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PLUM

1
Plum blossoms wet with dew hang beside the window in the last light of a spring evening.

2
Beside the back door of the old farmhouse a plum tree grew. For years I passed it without noticing.

3
Tonight, I remembered . . .

4
I'd forgotten how much I've died.
WRAPPING BREAD

Light falls or hides behind trees —
I'm not sure about this

but it's dark, or getting dark.
Maybe it's a rat, or a lot of rats

eating light
out of the hands of clouds.

It's dark for sure now. And I have my arms
around you, or wish I did instead

of this handful of stars
that clouds feed rabbits at dawn.

Tonight fireworks rip the sky, July 4th
traffic wheezing on a bridge.

On the radio: floods, tornadoes,
earthquakes. I've seen pictures

but I'm not sure. What I want to say
is that in this darkness I remember

in a bakery wrapping bread before sunrise
under fluorescent lights high

with the smell, heels tucked in my cheeks
I thought nothing could hurt me.

And if you were here now I would be holding you
like a warm loaf of bread, or maybe

tighter, I'm not sure.
THE HELP

Gertie's been working here
so long the owner lets her close.
Husband Tony died shoveling snow
few years back. I see
the food she drops
in her handbag, forgets
to pay for. She cooks
me meals in the back room.

The customers call her by name
and she snatches their bottles
off the shelves, slips them into
bags with a smoothness that eases minds.

Her son staggers in
near closing to walk his mother
home and get another fifth.
She makes him ask
before she pulls the bottle
down, clutching the counter
like he clutches his money.
I stand with my broom, a witness
to the nightly ritual.

_The Boy_, she calls him, her fat face
shrinking into shadow, doesn't
have a job. I don't ask.

She's hanging up her apron now.
He's strangling the bottle, eyeing
the door. She squeezes my arm
as we head out, the three of us,
into the yellow light of the parking lot,
where they turn right, I left,
into the cold and snow.
I stop for a moment and watch them,
their breath blasting into the air,
mine too: _who walks who home?_
QUARTERS

He let the quarters pile up
after each beer he paid for
with a bill, set his glass
down empty for the young woman
bartender and tried to say something
that would make her forget
the cowlick that wouldn't stay down
or the shoes, so clumsy
even with their sheen,
he wanted to kick them
into pieces against the wall
in the men's room
where he'd go to hide
if he weren't afraid
another would take his stool
and the sight of her,
divine in her efficiency
and long waisted grace.

He tried smiling and received
a polite parting of her lips
in her swooping up
of his suds-foamed glass,
while the stool seemed to rock;
and the pile of quarters grew,
more unsteady with each one
he set in place. Finally,
he pushed himself up
to the full height of his courage,
to blurt a word that would melt her,
but quarters flew along the counter,
gravity betraying his tower,
speech dying in each clattering coin.
THE VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL

The granite is cracking,
tiny fault lines run
through the names
as if to strike them out
a second time,
one death not enough
to ask of them.

No doubt the granite
is second quality,
nothing close to Parian
marble, or Carrara, fit
for a Medici's tomb
sculpted by Michaelangelo.

They died in mud
or highlands cracking
with unnatural drought,
death splitting them
like this granite, flaking
away in the wind,
the slab emptying
of their names,
crumbling slowly, slowly --
bad stone unable
to obliterate the memory
of so much anger.
THE PROMISE

For the twelve thousandth time
I tell my mother, when she asks,
that you and I are not having children.
"You may find," she answers,
"you've changed your mind
in twenty years, to your sorrow."
And suddenly it strikes me
we are no longer talking
about having or not having children,
but about life and death,
specifically hers, my mother
getting used to the idea
that no one is immortal: not she
who has nagged for grandchildren
since my marriage; nor her son,
who next year will turn forty,
when just yesterday he was riding
dining room chairs, kicking them
like mustangs into a prairie wind.

I can see it is a thought
she has chewed a great deal lately,
and for a second I want to promise her
we will have children,
perfect litters, kennels of them,
anything, so long as death can be kept
from making a morsel of her.
She looks at me and smiles,
aware of the thoughts spinning madly
in my head; she pats my hand
as if I were seven again,
and she can make everything perfect,
and for the moment I believe her
and am able to breathe,
to forget what has so shaken me
into my unspoken promise.
WATCHING THE MOON

The night is quiet and the air is still. She watches him for it is all she has to do these days. She thinks of keeping herself warm. This winter is especially cold. He had been laid off from work and there wasn’t always enough money to heat the house. It is cold, there is a chill in the bedroom. She sits on the bed and clutches the bedpost; it is made of wood. Sturdy and the same color as her hand. She waits for her husband. Across the dark room he stands in front of open blinds, eyes wide open taking in the street before him. He begins his strange murmurs in front of the window, his habit for the past seven months.

“This is life,” he says shaking his head up and down as if to confirm it.

She sits up straighter and listens to the low voice. He is going to go on about life again. She knows his moves. First he will survey the street, attach much symbolic meaning to each rowhouse. He will make verse of the thin layer of snow that covers the pavement. Then turn upward to the night sky and revel in the sheer blackness. He will look to his own blackness and believe himself a sharer in the magnificence. His eyes will focus on the moon. It is full this night but always so distant that it does not interest her.

“Watch the moon,” he tells her.

She doesn’t want to. Though maybe she ought to stand beside him. No, she thought, what worked for him didn’t necessarily work for her.

“I’m not watching the moon,” she answers and waits for his revelations of space. He will tell her about the moon and the stars and what it all means. Then pronounce himself small to the universe.

“The moon is far away, and its face is bare. Never bound by a rope but it hangs without falling. Some things are stronger than others. Night after night it takes its place in the sky. Sometimes hiding itself from men, but it’s always there. We’re all together in this thing, the moon, you and me, the chemical plant.”

What is this thing he talks of, she wonders. She is concerned about him but she doesn’t know what to do about it. She pulls back the blankets and crawls underneath them, hoping the droning will stop. There were many nights like this. She had come to expect it.

Comes a night the following week, there is only a half moon. He is posed before the bedroom window, about to confront the sky. The moon gleams in its high position.

“Everything changes,” he says.

“I know,” she said with concern in her eyes.

“Even ants make changes,” he mentions.

“What’s this about the ants?” she asks, ears perking.

“They’re part of everything too. You don’t know about them, do you?”

“What’s there to know. Come on, get some sleep,” motioning with her arm.

He goes to her and hovers over where she lays. He is a tall man. “Must be a thousand ants in our shed. That means trouble.” He wants to explain.
Grace L. Joyner

He began telling the tale of the ants, told to him many years ago. Before the plant, before meeting his wife, he had worked for the railroad. Fixing the tracks with the other men.

One late afternoon, during break, an older man called him aside. They planted themselves down on the gravel of the rail yard. Then the younger man was told the story about a buddy who died in an accident there in the yard. “And the ants came from over there,” pointing to a mound, “an army of them. Surrounded the poor guy, put him on their backs, carried him away. Anyway,” said the older man, “I never saw him again.” His only guess was that they took him to their place beneath the ground.

“Oh, come now,” she said, looking up. He was staring straight at her. Her lips trembling, “What does that mean?”

He shrugs his shoulders, finds his side of the bed and falls back on it. “I don’t know. But it’s even in the ants, what to do, something to do.”

She doesn’t know how much more she can take. She has just enough strength to carry her through. How much does one have to feel for another? But she knows that she is his support. “Things will be better tomorrow,” she reasons.

It is the next morning at the breakfast table, when she speaks quick and asks where he is going to work.

He tells her that the plant is the best place to work. Both of them plead as they speak.

“But you don’t know if you’re going back to the plant. We have money problems. What we saved is running out. Our utilities are going to be cut off.”

“I don’t know why I was laid off. I was with that company a long time. They should have moved me up. But I didn’t have that piece of paper.”

“Oh, the degree!” slapping her hand down on the table. “The paper was an excuse. They use that against you when they’ve already picked their own guy for a position.”

He leaves the table to go into the living room. She stays in the kitchen ‘till noon while her husband reads the newspaper over and over again. Standing over the sink, she thinks about the money. Reminds herself that her husband’s self-esteem is important and that she is the support for both of them. Clenching a dishcloth in her hand, she leans against the sink letting the steel hold her up. She cannot fray along with him. For months, she had patiently watched his ritual before the moon. She saw him falling like an unhinged door. Holding it up takes something out of the support. It is her spirit weakening. Because she too needs to draw from. She muses of strength and all things strong, and the fleeting thought is pleasant.

And for ten days she busies herself in the kitchen, staying there until the afternoon to stretch out the day. On a certain day he receives the letter that turns the tide for both of them. The letter stating that he is called back to work. He comes into the kitchen and hugs her, squeezing so hard that it drains her.

Still that night, he is standing before open blinds, rambling on under the sky. The moon is a glistening crescent silver that hangs in the dark. His sentiments extolling the way it hung. He speaks only moments.
It continues like this so that her husband's stance before the moon is fewer. In the mornings he wakes up fresh. He goes to work. For days it goes like this. And he is talking of normal things, such as putting out the trash. He wonders what tie to wear. And pulls his socks over bare feet.

She takes to nurturing her houseplants and working in the kitchen. Going into the shed every so often to scatter the ants that come up from the wooden floors. So absorbed is she with such, that other things escape her. Her concerns seem behind her. She feels an alliance with all things strong. She has to take care of things. But her mind had drifted so much. She figured it had soared far into space and landed on the moon. Without it she was lost.

And one of those nights, she entered the darkened bedroom. Her husband telling her to come to bed.

But standing before the window, she opens the blinds. Gazing into the night sky, she tries to make sense of herself. All she wants is her very substance to be held together so that she can hold her place in this vast universe. So looking to the heavens she searches for the moon, but it is gone.

Grace L. Joyner
Miriam Sagan

DAY. BOOK.

Yes, it's easy here
All afternoon the white half moon
Hangs over the cow's skull on the adobe wall
The frozen circle of water
That marks the horses' trough.
Unvisited as we are but for the jays
And the orange berried firethorn
That creeps in at the bedroom window
We call the wind a doorknocker
And smoke our only visitor.
Yes, it's easy
To watch the light
Leave the field in drifts
To see the distant mountains
Made distinct by sunset
And the gray trees bare
Candelabras for a solstice.
It's easy to sleep
In the four poster bed
Under the canopy
Of phosphorescent, paper, cut-out stars
A crescent moon and Saturn in its rings.
Burning wood, we carry ash
Visit the sweet pair of horses
Who stand together behind the wire
The brown one dreaming of apples
And the white one dreaming of color.
Linda Pastan

THE FLOOZIE CLAUSE

When we were young and courting
I heard your father tell you:
It's time to take your floozie home.
Which translates: it isn't proper
to entertain a lady after dark.

I was so shocked to hear that cheap,
plush word applied to me, who never
even kissed with my mouth open,
I think I married you
partly from surprise.

Now when our lawyer wants
a Floozie Clause
to keep our children's money
from someone you might marry
if I die,

I smile and say I trust you,
the way my father said he trusted me
when I went out. This is a sharpened weapon
as I know, who didn't succumb
until a rabbi made it legal.
LATE FEBRUARY

It is the season
between seasons
when the snow
forgets itself
halfway down
and turns
to rain,
when the children
lose gloves
and scarves
on the way home --
bright offerings
to Spring
which like a coming
attraction
gives glimpses
of itself:
a vivid green
which is just
a garage door
newly painted,
a violet
bird which
has been here
all winter
long.
Alycee J. Lane

DREADFUL

my bad woman walk was all over me.
dreads bounced rebelliously upon my shoulders
eyes cruised behind blackened lenses
some dared say
  hey girl
  can i go witcha
but swallowed their words and stepped aside
yeah.
i was too smooth
this young boy though
small enough for me to beat his little ass
thought he was it
called me Medusa and laughed to himself
stopped cold my bad woman walk.
Medusa?
i took a step.
wanted to be mad
  to yell loudly bout his mama who probably
  picks up dirty cigarettes and
  smokes
  them . . .
took another step
Medusa?
shit i started to laugh my raunchy
bad woman laugh cause Medusa
  she had snakes that dreaded down her back and
  with one look
  turned would be hey mamas into stone
uh huh.
you know it came back all over me
  my bad woman walk.
and folks
  they just stepped aside.
POEM

It's stupid to be happy in August
with the rent due and the tv on the blink.
The weather's sadly predictable:
humid with no change in sight.
If I decided to visit a friend
I know no one would be home.
Everyone's taking a vacation
although they haven't done anything for months
and they won't go anywhere but stay home
and refuse to answer the door.
I make another large drink and hunch down
in my chair.
That's why I love my friends.
This miserable world's their brainchild.
And if they heard I had run off to Tahiti
or joined the Armed Forces, they would be appalled
and truly concerned for my welfare.
But that wouldn't be for weeks
and by then it would be
October.
AFTER VISITING THE HOME OF A FAMOUS POET

Just off the highway
behind a white picket fence
is a house.
*Home of the famous American poet*
says the sign out front
and that I believe.
Fame makes us respectable
whether we want it or not.
The house is closed today
but through the window
we can make out a table
with one sheet of paper
and a pen.
As if a vindictive maid
got tired of his ravings
and threw the whole lot out.

I want to lie
and say it is beautiful
but no one lives here now.
Cars rot out in the yard
Of a house nearby
and down the street
is a Chinese restaurant
equally out of place.

As we are leaving
we spot another house
five miles down the road.
The windows are boarded up
and several hand painted signs say
trespassers will be shot.
Here is another American.
I want to stop and ask
if he knew the poet
who was his neighbor.
But that's another lie.
I am tired of poetry
and this American means business.
FOG CITY

The summer sun's too much for the ocean as he falls home drunk from rolling in the blond hills all day. To get even, she decides to give the land a taste of her icy heart and, for days, an irresistible winter dream hides the city from July.

The ghosts of whales lick curiously at our bedroom window, and drowned sailors settle into the dark corners of neighborhood taverns. But we're awake, it's the ocean who's lost in a dream. She wants what the sun wants, to touch our faces, warm our lives, be loved.

And in her silver sleep, she listens to our slightest whisper, flows into every alley, up and down all the staircases, remembering everything. The restaurants simmer soup for her, murderers hide like sharks in her, and lovers forget the hours lost in her timeless silk.

She gathers herself like a mother around the hospitals. Anyone born in the fog will never forget her. Those who die, slip away with her to her home at the bottom of the waves where graveside flowers and storm swept trees root themselves and grow again under a platinum light and where she builds a secret city identical to ours in every way each stone, rail, and roof tile hidden from the sun.
Art Beck

CEMETERY STRIKE

The contract expires, and almost in unison
all the gravediggers in the city
switch off their bulldozers. In the crematoriums,
the oven attendants turn off the gas
then blow out the pilots.
Even the scatterers of ashes on the waters
check the weather, then go out
to lie on the beach.

But death, that scab, pays no attention
to the pickets and goes on
about his predatory business
with the conscience of a robber baron.

The strike continues for months
and the corpses have to wait
in refrigerated warehouses
like supplicants in an unemployment line.
The old and young, diseased
and murdered, suicides and accidents
so hungry for their little mouthful of earth
they don't even shiver, don't even notice
the cold. And black spots of mourners
who can't finish their grief
begin to appear all over the city
like a rash on the streets.

Finally, the unburied dead outnumber
the newborn. Out of sheer critical mass,
the almost silent mutter of their souls,
like thousands of rubbing butterflies,
pollenates the air and defeats the season.
That spring, even the living
yearn only for ashes and dust.
FIRST RAIN

Inevitable, but so late
we never really felt
it would come. August
stretching over October like a thin,
gold veil. So late,
the soft rains of early autumn
must have found somewhere else.
And now, all at once, it's
late November. Thunder
at three a.m. The bedroom
flashing like a dream.
The whole year swept away in a night.
Ice on the morning windows.
It wouldn't be so cold
except a layer of skin seems
stripped away. I'm afraid
if I touch your hand, I'll find
it's as raw as my own.
We just stare at each other, still
separated, like Christmas and Easter,
by a brittle winter
and unpredictable spring.
HARP BOYS

They play harps of rain. They strike a silver breathless music from the tenuous strings. They are completely naked except for the bony cape that covers each of their shoulders tapering down to the small of their backs. The bony outgrowth looks like the stunted remains of deformed wings. Their features are boyish, beautiful. The blue sun is aflame in a divided mirror sky. With their slim boyish bodies, flaxen hair, delicate bodies, they could almost be young girls. Their sex unadorned by hair is alive and vibrant. Some play harps, some wrestle playfully, some couple beneath the shade trees.

MAN AND WOMAN

The inexorable sweep of trees against the landscape. A yellow sun and blue sky as intense as a child's fingerpainting. The way a man and woman sit talking in the heart of the autumn stillness. Light falls on them lending shadows to his eyes, catching in her hair. Is it a stillness that grows between them, that falls in the hollow spaces between their words? Their hands might drift out and touch. But will the trees notice? Will the landscape remain unchanged? Will they?
LOVE POEM

My Cuban girlfriend thinks
I'm stupid. I laugh at this,
fearlessly, the way I hope
that one day I'll laugh at
death. I see a certain humor
in all of this. There are days
though when I might agree. And
she, my girlfriend, ten years
younger than I, thinks I move
too slowly towards certain things,
too slowly towards the future
like some shaggy form of lightning
disposed on certain days to not
flash its showy brilliance.

Together we watch dusk roll its
black ball of darkness across
the cool lawn. I ply her with
gifts, small lies, vague promises.
She punches my arm and mutters
under her breath, dumg guy. She
thinks that if you do A and B
that C follows. She is young
in this way and still doesn't
understand me, I think. She
hasn't learned yet that I do
what strikes me when and how
I best can. What can I say?
She's young and pretty, pretty
enough to break my heart. And
she is so beautifully in love
with her dreams and thinks the
world has possibility. I drink
and think about this a lot:
the possibility of possibility.
Stephen Ford Brown

The furious planets of desire rise into night air. I ply her with gifts, a small joke, a little song and dance. She punches me in the arm and mutters under her breath, dumb guy. When she is mad at me, I, the perpetual bad boy, think there's worse in the world than an angry woman. But at least she forgives me. There are so few left who are willing to forgive.

And I know that soon her peels of laughter will rise into the air and she will descend into my arms like darkness over some small midwestern town. Her body will become a train of dark flowers spilling across the bed and I, a young boy again, employed by no one but this singular form of happiness, will fall into her waiting arms. And she will rise, and we will make love against a world that doesn't know or care that we exist.
PROMISE

The other side
of this moment
holds a man you will
surely kill and no one
can stop the singing
of the knives or the
mysterious and intense
afternoon from bursting
into flame.
IT'S NO SMALL WONDER

--for Rose Graubart Ignatow

all this sudden talking
on the corner the owner
of Charles Street Antiques
yapping with the cop whose
enthusiasms aren't French Provincial
& just listen to these old women
in blended silk laughing as if
they hadn't laughed in years, their
lacquered hands conducting a fine
tapestry of sound, why even Julio
the mailman can't keep quiet, leaning
too far into his conversation with
Mr. Danner who talks to dogs if
no one else is around, I swear
the yammering is flowing west
toward the Hudson & if the wind holds
soon all New Jersey will break into
communication as I sit here on my
front step with smug Stein who stops
short of saying I told you so, but
smiles with one wing tapping, oh
he knows this furious banquet means
we've made it through another winter
with souls shredded but still unfolding,
yes, Stein, aren't we something, again
carrying on perhaps our strangest custom
on this fine first day of spring.
FAIRMOUNT: A FAN'S NOTES

Main Street in Fairmount, Indiana, is more or less like Main Street anywhere in the American Midwest. There's a bar, a bank, a furniture store, pool room, pharmacy and hardware store. The houses surrounding Main Street are mostly white-washed wood frame buildings or rectangles of red brick. Behind a few of them there are unpainted falling-down garage-barns where junk's stored and kids put minibikes together. On one street — I forget which — there's a brick Meeting House where Quakers, who settled this town in the last century, hold services.

Though agriculture is the economic mainstay of Fairmount, James Dean, native son, has become something of a cottage industry. Driving into Fairmount due east on Highway 26, there's a sign nailed to a pole. It isn't large or electric or particularly imposing. It is, in fact, very simple, in the Quaker tradition: large black block letters on a white background. It reads: Fairmount, Indiana, Birthplace of James Byron Dean.

When I drove into Fairmount on a Saturday afternoon in October of 1985, James Dean had been dead 30 years. Thirty years is a lot of years; more years, even, than he lived. Yet, far from lying peacefully interred, James Dean is very much a living presence in the town. Ever since he was buried in the town cemetery on October 8, 1955, people from all over the world have come to this Indiana village, to the graveyard, the museum, the farm not far away from where he grew up. Fairmount has become a sort of Fatima to film fans, Dean fans more especially, and day in, day out, not a week goes by when someone doesn't drive into the place to poke around. They come not so much to pay their respects as just to be there, or say they've been there. And, as is typically true of shrines, everyone who comes wants to take something. James Dean's tombstone has been hauled away three times at this writing. A bust of the actor used to rest atop an obelisk in the cemetery 50 feet from the road. That's gone. Even the tiny gilt tiles at the base of the obelisk, half of them anyway, have been chipped out and carried off in people's pockets.

The Fairmount Historical Museum, an old white clapboard building a half-block off Main Street, houses the local totems. Like county museums everywhere in America, it resembles a family scrapbook on a grand, if tattered, scale. Fairmount High School contributed group portraits of various graduating classes from the 20's and 30's, these framed imposingly in old wood, the matting now gone brown. A collection of a thousand or so seashells, gift of a local and world-traveled philanthrope, are lovingly arranged in a glass display case. A push of the button sets tray after tray of shells whirling upward, ferris-wheel style. The other room contain fossils, books, and local arrowheads.

But what everyone comes to see is mostly collected in one large square room just past the gift shop. Visitors — a glance at the guestbook shows they come from as close as Chicago and as far away as Tokyo — move with mixed curiosity and reverence past the rumpled, cream-colored shirt James Dean wore in the opening
scenes of *East of Eden*; the famous cowhide chaps from *Giant*; and the actor’s high school letter sweater. They marvel at the motorbike on which James Dean whipped up and down Fairmount’s Main Street in the 40’s. They study the photos. These, black and white, of course, are familiar from screen magazines and innumerable pictorial biographies. James Dean as a little boy in overalls. James Dean as a teenager, photographed with the Fairmount High School basketball team, the second smallest guy in the lineup.

In the gift shop a trio of gray-haired Quaker women, zealous as only volunteers can be, offer suggestions. There are James Dean keychains, James Dean ashtrays, James Dean T-shirts. There are even miniature wooden busts of the star. Like the donated oil portraits in the other room, these likenesses have a crude, clumsy look to them. In every case they’re executed with far more enthusiasm than skill. I slowly rotated a rack loaded with James Dean postcards and selected a shot of the actor in dungaree jacket and workman’s cap; cigarette at the corner of his mouth, hands in pockets, advancing down Fairmount’s Main Street. It was one of a series of shots done by Dennis Stock during James Dean’s final visit to Fairmount in 1955. James Dean in rubber boots, a gloved right hand resting on the back of a big sow. James Dean shaking hands and signing autographs at Fairmount High School. James Dean banging a bongo drum in a cattle pen or clowning morosely in a coffin.

* * *

A ghost by any definition is a living spirit, albeit a disembodied one. James Dean’s ghost holds sway over Fairmount as surely as Whitman’s walks Mickle Street, as surely as Aaron Burr’s discomfitted shade haunts the Battery, waiting for the ship that never came. If in the romantic gush of 50’s screen magazine copy his image once stood for the town and its way of life, now the town stands for him. Fairmount has become a symbol of a symbol. A grave has made it famous. And this is because James Dean’s genius — part of it anyway — was to tell everything there was to say about growing up in a place like Fairmount without ever addressing himself to the subject directly.

To know James Dean’s films — there are three of them — and to spend an afternoon in Fairmount is to realize almost at once that if James Dean had come from somewhere other than this Indiana town he would never have been James Dean. If he’d been, for example, one of those hapless children shepherded through show business by ruthless parents, or, say, the vapid, pouting sophisticate of our own day; if he had been anything else, he could never have become the kind of actor — and, ultimately, the symbol he was. James Dean, actually born in nearby Marion, Indiana, in 1931, moved to Los Angeles at the age of six. When, at nine, his mother died of breast cancer, he came back to Fairmount to live with an uncle and aunt. He grew up on a 440-acre farm within easy walking distance of Main Street. He drove a tractor, raised pigs and belonged to the local 4-H Club. He won letters in baseball and basketball at Fairmount High School. He was president of the Thespian
Society. It was on the boards of the high school stage that his art, mere exuberance then, found its original expression.

Sherwood Anderson peopled *Winesburg, Ohio* — a town much like Fairmount — with what he called “The Grotesques.” He didn’t mean the physically repulsive. He meant the spiritually separate, men like Wings Biddlebaum, the schoolteacher who, quite innocently, couldn’t keep his hands to himself and so was run out of another small town (this one in Pennsylvania), by a mob of enraged fathers and came to live quietly in Winesburg. These, the Wings Biddlebaums of the village, sooner or later told their stories to George Willard, the young reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle* whose ambition, like that of his creator, was to write. Out of the storyteller’s appetite for meaning, the thing that distinguishes his talent from that of the common gossip, was borne the patience to listen to those tales of missed chances and tragic misunderstandings. The ‘grotesques’ of the village were drawn to George Willard. They believed he somehow understood them. They hoped he might be able to tell their stories for them.

James Dean told his story by enacting it. The story found its summation as symbol, the symbol a carefully constructed psychic collage. It blended courage, grace, romance, joy and the spirit of youth itself into the figure of a psychologically complicated but morally pure anti-hero. There was an element of exaltation to it; the thrill of successful defiance. What James Dean came to stand for, not so much in film history as in the history of American popular culture, the culture people arrange in their living rooms or listen to in their cars, the one that counts, was something like a saint. A saint who had nothing to do with any church; a secular saint, but a saint no less, because saints are larger than life and necessarily possessed of a certain moral dimension. It was the sort of figure Whitman became in the process of writing, then living, *Leaves of Grass*. Archetypal. A fragment of the larger, national personality.

But whereas Whitman showed us another way of seeing ourselves — the hearty American as metaphor for a luckier world to come — James Dean, like Hemingway, offered, insisted on, a code of conduct. The blue jeans and T-shirt, the shuffling walk, the cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth; the image was as recognizably American as a flat Midwestern accent. Behind the image, or, better, the point of it, was a way to behave in a world peopled with distant, unloving fathers, nattering middle-class parents and corrupt businessmen.

To audiences seeing him on screen for the first time, James Dean was familiar, almost recognizable, and virtually indelible. This is because more than anything else, more than gesture or voice even, he made his face be the mirror of his feelings. And so what we see, from frame to frame, shot to shot, scene to scene, are hundreds, maybe thousands, of different faces. James Dean never looked the same way twice, but he was always James Dean, because every face expressed some facet, some emotional nuance, of the personality at its core. The camera always caught something different, but what it caught was always real and intent in a way that made us almost think we were seeing someone we’d seen before, or known before.
Everything Dean said and did was directed towards a certain part of the emotional anatomy. "One had to witness the indignation in the movie house," wrote Francoise Truffaut, apropos of that moment in *East of Eden* when Adam Trask (Raymond Massey) rejects his son's great gift ($15,000) and, by extension, of course, his love. James Dean stepped inside that adaptation of Steinbeck's clunky novel and made it his: the story of a martyrdom. It was psychic martyrdom; about the price we pay for wanting love. From the opening shot — Dean sitting on a sidewalk, his head resting on his arms, the arms thrown over his knees — to that final scene where he kneels at his father's bedside, begging his forgiveness, there's an animal tenderness about him. James Dean could establish audience curiosity about himself without uttering a word, merely by looking, by feeling, a certain way. From the curious we rapidly pass over to the sympathetic. Moreover, the sympathy we extend is of a special sort, unlike what we might give to any other screen actor. Imagine a musician who's dropped his bow or lost his place in the score. Everyone in the concert knows it. We desperately don't want him to lose control or fail, because if he fails, somehow every other human being also fails. It was to that part of the psyche that James Dean directed his appeal. Think of that scene in *Rebel Without A Cause* when Jim Stark (Dean) returns to his parents' house after the deadly drag race. He opens the refrigerator, takes a swig of milk from a bottle, then rubs it across his cheeks and forehead. ( Entirely improvised by the actor.) Or the scene in *Giant* where ranchhand Jett Rink (Dean), living alone in a cluttered shack, offers his patrician boss' wife (Elizabeth Taylor) a cup of tea. Here is someone who knew how much people loved the ordinary, the common, that makes up 90% of anyone's greatness. Even when he's alone, when he's not talking, he generates a sense of the tragic, the misfortune, that doesn't allow us to take our eyes off him. The essence of his screen persona is in that shot of him hunched and shivering on top of a boxcar roaring through the Salinas Valley. Could anyone imagine a more American simile for that most American of themes: the broken heart?

All art has poetry at its center and the poetry is a way of seeing and a style of explaining. The mime cocking his head or rolling his eyes is as much involved in the truth of human life as any literary text. Put another way, art is message, and this is as true for performance as it is for the plastic or literary arts. James Dean understood this almost instinctively. When, again in *East of Eden*, he says exactly five words to the bouncer who works in his mother's whorehouse — "I wanna talk to her", or later, "Tell her I hate her" — these have all the force and power, the compressed feeling and experience, of great poetry. On the surface of the page they're mundane lines in a film script. On screen he infused them with hate, suffering, hope and, finally, betrayal. This is someone who knew, or believed he knew, what it was to be betrayed. His sense of Cal Trask as a character wasn't in the least abstract or intellectual. It was emotional, charged with a personal history he angrily hid from the world. This sense of a man somehow wronged was at the center of his screen personality. Connected to it was the idea that, because he's been hurt, he could understand the pain of others. "Want my jacket?" Jim Stark says to Plato (Sal Mineo) in *Rebel*. "It's warm."
James Cory

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To turn a mundane line of script into a poem of sorts required a different type of acting. Truffaut tried to define it when he noted that James Dean "acts beyond what he is saying," which is to say that behind his idea of character was the notion that words or lines are merely politic, gesturing toward or obscuring what we really think or feel. What he was doing with his body or eyes was always at least as important as what he was saying.

In the period immediately after the Second World War, American drama and film took a qualitative leap in the direction of realism, particularly through the portrayal of American 'types'. This made it imperative that acting transcend the outmoded and inadequate technology of 'exterior' performance. If in turn-of-the-century Russia Konstantin Stanislavski's system had developed as a response to the demands of acting Chekhov, then similarly in the 1950's the Actor's Studio in New York achieved its power and reputation because it could prepare actors for roles in the new, very different plays of a Tennessee Williams, an Arthur Miller, or a William Inge.

In the view of Lee Strasberg, who ran the Actor's Studio, acting had to be more than timing, a crisp recitation of lines; a predictable set of syncopated gestures. It had to come from within. What developed out of the Actor's Studio and among its graduates, then, was a vernacular American style as distinct from what was referred to, disparagingly enough, as the "British School" (i.e. acting by rote). It was, being American, characteristically impassioned. Its most famous exponents mumbled, shouted, and wept, turned their backs on the audience (or the camera), and ignored the finer points of diction in favor of natural, that is to say, colloquial, speech. Who really talked like that anyhow? In the American style the whole burden of performance rested on the actor's imagination. He had to believe in the character so totally that his own personality would be subsumed. In effect, he had to be as much of an artist as the playwright or director, maybe more, as his (or her) responsibility was not to interpret or create the character so much as to find the writer's creation within himself.

That that could be done, given the right actor and role, was an article of faith at the Actor's Studio and among its graduates, who included James Dean. For those practicing Method, the name by which this style came to be known, concentration was the key. Concentration was the means by which the imagination would be freed to discover character. The techniques Strasberg adapted from Stanislavski -- affective memory, scenic faith and the rest -- were aimed at enabling the actor to concentrate. Concentration was specifically directed to harnessing psychic resources, uprooting the actor's unconscious, capturing and shaping what was there for the character. Performers were taught to search their minds for old feelings and fears and put them to work in the service of a role. It was within the unconscious, wrote I. Sudakov, an early proponent of Stanislavski's system, that "the possibilities of various performances reside."

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For better or worse, American literature is largely the stuff of autobiography. The country which has always placed a premium on the individual as opposed to the mass, which has, in effect, made of the self a sort of deity, not surprisingly spawned a literature whose storytellers most often tell their own stories. Americans don’t trust what they can’t see; aren’t interested in what can’t be explained through the precepts of common sense.

James Dean’s three performances — in *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without A Cause* and *Giant* — are similarly of an autobiographical nature. For each of these roles he drew on his own experience; that well of pure feeling we sense is there just under the surface of his voice and gestures. It was the source of what made him mysterious. He was an orphan, sent away by his widowed father to live in an only vaguely familiar place (Fairmount) at the age of nine. Thus his stance: that of the outsider, the misplaced, the misunderstood. All the external technology of his acting underscored this essential self-perception. It was there even in the early television work, before he’d ever stepped in front of Elia Kazan’s cameras. He threw back his head and rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. He jammed his hands in his pockets and arched his shoulders forward. He stammered. He stopped speaking in mid-sentence. Or he swung his body in a wild, mechanical half-turn. It all spoke to an immense, almost ungovernable frustration. Director Nicholas Ray capitalized on this when he handed him that famous line in *Rebel* that constitutes something like an epitaph: “If I had one day when I didn’t have to be all confused, when I didn’t have to be afraid of everything, when I felt like I belonged someplace . . .”

Bruised innocence was the perfect pedestal on which to erect the larger figure of the Rebel. A society without a deeply traditional sense of itself, a society which secretly worshipped the unconventional, which was fascinated with what Tennessee Williams came to call “the fugitive kind,” had always mythologized its rebels. America loved outlaws and gangsters. They were the ultimate individuals: they did exactly as they pleased. It loved Dillinger, Capone and Pretty Boy Floyd. And in the 50’s American society had a psychic need for the Rebel. He was the timely, logical opposite of church-going, Rotarian Republicanism, of stuffy school board respectability. If, as Carl Jung argued, the archetype appears at historical junctures as both counterweight and warning, then the emergence of James Dean first as screen persona then cultural ikon and the overwhelming response of American youth should have shown just how monotonous, sterile and spiritually bereft the country had become under Eisenhower and, by extension, how far it would travel in the opposite direction a decade later. But by then, of course, James Dean had returned to Fairmount and the film martyrdom he enacted had come to its ultimate logical sequence: death in real life, distorted from bad taste to grotesquerie by the tabloids and screen magazines.
James Cory

James Dean moved people, particularly young people, because he addressed an issue guaranteed to prick the American conscience. That was the smothering conformity of American life, individualism turned inside-out, the deadening of the spirit in a land dominated by religious and bureaucratic institutions. In each of his films he rises up against the prescription: ‘Do what you’re told.’ Against a father’s indifference, against selfish, bickering parents, against the power of a wealthy rancher and his cronies. In two of the three films he goes in search of a father’s love: that preeminent theme in American fiction. It’s because he’s vulnerable that the moral integrity of his independence, his refusal to be like everybody else, becomes heroic. Everyone around him seems, by contrast, stupid, subservient, crafty or just pathetic.

In Man and his Symbols, Jung distinguished between the sign and the symbol as follows: the sign, he wrote, is “always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.”

James Dean transformed himself into symbol. Better yet, he discovered and drew out the archetype, the living symbol, within himself. Like Jung’s symbol, the screen personality — what we finally come to understand by the name ‘James Dean’ — hinted at something far larger. The archetype draws its power from an ability to call forth or unleash emotional states which belong to the unconscious rather than the rational, ordered world of the controlled thought process. So James Dean appealed to feelings which Americans weren’t publicly comfortable with. To do that he had to break down a wall of taboos, most of them having to do with male sensitivity. He cried, stuttered, humbled himself. Once the wall was down, and Dean was dead, a horde of imitators cautiously crept forward through the breech. He was after feelings, not thoughts, not ideas. Did he even realize what he was doing? Elia Kazan, who directed him in East of Eden, once described Dean’s working methods, his approach to a role, as “instinctive” as opposed to conscious and controlled. The archetype, in Jung’s view, is the psychic equivalent of animal instinct.

But the archetype is also specific to a culture. The concept, notion, feeling or idea — however we define or classify it — may be universal, may be as organic a part of the mind as, say, the cerebellum, but the forms of its expression are necessarily shaped by a society and its spirit. Motion pictures were the product of Edison’s lightning-like pragmatic American genius, and so, half a century after Edison, it was through the medium of the silver screen that the tales of the tribe were told, moral precepts delivered, leaders — that is, symbol-figures — chosen. Film had supplanted fiction as the forum for cultural instruction. Being archetypal, the character Dean created for the screen — there was really only one — stepped right through the superficial roles he played. We think of Robeson’s Othello or Olivier’s Hamlet, we measure all Stanley Kowalskis against Marlon Brando’s, but we never think of James Dean’s Cal Trask or Jett Rink. We think of James Dean. In an almost manic effort to achieve believability as character he blurred the distinction between actor and role, so that we remember the roles only as a shadow of the larger figure of the actor. He invented himself, using the psychic materials at
hand, and the three films — a triptych, really — are an overview of the process. In film’s history they’re important for no other reason than that he starred in them.

James Dean fascinated the public, especially American youth, because — excluding the last half of Giant — he moved through these films with a kind of moral inner light which eschewed the fearful, vulgar or inane. He transformed the faults and flaws of his characters into their opposite without ever diminishing them. He wasn’t articulate or clever, either as a character on screen or a private person off of it, yet somehow he made this trait actually endearing. Sometimes he came dangerously close to being a sociopath (think of the scene in East of Eden in which he eavesdrops on Aron and Abra in the barn: shades of Son of Sam), yet there was a kind of plebian grace to everything he said and did. James Dean was cool in the specifically American sense of being hard, in control, and at the same time completely without pretense. He had, through some inner wisdom, transported himself beyond the incessant petty squabbling of the human animal. Thus the figure of the peacemaker, the saint, but a Beat saint, without so much as a look in God’s direction.

Innocence was a necessary part of James Dean’s heroism and it was one of the things that made him interesting to Americans. America had always been enamored of innocence. The myth of the frontier, the notion of spiritually pure people leaving a corrupted Europe: the historical roots of this fascination ran deep. Along with the ‘search for the father,’ it was a recurrent motif in American literature. The Innocents Abroad. Summarized best, perhaps, in Henry James’ The American, where American-ness, as juxtaposed with the machinations of a cynical and conniving French family, is innocence. Probably the most affecting scene in all Dreiser is the part of An American Tragedy in which Clyde Griffiths gets a job as a bellhop in a Kansas City hotel. The mean-spiritedness of the young bell-hops, who alternate between obsequiousness and hatred for the people they serve and accept tips from, is totally at odds with the naivete of Clyde Griffiths. Shocked at first, Clyde, of course, rapidly becomes like them. And behind this magnificent scene we can see Dreiser’s obsession with the process of corruption. The theme of innocence lost is precisely what made it an American tragedy.

Innocence (myopia too) was the source of what comes across on screen as James Dean’s chronic blinking confusion and pardon-me-please approach. As a country boy who came to the city he brought it off in a way that could never be convincingly faked. Think of that scene in Giant where Jordan Benedict III (Rock Hudson) and his flunkies try to wrangle Jett Rink out of the piece of land that’s his by fluke of inheritance. The smooth-talking slickness, the dishonesty, the smug sense of white male privilege and control: it’s all made that much more unpalatable by the counter-point of Dean’s shuffling, shoulder-shrugging performance.

Innocence, vulnerability and moral strength: all melded at some point into myth. But part of the Dean myth had to do with symbols which were consciously manipulated by others. There’s a shot in East of Eden where for maybe three or four seconds all we see is a clear blue sky, an American flag snapping in the breeze
and James Dean in rugged profile. There's a shot in Giant, transposed to a famous still, where the star rests a shotgun across his shoulders, his arms draped over the gunstock and barrel, crucifixion-style. "What's he like?" Judy (Natalie Wood) asks Plato in Rebel. "He doesn't say much, but when he does you know he means it." The existential hero by definition.

* * *

Death by auto wreck at age 24 added the element of mortality to the Dean myth. East of Eden had been released only two weeks before the fatal crash. Rebel was about to be released. Giant was still in production. Warner Brothers was convinced Dean's death meant fatality for his pictures at the box office. But exactly the opposite happened. Fed by exploitative publishers of ratty screen magazines, writers of hokey lyrics and the more ghoulish side of mainstream media, the death triggered a frenzy of adulation. James Dean became a star almost posthumously. Fan clubs sprung up. Their membership at one point totalled close to 4 million. Thousands of letters addressed to James Dean arrived at Warner Brothers. Everyone wanted a piece of James Dean. His smashed Porsche, the death car, was exhibited to hundreds of people, all paying customers.

But James Dean as symbol transcended the sludge of sentimental mourning and teenage infatuation, the necrophilia of commercial exploitation. There was something too potent in the image. It wouldn't die. Cynics reacted to the deluge of publicity and public attention by dismissing the actor and his films. In print, they wondered how far he would have gone had he lived, since the three films gave him little opportunity to demonstrate range.

Death no doubt lent the myth a good portion of its power. There was the irony that, having recklessly given of himself on screen, he had just as recklessly risked his life for... what? the thrill of high speed behind the wheel of a fly-weight race car. There was an element of sacrifice in that death.

But the durability of the myth owes to the sort of living symbol James Dean became, as preserved on celluloid. To this day there are people in America who have a James Dean room in their houses or apartments. There are quite possibly millions with his picture — poster or postcard — on their walls somewhere. The photographic image is obviously more than adornment. It stands for something vaguely defined but implicitly understood. It's intended to reassure, to set off a mood, to gesture toward an escaped or closeted sensibility. "If only I had one day..."

If we accept Jung's definition, then symbols can't be created. They just are; we know them when we see them. They're powerful because they allude to a raw, untravelled part of the mind.

Everyone who ever watched James Dean sensed the James Dean in himself. That's the nature of a symbol. If James Dean had been purely the product of publicity or directorial manipulation, that is, if someone else had created James Dean, we
might think of him today the way we think of Valentino: at best a cinematic curiosity, at worst a mindless dollboy who stood for the frivolity, the essential shallowness, of his age.

The studios have endlessly tried to re-make James Dean. Every other year a publicist or director proclaims some new film star "the new James Dean" or "the next James Dean." One can hardly fault the Matt Dillons or Tom Cruises for failing to measure up. James Dean created himself. He could do it because he had the psychic materials and because Method gave him a way to reach them. They were purely individual, his alone, but his genius — the largest part of it — was to translate them into universal terms for our benefit. Just as James Dean resisted the attempts of Warner Brothers publicity department to 'civilize' him in the public eye, so the image of James Dean stubbornly resists being created for the benefit of the box office. It isn't enough to be young, beautiful and male. He wasn't even beautiful: he was handsome in the way an ordinary man might be. What made him attractive to some, irresistible to many, had far more to do with presence, with personality, than beauty. It was his great good fortune to be one of those people who look like the kind of person they are.

The archetype isn't created by one conscious mind for the next. It exists a priori in the unconscious, at least up to that point when we see it represented in the flesh, on film, or wherever, and the effect is a release of forces and feelings, of psychic energy, within ourselves. None of the slick suburban counterfeits who have come along since James Dean died could begin to have the kind of power over audiences that he had, and has. Kazan was right: James Dean was instinct. To the extent his goal as a performer was intellectualized, it was to express the poetic essence of what it was like to be young, lost or alone in a country where nobody cared.

* * *

In October of 1955, James Dean's body was brought back to Fairmount and interred in the town cemetery on the other side of Route 26. Fairmount is where the story began and Fairmount is where it ends. James Dean was never at odds with the town where he grew up; where, in fact, he spent the majority of his years. He was no misfit in Fairmount. Everyone knew him. He had friends, was accepted, even encouraged in his acting ambitions by those rare sort of adults — in this case a high school dramatic arts teacher and a Methodist minister — who never lose the sense of what it means to be young and so take risks that the gifted among them might succeed. When he did succeed, when he became a television star in the early 50's and, especially just after the release of East of Eden, he was a hero to the town.

It was when James Dean stepped away from Fairmount that he became the misfit, the stranger, the spiritually separated. It was then he became a transplanted version of one of Anderson's grotesques. What did they really want, anyway, those people
in Winesburg? Someone, anyone, who would listen, who would understand. That was his legacy, then, to speak for the inarticulate. To belong. The issue he raised. If the world were made up of people who lied, who didn’t care, who were cruel: why bother? To be confused. In a society riven by the contradictions of class, ethnicity and generational conflict, who wouldn’t be? If I could just have one day... It had to be instinct that told him when he said those words in the way he did that there’d be millions out there, blinking back tears in the darkened crushed-velvet theaters of the 50’s, who also wanted just that one day.
MURPHY'S PORCH

Murphy has broken his home from the land
and moved it near the sea
where he sees the world through ocean-lit windows.
Before, he was a fool of the grass and
spent his afternoons chopping the lawn's wilderness,
stung by tics and mosquitoes and neighbors
who threatened his days with small talk.
Now Murphy sits out on his porch
with his newspaper and a fat cup of tea.
Here the grass has been buried under a storm
of sea shells.
An awning blocks the sun from burning his
equator-like body as he listens to the waves
crashing, and neighbors content themselves
with a wave and a goodbye.
Murphy is happy here.
He is not disturbed by his wife who is involved
with the laundry, or by the little Murphys
who sail back to the old neighborhood
fishing for friends.
When Murphy is fatigued the night breeze
whips the sun out of the sky and blows him
from his rocker. It pushes him into the house
where his bed curls around him like another body.
Murphy awakes the next morning, full of breath
and visions, ready to eat the day.
He walks out on his porch, alert for storms,
and hurricane he hopes he can avoid.
MURPHY, FURIOUSLY CONTENT

This morning, everything is enjoying itself. The grass waving its little arms in the breeze. The sky, glad to be rid of its awful cumulus that moved in early in the week and stayed late. Murphy sits on his porch drinking the air and getting drunk on solitude. It is the time he likes best, when there is no one around to interpret him, when he can relax with his animal emotions and have no thoughts at all, and just show up and eat the better part of the day doing nothing. Somewhere above him a woman is sweeping a porch, the fine debris falling to Murphy's level, and he notices it and is glad it's already dead. There are paths in the field across the way he is happy to ignore, and if he spoke to the world, he'd say Forget about me. Don't bother giving me a break. Don't bother thinking of me at all. Murphy is in debt to his past and this morning he walks in his mind to a park where he made one of his tragic plays in the first half of the first inning of his life, when things were still comfortably safe, without any fear of striking out, without any fear of loving in return.
MURPHY CONFRONTS HIMSELF

When the daffodils are done flooding
the snow-late gardens golden and their
pretty yellow heads have fallen off
and turned to mud, Murphy
feels the beauty of unmistakable
sadness and closes himself in his room.
Slowly, he undoes the buttons
to his pajamas and they fall, lifeless
to the puddle of clothes left
from other days.
Murphy turns in front of the mirror
which narrowly squeezes all of
him in. He is amazed at
the grooves in his skin, the
furrowing which has freely followed
the weight of winter. Murphy
looks to escape this skin which
has grown around him all these months,
like moss. As he turns in the mirror the
sun rises to cover his sides and
he is reminded of breakfast and the attention
to details that have made him,
this morning, as big and as hungry
as he is.
BLUE HERON LAKE, NEW MEXICO

The moon is a ragged crescent
diffused by clouds.
I lie on my sleeping bag
watching it change
as the clouds pass in front of it.
Lightning from across the lake
ripples over the water.
It rained today driving up.
It may rain again.
Now the moon steps forward
shouldering the clouds aside.
Two stars appear to its right.
The lightning continues,
flickering on and off
like a light switch.
The night whispers to the lake
which listens without a murmur.
GREG GELETA

Greg Geleta's poems have a way of sneaking up on you. There is an easy grace to the writing that lulls you, makes you feel like maybe you're listening to someone talk. Instead of reading a poem. But you walk away from a Geleta poem feeling like you've just seen something you'd like to go home and write about, feeling like you've entered a very private, almost Walter Mitty-like world.

Geleta's poems are always moving in and out of a world "free of dents and missed payments." There is a lot of love and gentle dreaming here . . .

--Al Masarik
THE ART OF HAILING A CAB

You are riding home from church
in a black '61 Rambler.
Your parents are up front
and you and your two brothers
are wrestling in the backseat
to see who gets stuck in the middle.
You are heading north on the Boulevard
when your father stops for a red light
in front of Sears
and the car shuts itself off.
He opens the hood but knows nothing
of what goes on down there.
When the light changes
people in cars that still move
call to your father, frantic
in his best suit, asking what he thinks
the problem is, and saying maybe
he should turn on his blinkers.
He's afraid that'll kill the battery,
so he stands in back of the car
and waves away oncoming traffic.
The Boulevard is a twelve-lane highway
and whenever your father sees a cab
he yells TAXI! in the booming voice
you're so familiar with.
But they're either going too fast
or in the opposite direction.

If this were to happen when you were thirteen,
struggling with your voice
and with your father,
you would curse
and start walking the five miles home.
But it's 1961; you're seven
and don't know what it is to lose dignity.
In thirty years you won't remember
how you got home, whether your father's gyrations succeeded in stopping a cab or a tow truck arrived and got the car started. Only the faintest of details will come back: the Sears building, the death of the Rambler, and your father, waving like a shipwreck victim, because he wanted to get his family home.
INTRODUCING MR. HOMONYM

My father never taught me how to fight. When the 12:00 bell rang at St. Jerome's school the fifteen minutes for eating were up and we were sent to the schoolyard, a Catholic jungle where rules were made with fists.

Bruises, black eyes and bloody noses accompanied me to the 12:45 History lesson. Girls were impressed by how quickly my fellow seventh graders could pin me to the asphalt. But only on nice days, when the weather was clear.

When it rained we stayed in the classroom and listened as the principal played a radio over the p.a. Mostly it was violin music till the news came on at 12:30. Once, the announcer said that three men had been shot in a guerilla attack. Mary Jo Wierzbicki gasped, the rest of us looked at each other. The only thing I couldn't figure was why King Kong even bothered with a gun.

As the p.a. went silent and the teachers emerged through smokeclouds in the faculty lounge, I thanked God for the fact that there were no gorillas in Philadelphia, and for the rain, His gift to me, a vacation from the blows that left me flattened near where the priests parked their cars.
ADVANCE TO GO

Growing up an only child
I had to change the rules
of many games
so they could be played alone:
gin rummy, kick ball, even Monopoly.

I would be the thimble,
the dog, and the race car,
hoping each time I threw the dice
to both land on and pass over
Boardwalk, with its shiny green houses.

Sometimes I'd be the shoe
and I'd imagine Kimberly Whalen, a girl
from school, sitting across from me.
Landing on Income Tax
meant we had to remove
a piece of clothing.
Free Parking got us a kiss.
Going to jail gave the other person a feel.

But Kimberly lived across town
and never entered my house.
A few times, on weekends, I played my father.
A C.P.A. the rest of the week,
after an hour his hotels would cover half
the board.
My portfolio consisted mostly of Baltic Avenue,
the Water Works, and a Get Out Of Jail Free card.
Each turn became an expensive journey,
and my only repose was Free Parking,
where I sat and did nothing.
FIRST KISS

Like most that followed,  
Joe's first date was fixed-up,  
with the sister of a trombone player  
who sat across from him in the school band.

For years all Joe dreamed of  
was his future as a trumpet player.  
Dizzie Gillespie appeared in one of these dreams  
and Joe asked him how much he practiced his  
trumpet  
when he was a boy. Diz called out  
"Ten hours a day," and that's how long Joe  
practiced,  
till his lips puffed to three times their normal  
size.

But on the first date  
when he saw Sherry's long blonde beauty  
from across the living room of her parents' house,  
Joe was ready to forget the trumpet forever,  
if that's what she wanted.

After the movie they sat in her kitchen  
drinking cocoa. His father was picking him up  
at midnight.  
At 11:58 their heads came forward and their lips  
crashed together.

Joe glided to the front door,  
past the glow of the t.v., the glare  
of her parents,  
the moronic leer of her trombone playing brother.

On Monday morning before band practice  
the trombone player stood at the conductor's  
podium,  
announced how loud it was  
and the whole band knew  
that Joe had his first kiss.
Greg Geleta

JAMAICA FAREWELL

o god
first paul chambers,
then coltrane
& now
red garland

i'll buy a can of spraypaint
& write it on the wall of the allentown hilton:
red garland lives!

i think i'll tell reagan about it,
how it was that night at the blue note
when red played the opening notes to
"if i were a bell."
first miles, then coltrane
stepped to the microphone
& taught us the meaning of music,
the meaning of oppression,
the meaning of war.
when they had finished their solos
red garland leaned over the keyboard
& put the icing
on the fuckin cake.

do you think ronnie would understand all this?

i think i'll fly to jamaica
& blow up the montego bay hilton.
amidst the confusion of fire & death lists
someone watching the evening news
might
sit up & wonder
where have you gone, red garland?
DONNA LEE

it started softly enough,
your trumpet blazing through the low notes
of a melody made famous by charlie parker.

but when the rhythm section dropped out
you filled five seconds
of your time on this planet
with such
a flurry of notes
that
the people crowding that music store-turned-concert hall
forgot their drinks & their lovers
& their packs of chesterfields.

when the rhythm section came back in
you soared over the changes they laid down,
& the sounds
that flowed from your trumpet
went beyond
low notes & high notes,
beyond wilmington & philadelphia & birdland,
beyond chord changes & time payments & negros & caucasians,
beyond bebop & swing & jazz & beyond music itself.

when the final crash
of ellis tollin's cymbals faded away
you stepped to the microphone & said
"i really must go now . . . it's so hot!"
that night
you lost it all
on the pennsylvania turnpike.

when the news arrived the next morning
a man
who had stood in the back of music city
took the tape from his recorder
& marked it
Clifford Brown 1930 - 1956
THE DEATH OF MUSSOLINI

Benito Mussolini is alive and well
and selling used cars in Memphis, Tennessee.
I once saw a photograph of him and his mistress
strung by their necks in Milan.
Evidently he was holding his breath
and when they carted to the cemetary
what they thought were two corpses,
Mussolini jumped off,
made his way, on foot, to Spain.

He drank sangria and watched bullfights
until Franco became envious and gave him the boot.
From there it was South America and a succession
of banana republics, false passports, and hard labor.
Mussolini picked grapes in Peru,
sold insurance in Bolivia, worked the docks
in Venezuela.

He came north with the election of Reagan
and now goes by his real name.
It hangs against the sky twenty feet above
Union Avenue,
Mussolini's Creampuffs.

He is telling me the virtues of a '68 Bel Air
but I cut him off in mid-spiel,
ask him how it was
to stand on the last bridge across the Tiber
with Allied artillery echoing in the distance.
He kicks the tires, checks his watch,
then says without the slightest trace of an accent,
"Perhaps this '43 Fiat . . ."
SHOOTING FROM HALF COURT

It is half time
of a basketball game at the Spectrum
and you are one of ten people
chosen at random
to attempt a shot from half court.
If you make it you have a choice
of a cruise to Hawaii or a Subaru.
But how can you? The first three people
come nowhere near the backboard
let alone the basket.
Should you take a running start,
or shoot underhanded? It’s been so long
since you felt a basketball.
You are wearing a jacket and tie
and tight brown loafers.
The next two people make idiots of themselves
and you notice the faces
of some of the spectators
who have foregone popcorn and a trip to
the restroom
and stayed for the real show.
There, in the third row, is Tina Fleming,
the first girl you dated.
She sits with a man straight out
of Dance Fever. In Section A is Mrs. Thomer,
the librarian who always said how proud she was
of you.
The marching band from the school you now teach at
has stopped playing and awaits your shot.
Sherry, the last woman you loved,
sits directly behind the basket.
You wonder if she likes Hawaii.
Then Dave Zinkoff calls your name
and the ball leaves your hands.
Next thing you know
you are surrounded by Celtics and 76ers
who have come from the locker rooms
to see what the noise is.
"Gee, I never knew you played,"
says your awestruck high school principal.
FOUR A.M. AT THE MT. JOY REST STOP

Those teenage nights when I couldn't sleep
I did what I figured Fats Navarro
or Lee Morgan must have done.
I tiptoed to my father's car
and with a rag in the bell as far as it would go
played long tones, scales, whatever tunes
I could remember on my trumpet.
When the sun appeared I stole inside
where everyone was safely asleep
until one time when I fell
asleep and my father discovered me
on the front seat
as he was leaving for work.

Now, seven states
and fifteen years from the house
where the trumpet lies
exiled at the bottom of a closet,
let this be a song for my father,
each letter a blue note,
the words, riffs, until the melody
is complete and the last note
gives way to silence.
ADVICE TO A LONELY HEART
ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

Buy a car
in which the radio
doesn't work.

at 11:30
fill it with gas
and find the darkest
backroad.
The new year
will arrive

without benefit
of countdown,
saxophone music,

champagne toasts
or handshakes
all around.

When the gas gauge reads
half empty
turn back

and drive home.
Break every resolution
you ever made.
GELETA GETS A SECOND CHANCE
AT ADOLESCENCE

for Paul Zimmer

They asked me to monitor a dance
At the school where I teach.
It's an all-boy school
And last year the girls in the drill team
Got stoned under the bleachers
And when the lights came on
There they were on the bathroom floor.
This year the administration wasn't taking any shit.
They called out all the big guns
And there I was
In my gray suit, wing-tip shoes,
With my arms folded,
Sneering through the flashing lights.

The kids in my classes sent girls up to ask me
to dance.
Not the ones in bobby socks and poodle skirts,
But girls in leather jeans
With names like Flame and Destiny.
All night I said,
"No thanks, ma'am" through my teeth
Until the d.j. announced the last dance
And the same girl came up to me
For the 12th time.

They gave us a standing ovation
As we walked onto the dance floor hand in hand.
She wore some kid's tie around her waist
And she had to stand on her toes to get her arms
around me.
She told me she was a freshman
At Little Flower High School for Girls
And as I felt her breasts against my stomach
I told her
To wear higher heels the next time.
Greg Geleta

TRAIN SET

When I was a boy my father put up a train set every Christmas. The tracks wound around an aluminum tree, the still-to-be-opened presents, and a small town that my father had also erected. A child waved to the driver of the locomotive. Neighbors called to each other. Men with lunchpails entered a construction site, all smiles and dirty clothes. The matchbox cars that waited at a railroad crossing were free of dents and missed payments.

This morning when my son asked if we were doing anything special for Christmas I thought of the world that someday might take up this living room floor. Soldiers will move from house to house collecting taxes. A girl will marry too young, another will contract a strange disease, and everyday a different man will be left by a lover.

If when we die we find that heaven is one big train set where God lets us be the stationary figure of our choice, I'd like to be a boy, somewhat overweight, walking out of a barbershop with a crew cut. Lance, the town bully, will be two steps away with his palm perpetually extended, ready to rub my head at any moment for good luck.
THE MAN WHO LIVES ALONE

There are thumps that make
his head swing through windy curtains,
tired of what's left after the late show.

It's time now for the last kiss
of bourbon. Time to scrub the empty
glass. He's used to this.

The man who lives alone
finds yarn unraveling into balls
inside his shoes.

There's no need for the news.
No need for the name he knows he'll hear,
the name that sounds familiar.

There is only an ashtray
and the smoke that curls.
Only the light dimming slowly

until we are not watching him at all,
until we are sure he is pressed
to his screen, watching us.
When they reached the top of the landing, Amar took a step backwards so that Milky could enter the room first. Amar patted him on the shoulder and let the thin curtain fall behind them.

"Sit here," he said, pointing to the m'tarrba, a long narrow mattress that lined the four mirrored walls. "Mine is yours. If you'd like to take off your shoes, do. Whatever you want, you know best."

With that he began to unwind his black silk turban, revealing a head of thick brilliantined hair. He was bare-chested, and his muscles stood out like large snakes beneath his honey-colored skin.

Milky sat on the floor and Amar joined him.

Leaving college and coming to Morocco had been an unexpected thing for Milky; all he'd known when he left was that he wanted to travel and with a process that resembled nothing logical, Milky had set off first for France, came down through to Algeria, then up to Spain and back down to Morocco. And after all these months of wandering, it was good to really meet someone now, to have the prospect of friendship. It was like a sudden gift.

"So you are in Morocco just by yourself?" Amar now asked, looking curiously into Milky's face.

"I'm alone," he answered seriously. "It's all right with me. But it's nice to meet people sometimes, too." He wrinkled his brow and smiled.

"You are a tourist," Amar concluded.

"No," Milky said firmly. "I am not. I am not a tourist." He was hoping Amar wouldn't take him for the common awful Americans that littered his country. Besides, he was too poor. "You can tell the difference, can't you?"

Amar nodded with a knowing look. "Yes," he said, "We are citizens of the world, you and me."

Milky was pleased. "Citizens of the world," he echoed.

Raising his sword-shaped eyebrows, Amar asked, "Do you live in a hotel?"

"The Villa de France."

"Why don't you come here and live with me. I will protect you, and if anyone wants to fight you, now, I will fight them instead. We'll be like brothers. And then, I'll also have something nice to look at."

Milky blushed. He tried to think of something to say, to show that he was not so easily affected, that beauty could make him lose all reason. "Why are you wear-
ing that string around your forehead?” was the first thing he could think of to say.

“Because I’m a Berber,” Amar replied, “from the Rif mountains. But my family lives here in Tangier since I was a baby. My brother and sister sleep upstairs with my parents. So you and me can be alone down here. We can do whatever we want. It’s like our own mahal. My father does this because I help him sell mint leaves to the cafes for tea. And we all thank Allah for the money I can make with the tourists.”

And that, Milky thought, does not need explaining. Get what you can, was always his philosophy. It was true they were like brothers, and it excited him to think Amar would think this way, too.

“I love my father very much,” Amar said, “He was sick and he had to go to the hospital of the Christians for two weeks. It cost us much money but I was able to pay for it and now we can see him everyday. If we did not pay he would not come here anymore; he would be dead.”

Milky reached into his pocket and took out a package of Daklas. “Want one?” he asked.

“But I can’t smoke cigarettes!” Amar exclaimed. “It’s still Ramadan. No one smokes now. This is the Moslem month of fasting, but tomorrow Ramadan will be over. Now, only at night can we do it, or eat or drink, not during the day, my friend. You can smoke if you want because you’re not Moslem.”

Milky put the cigarettes away.

“Ramadan is good for you,” Amar went on, “and it pleases the God. Every year we fast until the beginning of the moon of Chouwal—that’s tonight. Ramadan is like the Christmas when you bring the trees into your houses. But here it is different. My mother sacrificed a chicken at the tomb of the patron saint, Sidi Bou Araqia, so that we’ll all be healthy. Today we will wear our best clothes.”

While Milky listened he spied an insect making its way across the glazed tile floor and he smashed it with his foot.

Amar’s eyes flared. “You should treat it like you do yourself,” he cried, “Excuse me, but we help.”

Milky, a little horrified, said nothing. I must try to be more aware of myself, he thought.

“Now,” Amar continued, “a Moslem must clean himself five times a day. So excuse me, all right?”

With that he went into the kitchen and began singing as he undressed, and then splashed ice-cold well water from an earthen jug onto his shiny blue-black hair. With his hand he combed back the lustrous mop and then began to clean his teeth with his fingers. Milky kept watching him; there was no way of measuring the esteem he had for Amar’s dark looks.
Amar put on clean clothes—a T-shirt and a pair of cleanly sun-starched overalls. After that he came back into the sala and sat down again. His shoulder rested against Milky’s. Suddenly he turned and kissed Milky fully on the mouth. He touched his cheek. Awkward and excited, Milky reached over to touch him, but Amar gently pushed him away. He said:

“Look, with my overalls, I have a place for your passport and your pencil.” He pointed to a pocket in his pant leg. “And I have a place for your keys and your cigarettes. And then I have a place for you.” He smiled, lightly tapping a small pocket at his breast. Then he rolled the cuffs up on Milky’s pant leg and placed a box of matches inside of the folds. “This is where you should put your money and all important things where they’re safe and the police won’t find them, too.”

Milky felt something deep in his stomach, like a door, open up.

“Also, Milky, this is very important; if a policeman sees us together, he might want to arrest me because he’ll think I’m a hustler, ouakha? So you must always take my hand and say that I’m your friend. If you don’t they’ll take me to jail and shave my head like I’m nothing.”

“But you are my friend,” Milky said, feeling happiness make his shoulders loose and his body lazy all over.

Joining his palms, Amar said, “Once we were like this, but now we’re more like this.” He laced his fingers together. “So, now it’s time for us to go,” he announced. “Come.”

Blindly, Milky followed him down the narrow stairwell to the street below. Outside it was so bright that the glare hurt Milky’s eyes.

Then, latching shut the wooden door, Amar, linking his little finger with Milky’s, led the way down through the Rue Djanne el Kaptan.

“See that?” he asked, once they’d come out into the sun-light of the lower city. He pointed to a garish pink wall. “Meet me in there at sunset.”

Milky strained his eyes to see inside the doorway. He could hear noisy Arab music wailing from a speaker.

“Now, wait a moment. Excuse me, please.”

Milky watched his lover run across the square and disappear into a small crowd at a kiosk, returning moments later carrying a plastic bottle of Sidi Harazem.

“Here. Take this,” he said. “And today, when you’re alone, drink this water and then you’ll think of me.”

He smiled radiantly and Milky was so profoundly touched that he could say nothing. He felt it was important not to let Amar know how much he was affecting him. He looked at his feet, not yet even worrying what he would do to wait until sunset. I want you to do what you have to do, he wanted to say, for he understood that Amar was a boy with responsibilities, and that he had a life that Milky should
have nothing to do with.

They looked at each other.

"Don't forget. Meet me at the Cafe Pilpil tonight." He gripped Milky by the upper arms and shook him.

Milky liked this, and he could stand there for a long time and still have that sensation with him, he could stand there and let Amar shake him all day.

"Goodbye, gazelle. I'll have you all day in my mind, my heart and my eyes." He took Milky's hand, and after kissing his own fingers, he struck his chest with his fist. "I miss you," he said. And then he was gone.

As if the world had suddenly changed and become a different thing, Milky passed slowly through the souks and went under the archway of the old citadel. When he came out into the open of the Grand Socco he walked along looking at the bright orange fish, the baskets of roast locusts and the sea urchins. There was nothing about these foreign things that seemed strange to him; in a certain way he was no longer part of the world, now because of Amar—it was difficult to put into words.

Heading in the direction of the Old Mountain, he waited while a long funeral procession passed by, the mourners carrying a woøen coffin above their heads. From there he made his way slowly up towards the boulevard, not really caring if he got lost for a while. I must wait until sunset, he said out loud, and thinking about this, the day stretched out before him like an endless desert that had to be crossed.

II.

The ceiling of the Cafe Pilpil was formed by a string of yellow light bulbs draped across several bamboo poles. There were stone walls on either side of the roof which were now cast in a peaceful red from the fading sunlight. From where he sat, Milky could see the other roofs of the adjoining dwelling where women were doing their chores. He looked below at the palm-lined paseo at the men in burnt orange and citron yellow turbans, gathering in preparation for the end of Ramadan. A copper lantern with blue and red encrusted stones was being placed before him by the qahauji of the cafe. There were the sounds of boys who, squatting on the straw mats, argued and played cards. Amar was beside him, pulling at the black head-band that covered his forehead like a bandage.

"My mother," Amar finally spoke, "told me today: 'Aoulidi, tell the American to bring his dirty clothes and I will wash them.' See? Now you're like her son, too." He smiled proudly, tossing Milky's hair.

Milky, who did not usually smile, did so now.

Suddenly there came the boom of a cannon nearby, and the call for prayer of the Muezzin could be heard coming from the Mosque. Shouts sprang up. Amar
pushed the canteen of orange-colored harira soup toward Milky. He motioned for him to fill his bowl. Soon, they were both eating vigorously.

Then, after they had finished, Amar excused himself and went off to pray. He weaved his way through the group of Chleuh boy-dancers and disappeared among them. Alone, Milky watched as the qahaouji, one by one, lit the torches along the walls. The boys had all resumed their card games and began smoking kif out of long wooden sebsis. There was an air of excitement on the roof-top, and Milky just sat back taking it all in.

"Saleam Aleikoum."

Startled, Milky looked up. A tall slim youth was crouching beside him.

"American, no?"

"Yes," Milky answered slowly. From where he sat he could see Amar spreading out a prayer-mat on a corner of the roof. Touching the floor with his forehead, he was praying, prostrating himself over and over again.

"You are my friend, no?"

Milky nodded his head gravely. I can take care of myself without Amar, he thought.

"See," the boy persisted, "we like you because you have a good face. We know you're good, we can tell these things. People think I'm bad because I go to jail and because I have many scars, but I'm good, like you. It's true, my friend."

Milky nodded politely. He kept his eyes on Amar, and he thought: he is mine.

"Maybe," the boy continued, "tomorrow we can meet at the big fountain and go to the Caves of Hercules. My name is Mustapha."

Milky now decided to stand up, but Mustapha held him down with his hand.

"See him over there? Now he's bad. He comes from a village where everyone is crazy because they drink the bad water near a cemetary. He thinks only of the snake between his legs. But the King, now he is really bad: his men are all barbarians. He fucks all the boys and he's rich. He lives in a big house. But us? We're poor. We tell him: 'Food costs too much,' and we protest this problem. But what does he do? He has us shot. In Morocco if you have no money you're nothing. Nazarenes are rich, too, but they have their paradise only in this world, like the King. True Moslems, like me, will have paradise forever in heaven. Now, if you come with me, my friend, I'll give you a good price, better than your friend, Amar."

Milky gave him an outraged look. "Amar doesn't make me give him anything," he protested. "We are citizens of the world."


Milky clamped his jaws tight. "No!" he said firmly.

"So fuck you, Nazarene! I hope you go blind. Either give my money or I'll kill you." He traced his throat with his finger.
Milky pushed him away. As he did this, Amar suddenly appeared.

“What’s the story here?” Amar demanded.

“It’s a story that ends with this white-boy’s death.”

Amar seized Mustapha by the throat and shoved him to the ground.

“I’ll kill you,” Mustapha shouted, pulling out his knife, “both you and your Nazarene wife.” He stood and flashed the blade in Amar’s face.

“Brother,” Amar told him, “you’ll pay for this in blood.”

Mustapha only smiled. “Compradito,” he said, “why don’t you sit down and smoke some kif with me?”

“And which are you, Mustapha, drunk or kifed?”

“Maybe you don’t smoke kif, but you keep a Nazarene in your bed.” He sneered at Milky.

“And your mother isn’t a whore.” Amar crossed his arms.

“You said something about my mother, zamel?”

With all of his might, Amar flung his fist at Mustapha’s face and the boy fell, doubled over in pain.

“Go home! All of you! Get out of this cafe!” the qahaouji shouted at them in Arabic. He waved his arms excitedly and a group of boys began to circle around them.

“Why should I run away from this dog?” Amar said kicking Mustapha in the ribs.

“Let’s go,” Milky pleaded, taking Amar by the hand and leading him across the roof towards the stairwell.

Once they were outside on the street, Milky suggested they walk up the boulevard to the European quarter and from there, the long distance to the Quarter of the Lemon Tree.

But Amar stopped and looked at him. “I can’t go,” he said. “I met someone today, a rich Englishman who wants to take me to the south of Morocco. I have to meet him.”

Milky’s face fell. “But you can’t,” he said stammering, his voice growing shrill. He felt all the color draining from his face.

“But you see, we have to take care of ourselves, we have to do what is best, for money.”

Milky watched his friend go and held himself very still. When Amar was gone, he heard someone calling to him.

“Good price. I’ll give you a good price. . . .”

But Milky did not turn around, instead, he began running towards the ocean.
CHERRY HILL ALIEN MALLED

Of course, when the Alien Creatures arrive
the first place they will come to is The Mall.

--Susan Rostow
Cherry Hill, NJ

1.
At night
The Alien Creature
 closes its one eye
 and wakes up.

2.
You, when you are home asleep —
and you
who are asleep with your eyes open,
will not see The Alien Creature
seep out of its glass membrane
drinking the dust
of your need to spend money.

3.
Do you believe
The Alien Creature
and the fountains
dried-up
is a coincidence?

4.
Linoleum opens
its petals of grout
behind your favorite
bench,
The Alien Creature
lies down with a tree.
5.

How The Alien Creature
dances
is not what you'd imagine
considering the music.

Somehow -- after
a grueling day's work --
the Lowrey organ
rights itself.

6.

The Alien Creature
feathers
the Night Depository
Box
the way you
fumble your hands
across
a wall at night
feeling for
the lightswitch.

Money means
nothing/maybe
everything
to The Alien Creature,
the way
what is dark
beyond the wall
means
to the light:

it simply wants
to talk
to something
that's been around
many places
and always
new
on the spot.
7.
The Alien Creature
does not eat Mall food.
Eat what Humans
put in their mouths?

(note: this poem sequence was commissioned by
the NJ Council on the Arts & Cherry Hill Mall
as part of Rostow's plexiglass-encased
sculpture at Cherry Hill Mall, May 1986)
ZLATO

Ako je život rijeka što teče
ljubav je zlato nataloženo.
Ona ga u svom koritu njiše.
A zlato raste. I što ga dalje
u sebi nosi, sve zlatnija je.

Ja već prevalih tri nizine.
Daleko za mnom izvor šumi
a ušće ne znam gdje se krije.
A kada gledam na svoje dno
u šljunku sija zlato čisto.
I od visokog klasja ljeta
zlato je moje raskošnije.

GOLD

If life is a running river
Love is the gathering gold
The river sifts it out.
The gold grows. The more the river carries it
the golder it becomes.

I've already walked through three meadows.
Behind me, the whispering spring,
Unknown beginnings.
When I look at my own river bottom
In its pebbles shines pure gold.
My gold is richer
Than tall summer wheat.

translated from the Croatian
by Ivana Spalatin
ŠUM KRILA I ŠUM VODE

Išli smo rubom. S jedne strane noć a s druge voda.

Noć nam je htjela pokazati predjele gdje čovjek i ptica lako zalutaju, ako čovjek ne vjeruje ptici ni ptica čovjeku.

Voda nam je imala reči još mnogo iz svog iskustva dugog, u svakidašnjoj pratnji čovjeka.

Ali mi smo išli bezbrižni mimo vode i noći.

SOUND OF WINGS, SOUND OF WATER
(an excerpt)

Walking on the edge:
On one side, night; on the other, water.

Night was there, to show us partly where man and bird can easily be lost,
If man does not believe bird, and bird does not believe man.

Water might have told us so much more from her own long time in the company of man,

But we walked without worries that night on the edge of the water,

Not believing our own wrinkled faces: Only plants renew themselves that way. An aging sun.

The stones were scattered like summer's gold.

translated from the Croatian
by Ivana Spalatin
MAN ALONE

as the
cockroach
crawls across
his head
he dreams
of her
fingers
in his
hair
Dreaming of Rivers: A Review


M.L. Rosenthal reminds us in Poetry and the Common Life that Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses, is thus the major source of poetry and the other arts. Eric Trethewey, who can fairly be termed a poet of common life, takes memory as his main theme, its painful necessity and, occasionally, the flickering beauty it reveals. The rivers he dreams of are commonly rivers of the past, ranging from Nova Scotia to New Orleans, rivers of passion and kinship whose sources he restlessly explores. "Where It Begins" opens the volume, aptly summarizing its subject and style: "This is where it begins,/the long pull that draws a boy,/never the same way twice,/down the road to Boston/and blindly out along/those secret, branching rivers/of the blood." The very blindness and secrecy of the "long pull" into experience demand, it seems, a dogged and never-complete appraisal. The river of one's own blood is Heraclitean, the journey into one's origins "never the same way twice."

Yet there is a sturdy unity in Trethewey's visions, despite his claim of variety. As he notes in "Always the Same," a comment upon his obsessiveness, "Always it's the same thing,/even when the story changes." Indeed, a handful of motifs and ideas recur throughout Dreaming of Rivers: the "meanness" that breeds "at the root of sex," the need to listen for "the tongues of the lost," the way "one more ruined year" always lies behind us, and the often violent despair of the millhands, convicts, boxers, and hardscrabble farmers who are his typical characters. Repeatedly, Trethewey fishes the waters of the past, looking for the same thing, "a dream of clear rivers" to replace "the abject leaves/in this river's murky drift." "This river" is the present, with its overwhelming sense of loss and failure; the "clear rivers," naturally, remain elusive. If Trethewey risks monotony and predictability of theme and style, he achieves a compelling elegiac honesty, which at its best is reminiscent of the work of Richard Hugo and Philip Levine.

Trethewey avoids monotony also with his crisp, muscular language. He relishes sensory detail and writes a lyrical version of working class idiom. It's easy to enjoy descriptive touches like "the hollow tunk of cowbells," "the slapdash of snowchains on the grade," or "sun-bleached tarpaper/. . .windshredded into wisps/like an old peasant's hair." But he is no mere local colorist: such details always serve to make tangible his harrowing journeys into bruised past or diminished present. In "Antecedents," for instance, after a "down-deep mean" stepfather has just told a boy he's fatherless, the boy reflects: "He can't see,/here in the lee of the shed/where snowflakes slant down easy/and the dark closes in/on our corner of light,/how my left hand on the log between us/tenses to leap at his face and split it/like dry pine." Like "Antecedents," many fine poems in this tightly constructed volume have the charged beauty and simplicity of elemental dreams.
SNOWBOUND

Morning drifts into afternoon, afternoon into dusk.

For days there has been nothing to do but burrow in books, nothing to see but words, whatever may live in words,

and the woodbox repeating its emptiness.

Beyond the window, a shroud soundlessly stitched in slanting flakes. Trains wail in the distance, pull hard east and west to unravel silence.

And after days we are blessed again with light, a pale circle of sun.

The time has come to trace the delicate branchings thinly engraved on the air, to construe the white blanks that were gardens, fields humped subtly with hints of buried things.
OLD LOVE, OLD TIMES, DRIVING THROUGH

All that August the flat water at roadside
lay sullen as adolescence in the sun,
And the purple hyacinths sprawled
their easy favors across the marsh.
In the evenings we drank gin, prolonged
short drives through the swamp and pine barrens,
forestalling the coming cold, the brown weeds,
water buried under a dark wind's touch.

The year contracts. I've lost count of moons
as the blanks between days grow longer,
colder: late today, alone, headed southwest
on route 11, I saw with what care
one bare-limbed pecan tree was holding
at dusk, the light of the winter sun.
ELEGY

--for Shannon

I know nothing — not even how much
he knows, my friend who sits here
talking of who will win a bout next week
between two light-heavies we've never seen.

Once, he came to see me fight
in a ramshackle firehall across the river.
Surrounded by fierce-eyed, beer-bellied men
hanging on to something long since lost,
he watched me knock out the local boy.

Now, subdued, in a bar on Esplanade,
we muse on boxing and sip our beer.
He tells me he has a good chance,
that the treatments have begun to work,
and against the testimony of my eyes
I tell him I believe he'll win,
neither of us knowing that this drink
is final, that we're trading on each breath
our last fighting words.
Pattick Bizzaro teaches writing at East Carolina University, where he edits poetry for *A Carolina Literary Companion*. His most recent collection of poems, *The Man Who Eats Death*, is available from Backstreet Editions.

Harry Brody, born and raised in Iowa, now lives in Charlotte, NC, where he practices law for a living. Ion Books/Raccoon in Memphis has just published a collection of his poems, *Fields*.

Stephen Ford Brown is the editor of HEARTS INVENTION: ON THE POETRY OF VASSAR MILLER, published as volume 5 in the American Poets Profile Series. His poetry and translations are now appearing in American and Latin American literary journals.

Robert Cooperman’s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *APR, College English, Cimarron Review, Kansas Quarterly* and many other journals.

James Cory is currently working on a book concerning key figures in American cultural history. The essay included here is to be part of that volume. The summer of ‘87 has seen the publication of two chapbooks of his poetry.

Craig Czury, from Wilkes-Barre, has spent the best part of fifteen years drifting around the U.S. and Canada working carnivals, construction crews, restaurants, unloading fishing boats, canning red beets... GOD'S SHINING GLASS EYE (Great Elm Press) is his third collection of poems.

Jim Daniels teaches at Carnegie Mellon University, and is a recipient of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship for 1987. PLACES/EVERYONE, his first book, won the Brittingham Prize and was published by University of Wisconsin Press in ’85.

William Virgil Davis has two books of poetry to his credit: *One Way To Reconstruct The Scene* (1980) which won the Yale Series of Younger Poets award and *The Dark Hours* (1984) which won the Calliope Press Chapbook Prize. His poems have appeared in such journals as *Poetry, The Hudson Review, The Atlantic, Georgia Review, Sewanee Review* and *The New Criterion*. He is a Professor of English and Writer-in-Residence at Baylor.

Paul Dilsaver edits the BLUE LIGHT REVIEW from Pueblo, Colorado.

Gerard Futrick, of Reading, PA, specializes in photographing jazz and blues artists. He has contributed to such magazines as *Cadence, Jazz Times, Jazz Forum, Coda, Downbeat*. His work has been shown at Albright College, and recently as part of a jazz inspired program in the Gallery of the Painted Bride Art Center. The images in this issue capture the artist performing in various Philadelphia jazz venues, many of which are no longer with us.

*Opposite page:* Gerard Futrick,

*Dexter Gordon*, Ethical Society 1976
Greg Geleta, poet and musician, lives in Philadelphia, PA. A chapbook, JAZZ ELEGIES, was published in '86. This fall the Axe Factory will publish a full collection to be titled THE YEAR I LEARNED TO DRIVE.

Andrew Gent was born in England, grew up in Ohio, and now resides in New Hampshire where he makes his living as a computer hack.

David Graham has had two volumes appear in '86: MAGIC SHOW (Cleveland State University Press) and COMMON WATERS (winner of the 1986 Flume Press Chapbook Competition.) He teaches English at North Carolina State University.

Albert Huffstickler has three chapbooks coming, as well as poems in Abraxas, Nimrod and Samisdat. He lives in Austin, TX.

Grace L. Joyner has had work in Manna, Dawn, and elsewhere. A former teacher, she is presently a Treasury representative in Philadelphia, PA.

Alycee J. Lane is a recent graduate of Howard University, and is currently working as an organizer for the National Third World Student Coalition.

Al Masarik has left San Francisco for the clear air of the Smoky Mountains near Jacksboro, TN. His most recent collection of poems, EXCUSES TO BE OUTSIDE, was published by Duck Down Press.

Peter E. Murphy lives along the South Jersey shore and teaches part time at Stockton State College. His recent poems have been seen in The Beloit Journal, Xanadu, Commonweal, Confrontation, and the like. His thorough consideration of poet Robert Hayden appeared just recently in the American Book Review.

Vesna Parun is a Yugoslav poet born in 1922. She has been publishing her poems since 1947, and has more than thirty-five volumes to her credit.

Linda Pastan's most recent collection of poems, PM/AM, was awarded the Maurice English Prize.

Joel Redon lives in New York's East Village. He has had work published in the New York Native And Christopher Street, and is presently at work on a collection of stories.

Miriam Sagan's work has appeared widely, recent publications include poems in New America, fiction in Family Circle, reviews in Albuquerque Journal, and the poetry chapbook DHARMAKAYA (Plotkin Press, 1986). She lives in Santa Fe, and is an artist in residence with the state of New Mexico.

Philip Schultz won the Lamont Prize in 1984 for DEEP WITHIN THE RAVINE (reviewed in PBQ #28), and his previous collection, LIKE WINGS, was a nominee for the National Book Award in 1978. He heads up the creative writing program at NYU, and is currently at work on a novel.

Ivana Spalatin is Yugoslavian born, and presently teaching Art History at East Texas State University. Besides Parun, she has also translated from the Croatian the poetry of Vladimir Devide and Mirjana Matic - Halle among others. She has also translated the work of Robert Bly and Daniela Giossefi into Croatian.

Eric Trethewey was born and raised in rural Nova Scotia. For the last fifteen years he has lived in New Orleans. His DREAMING OF RIVERS (Cleveland State University Press) is reviewed in this issue of the PBQ.