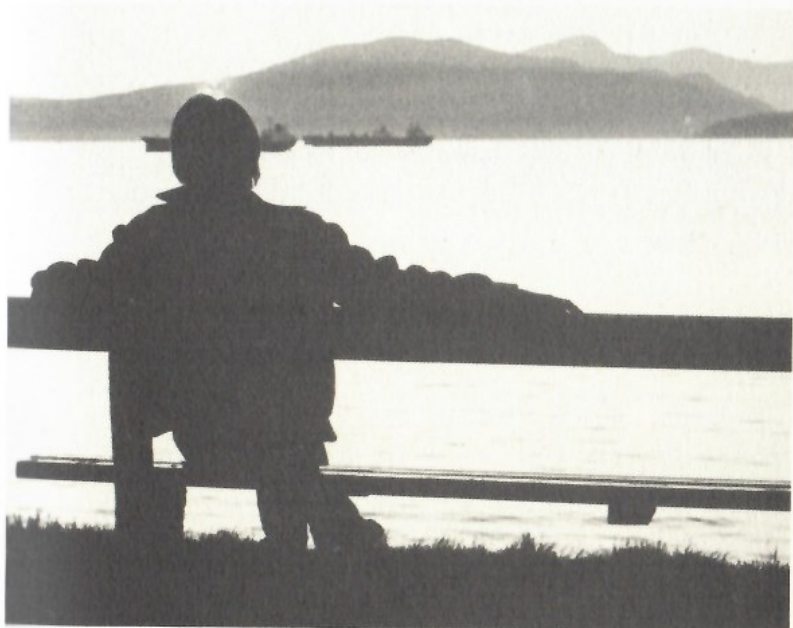
Unlike letters, no evidence remains  
No memory except of the saying, disembodied,  
Of voices and super-subtle tones, imagined nuances.  
Each listens with eavesdropper intensity  
To the conversation of strangers, often  
Unmoved, interpolating, interpreting.  
The next meeting betrays the awkwardness  
Of conspiracies and confessionals,  
Of never having spoken the words aloud.  
Eyes self-consciously seek out eyes  
Watching for proof of hear say words.

It is my voice that speaks,  
My words and not my self.  
But only on the phone am I my words.  
When essence concentrates itself  
Into phrases in space between two points  
The ego, wanting to, forgets itself.  
Undistorted by the space between two people  
Your words whisper wetly in my ear.  
Intimacy and solitude create themselves in each other.  
And in the silences between I feel your breath  
More warmly even than when I lie beside you.

■

There's a difference if you look for it, I was told. I thought it was in the colours until once I saw them clash. It might have been the texture until I felt that familiar roughness. Perhaps the weave, but that turned out to be an old pattern. Desperately I seized upon the cut, but knew I'd seen it before in some old magazine. Time to get a new man.

ASTORIA WILLAND



PAUL MCKENZIE

■  
No more for me the seagulls' beaching cry,  
Or the swift sharp sting of salt on my skin:  
No more the plangent wail of children  
Mottled red by the warm attentions of the sun,  
While their parents drift, drunkenly, to sleep  
Bloat dolphins cast on rum soaked shores.

Now my shore is winter-rimed,  
My coast this crystal hill  
Where the sky thuds with darkness  
As the wind marshalls clouds of snow;  
I flee now to the lake  
But its iced sheath is shut to me:  
The way to the sea is locked  
I cannot see beyond these hoar-crowned hills.

MARK HOULAHAN





PAUL COOPER

## A Rigour of Heresy

Is literature somehow religious? Does the creation of a literary work, for example, reflect a divine creativity, or, does our aesthetic appreciation of the work disclose a divine sensibility within us? In a recent study<sup>1</sup>, Jefferson Humphries has answered affirmatively, arguing that in the act of literary creation and in the enjoyment of the literary work we re-enact things ultimate and fundamental. We re-enact our divine origin and our tragic fall.

Let it be said from the outset that Humphries' religious presuppositions are hardly compatible with those of Church or Synagogue. He is trying, as he says, to observe 'a rigour of heresy'. His heresy, not unexpectedly, has its scripture. The Old Testament lesson is written in the ancient gnostic cosmogony; the gospels are those according to Marcel Proust, Flannery O'Connor, and François Villon; while the Apocalypse of St-Jacques Derrida completes the canon. Its eclecticism notwithstanding, Humphries' thesis has unity, and his argument coherence. And yet, if his thesis is true, then, paradoxically, literature has nothing intrinsically worthwhile to offer us. Can a dénouement so counter-intuitive have any plausibility? Or, is Humphries' heresy, like so many other heresies, only a strange, wild parody of the truth?

Humphries' thesis, which he believes is verified in the writings of Proust, O'Connor and Villon, is that in literature the gnostic myth of man's origin and fall is recapitulated. The gnostics assert that our present condition is one of fallenness. As we find ourselves in the world, we are corporeal, divided according to sex, temporal and mortal. But in this state we are alienated from our true self, which is, by contrast to the mundane self, something divine, immortal and androgynous. According to the gnostic mythology,<sup>2</sup> the primal man *Anthropos* is the mirror image of God, generated from God as the object and expression of his divine desire. Desire is, indeed, the inner moving nature of God, who, wishing to contemplate himself and take pleasure in himself, produces his own divine other, namely, the primal man. *Anthropos*, the true and primal man, is therefore an original whole which reflects the divine totality. However, *Anthropos* somehow forgets that his wholeness lies in mirroring the godhead. Repeating the divine self-absorption of which he is himself the expression, *Anthropos* wishes to know himself and possess himself in matter. But in this case the desire for self proves to have disastrous consequences, for its fulfillment requires that *Anthropos* dwell in the unreasoning form, namely the body, and hence that he find himself to be no longer a whole but merely a part of a larger cosmos, subjected to its laws and divided from himself by sexual differentiation.

Thus man, as we find him in the world, is a fragment of Light within an alien Darkness:

For this reason, man, unlike all other creatures on earth, is dual in nature: mortal in the body, but immortal through the real *Anthropos*. Though he is immortal and possesses authority over all things, he undergoes the fate of mortals in being subject to Destiny. Though above the world of the spheres, yet he has become a slave within that world: male and female generated from the bisexual Father, sleepless since he derives from a sleepless creature [sic], nevertheless he is vanquished by love and sleep.<sup>3</sup>

Salvation, in the gnostic myth, consists in the recovery of the self. The self to be recovered evidently is not the psycho-physical self constituted by its material nature and by worldly anxieties and ambitions. This latter self, rather, hides and absorbs the true self in the world of flesh where the true self becomes the unwitting victim of misdirected desire. Salvation consists, then, in the realization or knowledge (*gnosis*) that in this world of flesh the true self is occluded. To the extent that men and women see the futility and irony of their passions, their sense of dereliction is heightened. But at the same time the likelihood increases that they will grasp the truth that the true self transcends the opacity and oppression of this worldly condition. In the gnostic myth, salvation is attained paradoxically, as it were, in the realization of the depravity and dereliction of this fleshly life.

It is this myth which, according to Humphries, is re-enacted in literature. Language, he claims, is the perfect analogue for our fallen state. It is only through language that we can come to know ourselves and each other, and all the things we do and think. Hence, in language we attain ourselves differentially, that is, by objectifying ourselves. Our self-objectification in language would seem to most of us, no doubt, something natural, necessary and positive, intrinsic to the structure of the self. For Humphries, however, linguistic self-objectification, even if inevitable, is something essentially antithetical to the self. The verbal signs through which we objectify ourselves have no stable or absolute meanings, as de Saussure and Derrida have taught us. Language, therefore, is untrustworthy, a source of error, 'by nature ironic', so that our self-objectification in language is also unavoidably a betrayal and a loss of wholeness.

In the normal course of events we are not conscious of the way language serves both to objectify us and to mislead us. In literature, however, we employ language precisely in order to objectify ourselves and to take pleasure in ourselves. Literature is an instrument of self-contemplation in much the same way as, in the gnostic myth,

worldly existence is the instrument by which *Anthropos* seeks to know himself. The act of self-contemplation through the creation and enjoyment of literature thus corresponds to the self-absorption and self-desire which, in the gnostic view, has brought about our being and fall. In the act, let us say, of writing a poem or of reading a novel we re-enact our original self-alienation. Of course we do not spontaneously assess the self-contemplation which literature induces as a negation and loss of self. In gnosticism, however, spontaneous assessments are necessarily suspect, and, must give way to something more subtle. Indeed, the experience of self-alienation through literary creation and enjoyment is nothing if not subtle.

Let us recall that in the gnostic myth salvation is attained paradoxically, by the intensifying of our sense of lostness, and in the measure that it succeeds arouses within us the sense of an interior wholeness — a wholeness which cannot be expressed in words, which is lost in words:

In literature, fallen man may learn of the loss which has constituted him, his language and his desire, as mediation, heteronomy, contamination of light by dark. The mediation of literature, its projection of a ghostly space in which lies are truth and pleasure is entirely in being misled, by radicalizing the sense of lostness, reflecting the spectral irony and mendacity of all human knowledge, the absence of the totality of Light, plunges every 'Anthropos' deeper into himself, into the negative, antithetical lostness of the Light within him.<sup>4</sup>

The self-contemplation which both writer and reader seek by means of the literary work is the antithesis of the divine self-contemplation which constitutes our true and inner self. Literary self-contemplation is the negative image of a prior self-contemplation in which the self is a pure desire for self, unhindered by attachment to alien flesh and uncompromised by self-expression in language. By its very negativity, therefore, literary self-contemplation may evince the lost selfhood within.

It should be noted that in spite of the dualism of self and language, the dynamism of literary self-contemplation is still all divine. The creation and the reception of the literary work both re-enact the desire of the divine self for itself. The reason for this is that in the gnostic myth there is only one true self and agent. Evidently he must confront an alien darkness, but the action is all his: God desires God; God begets God; God loses God; God recovers God. Moreover, we are not mere observers of this divine drama but rather the protagonist, for the true and hidden self in us is God. Now, if we are truly divine, in the way described by gnostic theology, can literature have any-

thing positive to offer us? In other words, what kind of aesthetic is consonant with Humphries' heresy?

Let us recall that the desire for self-contemplation in literature re-enacts the desire of *Anthropos* to know himself in matter. Guiding the aesthetic experience of the literary work, therefore, is the desire to know and possess the self by means of the world created by the work. The world created by the work is like a mirror in which we may see the self reflected, just as the darkness of matter provides a mirror in which *Anthropos* sees himself reflected. Thus the world created by the work serves the function of allowing the self to be an object for itself. But since there is really only one true self, the literary work cannot truly be another perspective expressing the experience of an other self. The multiplicity of selves which we appear to be is actually a falsifying of the self; we are no more than the fragmenting and darkening of the Light which is one and whole. It is not surprising, then, that Humphries should liken our orientation to the literary work not to an entry into another perspective, but to the narcissistic introjection of the child. We approach the work in order to find ourselves and possess ourselves.

If by means of the literary work we could indeed come to delight ourselves, or learn the truth about ourselves and our world, then our desire for self would be satisfied. But Humphries invokes the witness of Proust, O'Connor, and Villon, who, in his opinion, testify to the inadequacy of literature.<sup>5</sup> What we discover in literature is not the self but the 'mendacious flimsiness' of the text, its constantly renewed failure to satisfy our desire for self-knowledge. Hence, implicit in reading and in writing is the experience of loss. Moreover, what is lost is not something external to us; it is the very self we have sought in the literary work. The logic of the desire for self-knowledge leads to mourning and melancholy.

This conclusion is entirely consonant with the gnostic myth. The self-objectification of primal man in a worldly existence is coincident with his fate. It amounts to the loss of true selfhood so that the man or woman who confuses this life and its cares with the authentic life of the self will inevitably suffer uncentredness. Since literature, according to Humphries, re-enacts this myth, it is not surprising that, in his opinion, the process of our aesthetic experience of the literary work should consist less in feeling the sense of a perspective other than our own than in the desire for self; that, in place of an ecstatic entry into the world of the work, there should be introjection; and, instead of self-discovery, loss of self.

Humphries does, however, allow for the experience of ecstasy, not at all intrinsic to the enjoyment of the literary work. Let us recall that in the gnostic myth the inner nature of God is desire, and the

self is the expression of this same divine desire. The self is recovered, then, when its inner constitutive desire is released from its bondage to all objects in which it sought to know itself. This is what happens, Humphries claims, when we finally realize the futility of our attempts to find meaning in literature. When the poverty of the text is disclosed, when it is understood that literature can in no way make sense of the self or the world, then we are released from a kind of slavery. We experience an objectless desire, and, this is ecstasy:

All objects of desire, whether persons or texts, serve no purpose save to make us experience desire – objectless desire .... Proust tells us that the only thing any writer can do is give us desires. O'Connor says that purpose in any serious writer must be to exhaust the 'concrete', exhaust all modes of 'making sense' and leave the reader with a sense of incomprehensibility.<sup>6</sup>

But if this is the rigour of heresy, then, paradoxically, there can be no substantial connection between gnostic ecstasy and the sense which is expressed in, and intrinsic to, the literary work: '... part of my discovery ... is that any choice of which text to read (to lose) must, at the gnostic level of self-conscious loss, be arbitrary. Any sense we make of such choices is an attempt to belie the loss of reading them.'<sup>7</sup> The gnostic aesthetic is a 'repeated loss and celebration of losing'.

It may be true that many people do approach the reading and writing of literature as Humphries suggests, namely, as a form of psychotherapy. It may be that they are only looking for themselves in the literary work. If so, they are likely, sooner or later, to encounter the mendacious flimsiness of the text, in the same way that adolescent infatuation sooner or later must discover that the loved one's charms are not all they seemed. But if Humphries' heresy traces the aesthetic experience of those who fall in and out of love with literature, can it account for the true rewards of respect and the joys of fidelity?

It is a curious fact that literature gives pleasure, and that great literature gives great pleasure. Even if the work depicts the perplexing or the unpleasant, and even if we disagree with the point of view expressed or implied in the work, there is something about it which invites our appreciation. Could it be that the literary work gives pleasure because of the way it enables its readers to enter and explore a different way of seeing something? To appreciate a literary work is not simply to be informed of the author's point of view. Is it not to feel the sense communicated in the work? Our entry into the text by means of the feeling life of the mind is something quite different from introjection. It is to know what it feels like to see through other eyes – to be someone else.

This expansion of the life of the self through feeling is precisely the opposite of egocentric desire. It is not attained by adding power or property to my ego, but rather through a dispossession of myself, a self-emptying.<sup>8</sup> The higher joys of which we human beings are capable usually demand a higher degree of self-forgetfulness. And yet, they do not impoverish us; they enrich us.

Perhaps Humphries has chosen the wrong paradigm of selfhood. Could it be that the true self is an ecstatic motion rather than an introjective one and, that its being is to enter selflessly into the world of the other and so to find itself included in, and inclusive of, the other? But if this is the case, then the essence of selfhood is charity rather than desire, and we are creatures not of a Great Androgyne but of the ecstatic, co-inherent society of Charity itself.

JOHN SIMONS

- 1 *The Otherness Within*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.
- 2 There are many variations of the gnostic myth. Humphries draws mainly upon the *Poimandres* of Hermes Trismegistus, a work dating from early in the Christian era. Cf. Haus Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, for a useful and fascinating study of gnosticism.
- 3 'Poimandres' in *Gnosis: Character and Testimony*, ed. R. Haardt, trans. J.F. Henry (Leiden, 1971), 171. Cited by Humphries, *The Otherness Within*, p.4.
- 4 Humphries, *The Otherness Within*, pp. 5-6.
- 5 Humphries does admit that O'Connor, a Catholic writer, would perhaps not be happy to be designated a gnostic.
- 6 Humphries, *The Otherness Within*, pp.170-1.
- 7 *ibid.* p.170.
- 8 Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 94-95 for a philosophical discussion of this idea.



*The Empress Plotina concealed the death of Trajan for several days.*

BRAD WALTON





