

# MIDDLESEX

*A Literary Journal*



Volume One

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MIDDLESEX, *A Literary Journal*

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**Middlesex:** a literary journal

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# THE FURNACE

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Milo De Angelis, the most important Italian poet today, a modern Poe/Dylan Thomas, writes words somewhere between classical music and modern jazz--he fuses, he is hard to understand, and he challenges. Somehow in translating him (BETWEEN THE BLAST FURNACES AND THE DIZZINESS, Chelsea Editions), I saw him clearly. In a dedication, he thanked me for "seeing the light within the darkness" of his work.

Poetry is light. If we are to believe the big bang theory, when blackness bursts into light, we must assume that the blackness, the dark, held light within, that the dark wanted to see and be seen. From the blackness within the rock, Pegasus, poetry incarnate, kicked the rock, broke it, and gave birth to poetry. In this spark of light, our Journal, in its second issue, continues to offer light.

— Emanuel di Pasquale



## GENESIS

The stars,  
The unusual stars,  
The stars that wanted to be, to see--  
The large-eyed stars  
That wanted to be seen

The emptiness that wanted to be filled,  
That wanted to fill--  
The stars  
The dust that dreamed,  
That spun itself into being--  
The stars



**FATHER/MOTHER**

Sun, father, life-spinner, light-giver  
Steady murderer

We come from nothing--physics, calculus, from  
Alchemy and slime--from blind science

Oh mother how can we find you?

What Voice Speaks? "In the ocean,  
In your blood: salt driven,  
In your tears. In April, when the bud  
Leafs green."

## **EBB AND FLOW**

There is no return  
There is no reason to return  
But we for a long time  
Don't know it  
Such a long time  
There is no return  
But once we know it  
In our blood  
In our brain  
After much love  
After much hurt  
After the tears of children:  
The wide eyes  
Full moon white  
Spine cell  
After much hurt  
After much love  
Then each of us becomes our own brother  
Each of us becomes our own sister  
Each of us becomes our own father  
Our own mother  
And we freely take the long breath  
And we become ocean,  
Ebb and flow

**DEATH COMES**

Death comes like a mother  
Like a woman holding her child  
By the fireplace  
While the snow gathers heft  
Tests the roof  
As it packs into ice

Loose sparks find dry cracks,  
Devour the house  
And the flames embrace us,  
Transmute us into cinders,  
Into spires of fire,  
And fly us home.

**A CERTAIN KIND OF DEATH**

The horror of the tail cut off  
From the warrior horse  
From the pit bull  
The horror of any Dragon  
Submitting to saint George  
The horror of the Erect Snake  
Crawling on its belly  
Losing its supple limbs  
Its wide wings

## **A WORD OF ADVICE**

Among you there is  
one who feels the heat of  
stars in his veins,  
one who knows the worm  
as his brother, the starfish  
as his sister; among you  
there is one that prays  
to the moving waters  
of brooks, rivulets,  
and rivers, one who whistles  
the song of blue jay and cardinal, one  
for whom the starling  
returns year after  
year; among you  
there is one for whom babies smile and to  
whom young children  
run, one  
whose living eye  
spooks the rabbi  
and priest, one who  
feasts at the joys of love.  
Isolate him--quickly--  
tear his guts open,  
stone him,  
drown him--  
protect our dun limbs  
from his glow.  
Then go on your usual ways.

**BURIED**

We should be buried in forests,  
In mountains, like leaves fallen into deep cracks,  
The origins of brooks,  
Rivers, rivulets

We should be buried far from the seas  
And let the rains, our fathers,  
Carry us in their fluid arms back home,  
Into the mothers' spinning waves



## **THE DEAD**

They wave at us  
Old ladies leaning against companionable birches  
Little girls in long white dresses  
Men bent over like aged flowers  
They wave at us  
From a small island  
In the middle of a lake so calm  
Only the sun's reflecting gold betrays water  
Hands waving  
                                    Slowly  
"We are here  
Waiting  
We are here"

## **JANE AUSTEN DRIVES TO ALTON IN HER DONKEY TRAP**

Disappointing waters at Cheltenham Spa  
Hadn't erased dark patches from her skin,  
Nor could she still walk miles untiringly.  
Well, then. Out back she harnessed Polly Sue  
And set off into kindled warmth that May  
Squandered on the dregs of day.

"Composition seems to me impossible," she said,  
"With a head full of doses of rhubarb  
And joints of mutton"--  
Nevertheless, on the rough road back to Chawton,  
She closed a stubborn sentence in her mind  
As one might fasten a button.

Looming, the near-horizon wore a hue  
Softer than garnet's, fullness she might carry,  
The first shy sycamore leaves  
Uncertainly poking through  
Like the affections of a girl  
Whose mother hadn't decreed a man to marry.

With faithful clop her donkey drew the load  
Of oolong, sugar, pink embroidery thread,  
Her quiet drive portending one last story.  
Today, our rented compact squeezes left,  
Scrapes weeds and fenceposts while around the road's  
Blind bend there thunderstorms a ten-ton lorry.

**SAINT MARTHA TAMING THE TARASQUE**

(after a miniature from Henry VIII's Book of Hours)

*for Stephen Sandy*

"Oh, come along, you silly beast," she clucked.  
"Now don't you gobble people anymore."  
Obedient, the monster, looking whacked,  
Waddled behind her trying to ignore  
The yeoman with rock-steady crossbow drawn  
Upon the creature's right eye and the knight  
Driving his lance into its scaly brawn  
As if brute nature might submit to might.

Two limp legs dangled from its lower jaw,  
For it was nothing if not fully fed,  
And yet the haloed saint had thrown a rope  
About its neck. Triumphantly she led  
It like a poodle: "Come, obey God's law,  
And like our own dear king, ignore the Pope."

## **THE GHOST OF MY UNFINISHED PH.D.**

The ghost of my unfinished Ph.D.  
Like fog comes in at night, on little footnotes.  
In billowing robe of swooshy silk he walks,  
Transparent as a microfilmed dissertation.

He crooks a finger, cocks his velvet hood.  
Teeth dribble from his skull as from a dicecup--  
Follow me down, he says, to the web-strung stacks  
Where thick books squat that no one has dared open  
Since Matthew Arnold died. There shall you graze  
And gag upon a windpipeful of dust.

Sometimes a college bookshop's plate glass window  
Accosts me with his pained, accusing stare,  
Jaws interrupted in the act of chewing  
On shriveled reputations. My mistake  
Approaches like a forgetful amputee extending  
A nonexistent hand to shake.

**TEMPS PERDU**

Smugly, I pat my back. Confronting crap,  
I paid bills, stuck stray books back on their shelves,  
Answered a poll that sought my view of rap,  
Wrote to some writers stuffed full of themselves.

A glittering raindrop hesitantly steps  
Down from a ficus leaf to the one below it.  
If beauty dwelt beyond my windowpane,  
I didn't know it,

But all day long stayed stuck fast to my desk,  
Blind eyeballs clogged with paper, dumb back bent.  
And what if I'd done nothing whatsoever?  
Wouldn't the time have been sublimely spent?

**BEGETTING LIKENED TO A CRAPSHOOT**

Dig down in your genes,  
Shake them lucky rocks,  
Roll somebody new--  
Clickiddy bumpbump clickiddy.

Sweet angels come and sit  
On these lovin' babies.  
Fine brace of twins: full house.  
Oh oh. Snake eyes.



## **A GAME OF EGGS**

It was a combat waged at summer camp:  
Two partners lined up facing, tossing eggs  
With reverence back and forth until one missed  
And yoke ran down the other camper's legs.  
Such feeble danger. Yet they stood in place  
With hands cupped to receive, keeping on sending  
That fragile ball revolving over space,  
Delaying its inevitable bad ending.

Seasons before, we'd met and traded smiles.  
I laid a vodka trap for you that failed.  
In bed at last, we were less intimate  
Than correspondence from long distance mailed.  
But we went on, affecting nonchalance  
As if no glance or touch of fingers mattered,  
Knowing, as though we played at tossing eggs,  
That either you or I would end up spattered.

## **SILENT CELL PHONES**

In airport waiting rooms, owners of cell phones  
Look wistful when their phones lie silent, millstones  
That no stream turns. Mindful of their high stations,  
They squirm and fidget their exasperations,  
Prisoners staring at a blank cell wall,  
Their fingers idle on each speechless phone.  
There ought to be a number they could call  
To demonstrate to us they're not alone.

## **PANIC IN THE CARWASH**

In neutral, hunched down worried at the wheel,  
I'm trundled through a claustrophobic cave  
Of swatting fingers, brushes, gushes, thrown  
Back to the womb, suspended on a chain,  
Helpless while hands perfect me in the dark.

Christ, let me out! Release me; get me born  
With eyes unfinished, anything to see  
This waterfall of wax drip to a stop,  
These obstetricians halt. Bring on, bring on  
That sweet green light at uterus's end,  
Roll me into the sunlight, whack my back.

## IMMIGRATION

**The author has exaggerated, omitted, and told the truth.**

*Chapter 1: In which the author explains the conditions which led to the immigration of her parents to America (circa 1966), the acquisition of their passage to their new country, and their initial arrival.*

### **My Father's Immigration**

One day, upon hearing that there was a lottery to immigrate to America Proper, Marvin stood in line in his high school to purchase his ticket. The ticket came from a teacher with a beehive hair style, cat glasses, and a tight mouth, who could mark the magic and lucky numbers in your permanent record. To his surprise he won and was slated to immigrate by way of a vessel called the Eastern State University. Cramped and uncomfortable quarters in the vessel had to be tolerated in order to reach the magical land of milk and honey. His was a difficult decision. His brick home, which was situated on a shady tree lined street in Danville, Illinois, America Unproper, housed the straight-backed, respectable father named Reverend Simeon, the beautiful and serene mother Edna, and 3 younger brothers and a sister. Marvin promised to come back to get them, but the Reverend initially thought it would be best to stay in America Unproper and work in the factory. The Reverend, a man who acquired a loan to buy his house by sending his documents to a bank out of town, (the local bankers--who had connections to America Proper--were not able to bear the thought of granting him a mortgage) was indeed wise and correct most of the time. America Proper was a big, scary place. As a result of their disagreement, the Reverend agreed not to give Marvin any money to ease his passage and Marvin agreed to go anyway and not complain, even when he went five days without eating before finding five dollars sticking out of the snow and when one of his teeth rotted and fell out. Upon arrival to the shores of America, to the surprise of Marvin, a man with a suit came

up to him' and his new bride, whom he met while on his long voyage to America Proper, and told him he had been waiting for someone just like him. He had a job for him in a school. All Marvin needed was an apartment. When people who said they had vacancies decided not to rent to my father and his bride upon seeing them, the suited man rented a garden apartment for them using his own American Proper face. This was necessary because of the disquieting appearance of Americans Unproper, which repulsed and repelled Americans Proper in 1966.

### **My Mother's Immigration**

The bride, Carolyn, had no decision at all. In her school there were three chances. To acquire a winning ticket was to escape a part of America Unproper called the Notorious Cairo Housing Projects, which housed little girls with babies; boys with wagging tongues, wandering hands, and grinning eyes; and mothers who spent their days sitting in kitchens drinking beer until their children walked home from school. When the children reached home the mothers sprang into action and would beat children with straps for such transgressions as being seen looking at boys (if they were girls), playing by the river, eyeballing them, eating food out of the refrigerator without permission, making noise, answering back, acting mannish or womanish, playing too hard, laughing too loud, falling asleep, or otherwise causing an inconvenience. Carolyn wanted the musician's ticket, but received the nurse's ticket and did not turn it down. She did not promise to come back. On the way to America Proper, when Carolyn's vessel, St. Mary's Catholic Nursing school, intersected with Marvin's vessel, Carolyn and Marvin met. Being foreigners on their way to a strange land, they banded together through attraction, convenience, and fear and were married at sea.

## SNAP SHOT OF THE VILLAGE OF SHOREWOOD CIRCA 1976

### The Suburban Babies

*In Shorewood, in Illinois, in Brook Forest North, there were large houses with well manicured lawns: acres of shrubbery, marigolds, red volcano rocks in flower beds, trimmed lawns, young trees, occasional vacant lots. You saw your house born--starting from a bare frame, then a naked inside that smelled like fresh cut timber and left you dirty and full of saw dust. There was a park some several blocks away with a swing set and a seesaw. When you were four there were also Big Wheels, skateboards, roller skates, Pogo sticks, banana seat bikes, tree houses, and other great kids.*

*When you were 5 you knew that near Hamil Park there was a trailer park and you had an insatiable curiosity about the inside of such a narrow living structure. Could you stand in the middle of the floor and touch both walls? Neat. Wished you lived in a trailer!*

*On the bed of the river there were houses that sometimes flooded and smelled like toilet, but they were located within 20 yards of a park that had a slide that was about 100 yards long. Wished you lived in a smelly river house next to the slide.*

### School District Children

*From kindergarten to 8th grade the school gradually evolved from equally cute children on a playground doing cart wheels and chasing each other, to three basic sets of kids. There were those who were called the stuck-ups who lived in the subdivision with the largest and best houses. They had Polo shirts, Oxford shirts, Penny Loafers, Gloria Vandervilt or Jordache jeans, preppy hair, and an undying love for each other.*

*There were the kids who lived in the other houses--second tier suburbs--who were either in small cliques of like children or wanna-be stuck-ups. They had the best chances of being wanna-be stuck-ups if they were also in the honors classes with the other stuck-ups.*

*Then there was the group that was indifferently and "passionlessly" called Scums by the others. These children lived in the trailer park or by the river.*

*There was sometimes a subtle distinction made for children who lived by the river; they were occasionally called the River Kids or River Rats.*

## **FLY AWAY**

Two days after Christmas, I am fly fishing the rapids coming off the Razorback Gorge, a deep and sometimes dangerous run of the south branch of the Black Bear River. The trees are rust-colored, brown, black, and gray; there is no wind. Ice keeps clogging the guides on the fly rod; the only sound is a solitary crow whose call goes unanswered. I am alone on the river. Despite the neoprene waders, thermal long johns, and insulated boots and socks, the cold's talons pierce the layers into my foot bones. I submerge my fly rod in the frigid currents--ironically, the best way to clear the guides of ice--and cast again just to get my blood flowing. About twenty minutes ago, I had a bite on a size 18 pheasant tail, and it's just enough to keep me here shivering for another hour or so. To drive my thoughts from the icy sting in the toes on my right foot, I think of the Gorge in the warm seasons. The old-timers named it "Razorback" because of the odd cliff formation through which the river had cut its path centuries ago: when the April sun is just coming up, the cliff casts a shadow in the shape of an enormous, hump-backed boar on Jackson Valley below.

I remember one spring when two ospreys lay claim to these waters, out-fishing even the old-timers, and drawing resentful, icy glares. I tipped my cap to them, a male and female, as they juggled their magnificent catches in mid-air--brookies, browns, and bows--manipulating them to face the direction of their flight, cutting down on the wind resistance. They snatched so many trout that they surely must have had an impressive nest, packed with downy chicks, their distinctive, needle sharp beaks constantly open to the sky. One Tuesday morning, I found both ospreys washed up on the bank, the massive, hooked talons now dangling lifelessly in the current. Although I never found the poison or the entry points of any bullets, I knew healthy osprey don't simply drop into the river in mid-flight.

Like melting ice-flows, my thoughts drift slowly to spring times of long ago and Peter O'Shea, who learned to think like an osprey and became the best damned fly fisherman I ever saw. When we were kids,



my friends and I occasionally bumbled along the banks of the Black Bear River with our oversized K-Mart rods, dangling bobbers, and coffee cans stuffed with pale, half dead nightcrawlers. And we would inevitably come upon Peter, already on his way back with a full stringer of magnificent trout that he had caught on dry fly with an ultra-light fly rod he had made himself.

“Gentlemen,” Peter would address us, “if you want to catch trout, turn yourself into an osprey. Up, up and away you go! A few hundred feet up, the sun warms your back like a spotlight from heaven and you’re center stage, Gents! The big time! There’s nothing else in the universe but you and those trout. That old spotlight reaches right down into the riverbed and shows you EXACTLY where they’re hiding--those caverns ‘n crags where you just KNOW the big ones love to hide!”

By the time Peter and the rest of us reached high school, he was a local legend on the north and south branches of the Black Bear River. A straight “A” student in biology, Peter dreamed of a Ph.D. in entomology. And he had already learned much from the river--not only about the mayflies, caddis flies, stoneflies, and midges that he studied every day during fishing season, but also about the net of relationships that linked them to each other; to the various trout species; and to the pike, osprey, mink, and fly fishermen that in turn fed on the trout. Raised on his uncle’s horse farm, Peter began practicing the 10 to 2 o’clock fly casting motion before he could ride or even walk. I had known him since grammar school, but we were never close. Peter never got too close to anyone--he seemed happiest when he was alone fishing on the river. In high school, despite his success on the athletic field, Peter was never popular, never part of the “in” crowd--i.e., those of us on the football team. He had a slight build; barely five foot five; sinewy, with a whippy strength that made him a star in track and field. No one could touch him in the high jump and the pole vault, though he was always too frail for football. Every week it seemed that Peter had a different girlfriend; he had a knack for always landing the bombshells to the annoyance of all of us football players. Maybe it was his puckish grin and boyish humor that drew out their maternal instincts. But Peter’s first love had always been the river-his first mother.

After turning over a thousand rocks in a hundred different stream beds, he became such an expert that he could predict the species and

stage of the aquatic insects on which trout were feeding on any given day. On opening day, he would hold court at Razorback Gorge, spouting to anyone who would listen the Latin names for each of the mayfly species and the times we could expect them: “Now Gentlemen, let’s review. There’s Ephemerella subvaria in late April; Ephemerella invaria in May and June; Ephemera guttulata by mid-June. How can you hope to know trout if you don’t know the mayfly?” Later on that opening day, some of us from the football team grew bored of watching Peter catch practically all of the trout in the river, so after a few beers each we lay on the bank, started lobbing stones into the holes he was fishing, and taunted him.

“If you could be any animal you wanted, what would it be, Phil?” I asked innocently.

“I dunno,” Phil answered just as innocently, “maybe a lion or a bear. What do you think Peter would want to be?”

“You mean Tinkerbell over there?” Now, I set the hook. “Maybe a goddam mosquito--you know, a little prick?” We rolled around on the bank guffawing. Proud of my joke, I continued: “Maybe a little mayfly--ya know, they kinda remind me of Tinkerbell!” More guffawing. Peter turned to face us, but he looked more curious than angry, as if he were seriously considering my suggestion. He waded over to the bank where we looked up at him, snickering.

“A mayfly--now there’s an excellent idea, Gentlemen, although I’m not sure how you Neanderthals stumbled onto it. You know, you can’t beat the mayfly for its sheer angelic beauty and its short, intense life. You spend most of your yearlong life in the stream, eating and growing. Then, you wake up one morning to discover that overnight you have grown long, beautiful wings. As if by magic, you’re reborn out of the water and mate on the wing as you fly up toward the sun. Your winged life would last only twenty-four hours--one day of sheer euphoria.”

It was the way he said it that made us all stop laughing--he ended up in a whisper, almost as if he was in a trance, as if he were living out the mayfly life cycle in his imagination right then and there. And we too fell under the spell, fantasizing about what it would be like. We suddenly felt foolish and clumsy with our thick lines laden with lead split shot. No one said a word as Peter waded off and proceeded to catch four more trout where we had just lobbed our stones.

We once saw Peter catch over seventy-five trout in less than two

hours at the Gorge--an awesome feat unmatched to this day on the Black Bear River that aroused the jealousy of the old-timers, the old cynics. "That candy ass fly boy!" they said loud enough for everyone to hear. "Dopin' up your flies with that goddam chemical attractant? How much you pay for it over at the Pro shop? You wanna buy trout, go to Shop-Rite! They got a special!"

I was there at the Gorge when Peter caught "Grendel's Mother," the fifty pound Pike that prowled the deep labyrinthine runs that wind through the Gorge's network of boulders. No one knew how she entered that part of the river, but that she had taken up residence there was no fish tale. You could always tell when Grendel's Mother was near when you hit "dead runs" in the river--areas where the trout stopped biting, even in optimal conditions, even during a hatch. Those few who had tied into her had their lines snapped early on in the contest. If the stiletto teeth didn't shred the dainty 7x tippetts designed for small brookies, then the sharp black rocks around which she wrapped their lines and then bore down with all her weight and the current's force would snap off the line even at the thickest part of the leader.

Some speculated that Grendel's Mother probably knew when the trucks from Fish and Game were coming to stock; indeed, she must have bolted down a few netfuls of brookies that spring before Peter went after her. He used a two-fly rig with wire traces, ingeniously tying on two long black Woolly Buggers, one larger than the other, with strips of tinsel in them. It created the flashing effect of a chase, the larger baitfish in hot pursuit of the smaller. As he worked the deadly dance through the water, a small river chub bore down on the rig, nibbling at the tail of the lead bugger. And then Grendel's Mother exploded from the shadows below. She swallowed both Buggers plus the astonished chub in one tremendous lunge. Realizing he couldn't simply horse her out of the water, Peter played her masterfully, letting her take out as much line as she wanted, the wire traces neutralizing her teeth and the cutting rocks, and he worked her into a shallow pool.

Standing in a Charlie Chaplin-like position, his large fishing boots heel to heel linking the rocks along both sides of the narrow feeder channel, he dammed up the pool and cut off the only exit. And then he just let her swim as fast and as hard as she wanted around and around that pool until she had spent all of her strength and rage. While Grendel's Mother hung suspended in a slack-jawed stupor, the needle-

like teeth completely powerless, Peter simply reached in under the gill cover and lifted her clear out of the water in triumph. A small crowd of anglers had gathered, and even the old-timers grudgingly tipped their caps. They stood in awe of her nearly five feet of densely packed muscle, armored in rows of bronze scales like chain mail; her sleek torpedo outline that belied her massive girth; her enormous dragon head with its furious, blood red eyes and, of course, all those teeth.

I helped Peter transport Grendel's Mother in a trash can filled with water from the Black Bear down to the Mill River, where they had recently started a Pike stocking program. I had to push my father's old pickup for all she was worth, Peter riding in the bed, wrestling with the trash can come alive, repeatedly slamming the lid back on whenever the pike's head would burst through. We carefully unloaded Grendel's Mother and revived her in the backwater. She lay motionless, letting us help her until she felt the strength of the current in her blood again. With a single, gator-like thrash she knocked us both off balance hard onto our backsides in the river and disappeared in a flash behind the spray and commotion.

Aside from the adventure with Grendel's Mother, I never fished much with Peter. He was always on the move, looking for a new section of the river that no one had ever heard of or where no one would ever have thought to fish. But he always fished the Razorback Gorge in the early part of the season. He was only eighteen when he died while fly fishing the Gorge. It was springtime again, and the river was swollen and running fast from the runoff and recent heavy rains. No one, not even the old-timers, would dream of fly fishing when the river was so violent.

Peter waded out confidently into the shadow of the great boar. Apparently, he tried to cast too far out over the river and his line snagged on a partially submerged sycamore branch far out in the middle of the rapids. Drawing him in, enticing him to get a better angle to retrieve his fly, the river lured and finally caught him--she tripped him up, spun him around, played him along through the rocks and into the deep run where he drown. Peter was reported missing, and his uncle had to wait almost a full year before the body was recovered. Big Jake Fulsom was fishing the Gorge for carp with his customary bait-casting rig, twelve-pound line, and dough balls. Jake was one of my buddies from the football team, a fellow lineman, and he used to tease Peter

mercilessly (whenever he could catch him) by wrapping him in an enormous bear hug and then picking him up over his head and spinning him around despite Peter's angry protests.

On that morning, Jake snagged his line on what he thought was a submerged log, and, not one to give up his rig without a fight, he began to slowly haul it to the surface. Forty minutes later, he reached beneath the surface to grope for his hook, and felt what he thought were branches and river grass. He soon discovered they were Peter's slender, pliant arms and his long blonde hair. The old-timers heard Big Jake's screams from nearly a mile downriver. They reported that Jake had found Peter with the fishing line wrapped around him like a burial shroud, binding his fly rod fast to his side. They said that his body was remarkably well preserved by the cold, spring-fed run--his alabaster skin, large clear eyes, long blonde hair, and even his puckish grin frozen in time.

Perhaps this was the river's way of honoring one of her young lovers, transforming him into a puer aeternus, her very own Adonis. I'm not sure why exactly, but it was around that time that I took up fly fishing, and I haven't fished any other way for the last twenty years. Peter would have been thirty-eight now, like me. I sometimes try to picture what he would look like. Would he be a professor of entomology, balding, with a goatee and tweed jacket, smoking a pipe? Would he have kids of his own? As hard as I try, I just can't imagine it. What would Peter ever do with a dirty diaper or a child's inner ear infection anyway? What would he do with standardized testing or a teacher strike?

My customary hour waiting for a bite runs out, and it's just as well since all ten toes have gone totally numb. It's time for the ceremonial last cast: rod tip toward the sun, then toward the ground, over the left shoulder, over the right, and cast--the fly line tracing the sign of the cross before it shoots out over the water. As I retrieve the pheasant tail, still expecting the miracle of a strike, even a nibble, I think of the next generation of mayfly nymphs lying on the frigid river bottom. With their slow pulses, they cling to the undersides of rocks, waiting so patiently for the return of spring, waiting to emerge and fly toward the sun.

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## WIDENING MY EYES

Widening my eyes,  
I see a delicate world,  
a world that startles with each footstep.  
The soft touch of your heel,  
the clatter of the children running in the street.  
A world that leans forward and upward,  
nuzzling heaven,  
waiting for the return of the sons of man.

*The sky is littered with shards of light, slivers of gold and red.  
A crown was never quite this bright on even the fairest head.  
The hand whose span is broader yet than dawn to evening star  
is painting you this masterpiece, no matter where you are.*

When we widen our eyes,  
we see the world as it truly is.  
We hear the sun's rustling rays move past us,  
busy with the day.  
We can look up into the sunlight,  
up into the daylight,  
and our contested hearts  
will rise.

## **SUMMER IN YOUR HAIR**

You peek over your arm,  
breath-swindler, blood-burner,  
sea glass eyes wide, full of hope.  
The flowers behind you, bursting with August,  
push summer into your hair.

We lay on the carpet,  
the sun poured thick on your legs.  
Our books pile among us,  
page pressed full length to page,  
phrase to phrase, making towers of  
images, metaphors, sounds.

A pin pushed straight through one  
might pierce ten thousand words.  
I want to raise them in a glinting string above you:  
fierce, unfurled, wild.

In the night we lay side by side,  
your head on my arm,  
my hand on the small of your back.  
I feel through delicate fabric  
that cool cleft I love,  
hear the rustle of skin and silk.

Around us the August flowers rage.

## MY SON SINGS

In the still dark morning,  
open, yearning,  
hoping to hear from God.  
But there're other voices,  
a clutter of voices  
that mutter of failure and loss.  
Then my son sings

from his little room.  
His voice,  
the clear sound of strings,  
brightly struck,  
hammered.  
Will he fashion a coat of mail,  
burnished and strong,  
for me?

The sun rises,  
flings fire across the sky  
to dance and mingle  
with the sweet stream of sound.  
I am drunk with love.  
The Lord has come

when my son sings.



## A ROOM FULL OF SUMMER

I watched you sleeping  
in a room full of summer.  
I knelt by you and felt the day pause,  
felt it shudder and go silent.  
For a long moment there was only you

*your face soft and white, your hair a wisp of light,  
your head so gently laid on a lovely pillow made  
from a little girl's hands.*

Danielle I have seen your slender fingers,  
your tender palms,  
cupped by your cheek so many times.

Your character is a tonic to me.  
It rises like the sun, one flame at a time.  
Roaring in a great cauldron,  
your words burn me and make me clean.

*A sliver of your love can drive away all fear.  
When waves and billows move the deep  
your voice comes to my ear.*

Yesterday I stood in the middle of the sea  
and watched you sleeping on the sand.  
The waves stopped.

**WATCHING YOU DAVID**  
*for my brother*

Watching you David,  
lying over River Bend  
like an injured mountaineer  
waiting for the weather to change.  
Or are you on skis, hunkered down,  
about to pierce the night,  
smiling and muttering,  
*visibility and gravity are highly overrated.*

David, remember another morning,  
the air crazed instead with  
river spray and sunlight,  
the cool thick scent of the woods,  
your arms twin pistons in front of me  
as the water surged and rolled.  
We slid past rocks and falls,  
hunting a world where no one lived but us.

David, watch the mist glide  
over the flanks of the mountain.  
Let your mind rest in this sky,  
this paint box blue,  
this hole in the heavens.  
Find inside it the secret of your hurt,  
your hurt that turns to love before it hits our eyes.  
Bring back to us your strange, tangled,  
unearthly beauty, your tumbles and  
glances of light that make hearts rise.

## OF COURSE

would DYFS investigate Dante today,  
or Lewis Carroll? Wilde languished  
in Reading Gaol; some still think  
rightly. when hearts go out of their breasts,  
must flesh follow? Nietzsche, horrified  
over a flogged horse, swallowed his mind.  
what folly enforced on him such farce?

blogs & tabloids seethe with answers.  
wisdom, like water, tends to pool--then  
go stagnant. buried to the neck in sand,  
waiting for stones' skull-crushing arcs,  
what shards of scripture riprap the soul  
against extinction? what murmurs today  
deny forgiveness? we know. of course.

## QUIET DESPERATION

most often a pretty  
low top to be over, not  
much of a stretch  
after all, just a bit  
snide, no monkey wrench  
to sabotage  
the dear machinery.

how discern a *faux*  
*pas* from an *entrechat*?  
not in the air, suspended,  
when a soft breeze  
might still correct  
the arc of thought. not  
by any method you suppose.

we're always south  
of heaven till we swerve  
a little off the crystal stair  
into the unruly thick  
of things, gunning the car  
we built but don't deserve,  
say those who see us as uncouth,

to whom we happily reply,  
eat my smoke.  
winners choke & losers roar.  
everybody gets a little sick  
of it. even though we've heard it all before,  
nobody gets the joke.  
still, we interview all who apply.

## SIZE MATTERS

everyone wants us--even ourselves--  
larger & smaller than life, equestrian statuary  
& kewpie dolls, tempests & teacups.

it blows us up with helium, Macy's parade  
gargantua, or fits us with a pull-string  
in our backs. either way, we squeak.

we'd rather leave elving to the elves,  
bone-grinding for bread to giants,  
but nobody knows how to measure enough.

everyone sharpens the blade,  
but none can cut the knot,  
& the knot will not unravel itself.

the oracle gives us too little,  
too much. we see ourselves,  
silent, in each others' eyes.

## THE BARGAIN

we made believe. we turned a verb  
into a noun. living thus,  
box canyoned in a suburb,

we began to count the days.  
all our fingers & toes never enough,  
we medicated the signs of decay.

second guessing dismayed our lust.  
garrulous birds replaced alarms.  
we woke from dreams of what we lost.

recognizing no escape,  
we believe in what we must,  
take pleasure in the sparrows' chirp

regardless of the morning's cost.  
practicing our magic charms,  
we speak in accents that we trust.

## TIMES TABLES

the distance, turning, we seek to adjust  
cheats us in the mirror.  
somewhere  
between dust and dust, we dance,  
gleaming for others.

*Space is a Woman*, Blake says,  
*& her Masculine Portion is Death.*  
no need to traverse  
the Vegetable Universe.  
Eternity lies around us.

so there. the sight of oneself,  
at last, hard to square  
with all that went before.  
*If your mother says she loves you,*  
the editor said, *check it out.*

when the shimmer  
seems dimmer, double down.  
odds are just odds.  
we have always counted on the gods  
for more.

## **WILL YOU STILL NEED ME**

an insistence on resemblances 86'd  
the otherwise promising relationship.  
each saw in the other an ex-lover,  
if only as rearview pillars of salt.

this has nothing to do with you,  
perfect creature, eyes-forward  
hominid. skeptics abound, but  
retrospection seems interminable.

a flaming sword denies us access  
to that part of the Bible. why we keep  
tunneling to Eden remains mysterious,  
its gates adamant to the central knot.

if we could live with our backs  
to each other, perfect aliens,  
we might decipher our languages  
enough to remain literal,

but we seem so human. we touch  
with tongue, with eye, with  
sigh, with skin. Darwin  
never thought of this as easy.



## **VITA NUOVA BY DANTE ALIGHIERI**

Translated by Emanuel di Pasquale

I. In my memory's book, after the first few sparse notes, there is a section called *Now My New Life Begins*. I wish to copy at least the meaning of the words under that heading into this small book.

II. The heavenly sun had spun nine times around the earth since my birth, when I saw a glorious child many people called Beatrice even though they did not know the meaning of her name. Appearing to me almost at the start of her ninth year, she had lived long enough for the procession of the equinoxes to shift one twelfth of a degree nearer the East. I first saw her at the end of my ninth year. She wore noble colors; muted, decorated crimson, girdled, classical and appropriate to her age. Honestly, I felt the Vital Spirit that lives in the heart's depth rumble with such power its vibrations affected my outermost pulses terribly. Trembling, it said, "Here is a god, greater than I, who has come to rule over me." Then, the Animal Spirit, which lives in the high chamber where senses are perceived, amazed, said to the spirits of sight, "Behold your fountain of joy." At that point the Natural Spirit, living in the place of nourishment, wept and said, "O sorrow, I will be made small from now on." Certainly, from that moment, Love ruled my soul, which readily wed it and which it completely ruled, and lorded over, as through my creative powers I obeyed its every wish. Often, he ordered me to find this child-angel of mine, and I, a youngster, obeyed. To describe her dignity and poise, one can recall Homer's words: "She did not seem born from a human, but from a god." Her image, always in my mind, anchored my Love for her, yet Love led me, clearheaded and pure, freezing any sense of filth. Since some people think these early recollections of thoughts and emotions may be make-believe, I will drop them, leaving out many things, and concentrate on more important notes.

III. After enough days passed that nine years had gone by since this kind creature's first appearance, on the very last day of this period, this wonderful girl appeared in the whitest dress, between two gentlewomen, older than she; as they walked down the street, she glanced where I, in fear, stood, and in her sweet goodness, now made eternal, greeted me so kindly that I felt blessed. She greeted me at three in the afternoon, and because that was the first time I heard her voice, I was overtaken by so much sweetness that, as if drunk, I withdrew from people, and returned to my lonely room, where, thinking of her, I fell asleep to face a splendid vision. I seemed to see a fire-red cloud, inside of which I saw a gentleman, frightening to look at yet lightly full of joy. Of the many things he said, I understood only a few: "I am your lord." In his arms, lightly wrapped in a crimson cloth, I saw cradled a naked, sleeping person. Focusing intently, I realized it was the girl who had greeted me. Holding a burning thing in one hand, he seemed to tell me: "Look at your heart." Soon after, he seemed to wake up the sleeping girl; he convinced her to eat this thing that burned in his hand which she did hesitantly. A short while later, his joy turned to bitter tears, and weeping, he gathered this woman in his arms and with her he seemed to climb toward heaven. I was so full of anguish that my light sleep broke, and I awoke. Quickly, I figured out that this vision had appeared between nine and ten at night. Thinking of what had appeared to me, I set out to explain it to the famous poets of the day. Since I already knew how to compose verse, I worked on a sonnet in which I greeted all those faithful to Love. Begging them to judge my vision, I wrote what I had seen in my dream. So I began this sonnet, which starts: "*To each taken soul.*"

To each taken soul and gentle heart  
who sees these lines by chance  
and from whom I hope to see an answer  
greetings in his lord's name, which is Love.  
Three hours had passed  
of the time in which each star shines  
when Love quickly appeared--  
remembering its essence horrifies me.

Love seemed happy holding  
my heart in his hand, and in his arms  
my sleeping lady wrapped in a mantle.  
Then he awoke her, and she, frightened, humbly  
ate of this burning heart:  
then he left my sight, weeping.

This sonnet is in two parts. In the first, I send greetings and ask for an answer, and in the second, I explain what needs a reply. The second part starts at: *Three hours had*. Many, with various opinions, responded to this sonnet; among them the one I call my best friend, who wrote a sonnet which begins *You saw, in my view, full virtue*. So our friendship started. The dream's true message, unseen by most then, is now clear to the simplest people.

IV. My Natural Spirit slackened as my soul was consumed with thoughts of this splendid young woman; so I quickly became frail and weak, my friends grew concerned at how I looked; others, jealous, wanted to know what I wanted to hide. And I, aware of their malicious questions, answered that I was following Love's wishes, who ruled me according to the counsel of reason, ruled by Love. I could not hide a thing as Love's signs were evident on my face. So when people asked, "For whom has Love ruined you so?", I, smiling, looked at them in silence.

V. On this day, this most gentle young woman sat where one hears words about the Queen of Glory, and I in a spot from where I could see my blessing; between us, in direct line, sat a lovely woman, who often looked back at me, marveling at my gaze, which seemed aimed at her. Many noticed me looking at her, and when I was leaving the place, I heard one say, "Look how that woman is ruining that man," and I understood that he meant the woman who was between Beatrice and me. Then I was greatly relieved, assured that my glances had not revealed my secret. Immediately, it occurred to me to use this nice woman as a screen for the truth; soon, I was so good at pretending that most gossipers thought they knew my secret. I hid behind this woman for some years, and to make things more believable, I wrote some rhymes for her, meaningless here because they're not for the noble Beatrice. I will omit all, except for one that seems to praise her.

VI. At the time this woman was a screen for so much of my love, I decided to record the name of the most gracious Beatrice and add to it the names of many other women, especially that of the nice woman. So I chose the name of sixty of the most beautiful women from the city where the Almighty placed my beloved and composed an epistle in the form of serventese, which I will not write down here: I mention it only because as I composed it, a marvelous thing happened: my Beatrice's name was the only one to fit ninth among all the names.

VII. The woman who had been a screen for my true feelings happened to leave the city to move to a far away town; losing my screen, I suffered more than I would have imagined. And thinking that if I didn't show grief people would be suspicious, I wrote a sonnet lamenting her departure. I will write it down because my words refer to my feelings for my Beatrice, apparent to those who know. So I wrote the sonnet, which starts: *O you who travel on.*

O you who travel on the road of Love  
await and see  
if anyone's pain is as deep as mine;  
I beg you only to hear my pain  
and then judge  
if I am not keeper and hostel to every torment.  
Love, not because of my slight worth,  
but for its nobility,  
gave me such a sweet and mild life  
that behind my back, I often heard whispered,  
"God, how has this man's heart  
earned such joy?"  
Now I have lost all that boldness  
that stirred from love's treasure;  
I live poor  
and fear to speak of what I feel.  
So wanting to emulate those  
ashamed of what they lack,  
I fake happiness,  
while in my heart I struggle and cry.

This sonnet has two main parts; in the first part, I mean to call on Love's faithful through the words of the prophet Jeremiah: *Travelers, see you if know sorrow more sorrowful than mine*, and beg them to hear me; in the second, I tell where Love had placed me, with a meaning that the last parts of the sonnet do not show, and say that I have lost it. The second part starts with: *Love, not because*.

\* \* \*

XI. When she [Beatrice] appeared someplace, hoping for her sweet greeting, I felt enemy-free and filled with a flame of charity, forgave all who had offended me. If anyone had asked me about anything, I would have humbly answered, "Love." When she was about to greet me, a spirit of Love, destroying all other spirits of the senses, drove away vision's weak spirits, saying, "Go honor your lady," and he took their place. Anyone wanting to know Love could see him in my trembling eyes. And when the woman gently greeted me, Love, without impeding such great blessedness, but as if overwhelmed with sweetness, controlled my body so it dragged. Clearly, my happiness, which often overflowed, lay in her greetings.

XII. Now, let's get back to when my bliss was denied. I was so full of pain that I withdrew from people and alone wept bitterly. After my tears eased, I went to my room, where I could weep in private, asking for mercy from the Virgin Mary, and saying, "Love, help your faithful one," and fell asleep like a beaten child. Almost midway through my sleep, I thought I saw next to me a youth dressed in the whitest clothes; apparently in deep thought, he saw where I lay, and seeming to sigh, said, "My son, it's time to stop making believe." Since many times before he had called me in my sleep, I thought I recognized him. As I looked at him, he seemed to be weeping out of compassion, and to be waiting for me to speak. Gathering courage, I said, "Lord, of nobility, why are you crying?" And he said these words to me: "I am like the center of a circle, from which all points in the circumference are equidistant; you, however, are not like that." It seemed to me that he had spoken very obscurely, so I forced myself to speak, and said, "Why do you speak in riddles?" Dropping the Latin, this time he answered in Italian, "Don't ask for more than you need to know." Then I asked

him the reason why Beatrice had denied me her greeting. “Our Beatrice heard that you had been rude to the woman I mentioned to you on the road of sighs; so this gentle woman, who rejects all harm, stopped greeting you, fearing associating with you could be more harmful. Since she more-or-less knows your old secret, I want you to compose a few verses in rhyme, where you explain the power I hold over you because of her, and how you were hers, right away, since childhood. Call then as witness one who knows this, and beg him to speak of it to her. And I, who am that witness, will gladly tell her. And she will know your exact feelings and see how those who speak badly of you are wrong. Your verses will be a go-between; don’t speak to her directly, for it’s best not to. Make sure she hears them when I am there; beautify them with sweet harmony as I will be there when I am needed.” After these words, he disappeared, my sleep broken. Realizing this vision had taken place at the day’s ninth hour, before leaving the room, I made up my mind to write a ballad, in which I would obey what my Lord had ordered me to, which I did, and it starts: *Ballad, I want.*

Ballad, I want you to find Love  
and with him go to meet my lady,

so my excuse, which you sing,  
will be explained to her by my Lord.

Go so courteously, ballad,  
that even by yourself  
you should boldly venture anywhere;  
but if you wish to safely go,  
first find Love,  
for to go without him is not wise  
as the one who is to receive these words,  
if I am right, is full of anger at me:  
and if you do not go with him,  
she might be cold to you.

Sweetly, when you are with him,  
begin with these words  
after you have begged her forgiveness,

“Lady, he who has sent me to you  
desires, if he has been forgiven  
and if it is fine with you, that you hear me.  
Love is here who, because of your beauty,  
can make him at will change appearance.

So consider why he made his eyes stray  
since his heart stayed firm.”

Tell her: “My Lady, his heart keeps such  
perfect faith that serving you  
fills his thoughts fully:  
he is yours, from beginning to end.”  
If she does not believe you,  
have her ask Love, truth-knower:  
And finally; humbly pray to her for,  
if forgiving is hard for her,  
tell her to order me to die  
and that I, faithful servant, will obey.

And before you leave her,  
speak with him who is pure compassion  
as he will know how to tell my side:  
Thanks to my sweet notes,  
Love, stay with her,  
and speak openly of your servant;  
and if she forgives me at your begging  
let her fair smile announce peace.

My gentle ballad, when it pleases you,  
go where you will win yourself honor.’

This ballad is divided in three parts: In the first, I encourage my ballad to go safely, and tell it what company to keep if she wants to go danger-free; in the second, I tell what it must relay; in the third, I let it go where it wants, wishing it success. The second part starts: *Sweetly, when you are with him*; the third: *My gentle ballad*.

One might say that he does not know to whom I am referring in the second person, as the ballad is merely my words, but I will clear all this up in a more subtle section of this little book. So if anyone has doubts now, let him be patient, and he will later understand.

\* \* \*

XIV. After the battle of the different thoughts, this most gentle woman went where many kind women had gathered; a friend who believed he was doing me a great favor by bringing me near so many beautiful women brought me there. I, not knowing why I was brought there, and trusting a friend who led me near death, said, "Why are we visiting these women?" He said, "To honorably serve them." In reality, they were gathered in the company of a newlywed woman, and according to local custom, were staying with her for the first meal in her new husband's house. So, I, thinking of pleasing my friend, suggested that he and I stay and wait on the women. After my suggestion, I felt a wondrous agitation begin on the left side of my chest and extend quickly all over my body. Then I leaned my body against a fresco, and fearing others might see my agitation, raised my eyes, looked at the women, and among them saw the most gentle Beatrice. My spirits were so jumbled at that point because of the power Love felt from being so close to this wondrous woman, that save for my sight all my other senses blacked out. Even my sight was pushed aside as Love took my eyes' place to see the splendid woman fully. Not quite all there, I felt badly for these little spirits that grieved: "If this Love had not zapped us out of our place, we, too, like our fellows, could see this splendid woman." Many of the women aware of the change in me began to marvel, and gabbing, along with the splendid woman, made fun of me. Then my dear mistaken friend took me by the hand, away from sight of the women, and asked me what bothered me. Then I rested a bit, feeling my spirits come alive, and those pushed out returning to their rightful place, I said to my friend, "I had stepped almost where there is little hope of returning." And leaving him, I returned to my room of tears where, weeping and feeling ashamed, I said to myself, "If this woman knew my state, instead of making fun of me, she would feel pity." Still weeping, I decided to write to her, explaining the reason for my change and appealing to the compassion that people would feel if they knew of it. I hoped she would hear the verses, so I wrote this sonnet, which starts: *You put me down.*



You put me down to other women  
without thinking, Lady, why  
I look so weird  
when I see your beauty.

If you knew, Pity would no longer  
be harsh with me in her usual way,  
since Love, when he finds me near you,  
grows so bold and self-assured

that it wounds my frightened senses,  
killing this one, pushing this one out.  
Until he alone is left to look at you:

so I change appearance  
while always aware  
of my tormented spirits' pains.

I do not divide this sonnet into parts because its meaning is clear. Things are clear, so why divide? I know some words could be clearer, as when I write of Love killing my spirits, only those of sight surviving, and they outside their places. This lack of clarity is hard to explain to those, unlike me, who are not among Love's faithful; to those faithful all is perfectly clear. It would be redundant if I clarified such things.

\* \* \*

XXII. A few days later, as it pleased the good Lord who did not withhold his own death, the father of this magnificent Beatrice died, heading surely into eternal glory. Such leaving is always painful to friends of the departed and no relationship is as close as one between a good father and a good child; this woman being purely good, and her father as most believe, also purely good, it is evident how she suffered bitterly. In this city women gather with women and men with men at such moments of suffering, so many women gathered where Beatrice wept sorrowfully. I saw some women leaving her house and heard how concerned they were about her grieving. Here is some of what they said, "She is full of tears; to see her is to die from pity." These women

then walked by me, and in my sorrow I wept so much I had to cover my eyes with my hands. I wanted to hear about her, and I was where the women passed by when they left her; I would have hidden if I started crying again. And while I waited there, other women went by, saying, "Now that we have heard this woman's pitiful speech, none of us can be happy ever again." Other women said, "This man weeps as if he'd seen her." Others then said of me, "Look at this mean, pale shade of what he once was." So, as these women passed by, I heard words about her and me. Later, thinking it over, I decided to write, since what I had heard from these women was worthy of verse. Wishing I could have asked them questions, if it were polite, I arranged the poem as questions and answers. I wrote two sonnets. In the first, I ask questions. In the other, they give answers, using material I heard from them. The first begins, "*You who seem so humble;*" and the other, "Are you he..."

You, who seem so humble,  
your lowered eyes showing pain,  
where do you come from looking  
like pity itself?

Did you see our gentle lady  
bathe love in her tearful face?  
Tell me, women, for my heart tells me,  
as I see you go in her grace.

And if you come from such pity,  
please pause here near me,  
and tell me all about her.

I see your eyes full of tears  
and seeing you return disfigured  
by such great pain, my heart trembles.

This sonnet is divided in two parts: in the first, I ask these women if they come from her, telling them I believe so, as they have returned nobler looking. In the second, I beg them to tell me about her. The second starts here: *And if you come.*

Here follows the other sonnet, as I mentioned before.

Are you he who often spoke, and  
only to us, of our lady?  
Your voice is the same,  
but not so your face.

And why are our tears so heartfelt  
as to draw pity from others?  
Did you see her weep and now can no longer  
hide the pain that fills your mind?

Let us weep and sadly go  
(it's a sin to try to comfort us)  
for amid her tears we heard her speak.

Her face shows such complete pity,  
and if one were to look at her,  
he would die weeping.

This sonnet has four parts, each part the voice of each woman; since they are clearly delineated above, I won't repeat the meaning, or show where they take place. The second part starts: *And why do you weep*; the third: *Let us weep*; the fourth: *Her face fully shows*.

XXIII. A few days later, I got terribly ill for nine days in parts of my body, and had to lie in bed like a cripple. On the ninth day, feeling intolerable pain, I thought of my woman. After thinking of her, I once again thought of my sickness and aware of life's brevity and misery, I wept quietly. Then sighing deeply I told myself, "Eventually, most gentle Beatrice will inevitably die." This thought made me lose focus and in near delirium, I had a fantasy where wild-haired women appeared and told me, "You'll die, too." Then after these women, different faces, horrible to look at, told me, "You're dead." My imagination wandered; I no longer knew where I was, and I thought I saw wild-haired women weeping as they went, deeply sad. The sun seemed to darken, and the stars seemed the color of tears; flying birds fell dead, and there were tremendous earthquakes. Amazed at such

fantasy, and scared to death, I thought a friend came near and said, "Haven't you heard? Your splendid woman has passed on." I wept terribly, both in my dream and with real tears. Looking at the sky, I thought I saw myriad angels flying up to heaven, a pure white cloud before them. As they sang gloriously, they seemed to say, '*Hosanna in excelsis*'; that's all I could hear. Then, full of love, my heart said, "It's true; our woman lies dead." I imagined I was where this noble and blessed woman lay dead; it seemed the women were covering her head with a white veil. From a deep look of serenity in her face, she seemed to say, "I see the origin of peace." Fully at peace at seeing her in my dream, I spoke to Death: "Most Sweet Death, come to me; don't be a creep, for you've just been made noble by where you've been. Come to me now as I desire you greatly. And you can see I already have your color." When I had seen the usual solemn rituals performed over dead bodies, I thought that I went back to my room and looked toward the sky; my imagination was so strong that weeping, in my real voice, I said, "O splendid soul; blessed is he who sees you." As I sobbed these words in pain and asked death to take me, a young and gentle woman at my bedside, believing that my tears and words were only for my illness, wept from great fear. Because of her weeping, other women in my room noticed that I wept; they made her, a close relative of mine, leave. Thinking I was dreaming, they came to wake me, saying, "Stop sleeping," and "Stop worrying." So my vision vanished as I was about to say, "Beatrice, you are blessed." Just as I said "Beatrice," opening my eyes, I realized I had been deluded. Convulsed, in tears, I shouted out this name, but the women couldn't understand me; although ashamed, moved by love I turned to them. Seeing me, they said, "He seems dead. Let's comfort him," which they did, and then asked me what I was frightened of. More at ease, knowing I had only been dreaming, I said, "I'll tell you what happened to me," and I told everything, from beginning to end, except the most gentle woman's name. Then feeling better, I wrote a few lines about my love-bent experience. Since it seemed a courteous thing to hear, I wrote this song: *A young, compassionate woman*, the structure of which is clarified below.

A young, compassionate woman,  
adorned in human gentleness,  
who was there where I often called on Death,  
seeing my pitiful, weeping eyes,

hearing my ravings,  
was moved by fear to loudly weep.  
And other women, aware  
of me because of she who wept by me,  
made her leave  
and came close to encourage me.  
One said, "Don't sleep,"  
and one, "What pains you?"  
Then I snapped out of my delirium  
calling my woman's name.

My voice was so filled with pain  
so broken by my tears' anguish  
that only I understood the name.  
With a shameful look,  
easily visible in my face,  
compelled by Love, I turned to them.  
My color was so pale,  
it made them speak of death.  
"Come, let's take care of him,"  
each humbly said to the others.  
And they often repeated,  
"What did you see that broke you down?"  
Feeling a bit better,  
I said, "Women, I will tell you."

As I thought of my frail life  
and how brief it is,  
Love wept in my heart, its home;  
My soul was so lost  
that sighing I said in my thought:  
"For sure, my woman will die."  
I was so bewildered then  
that I shut my troubled eyes,  
and my spirits,  
unfocused, wandered about;  
and as I was delirious,  
unconscious, lost to truth,

enraged faces of women appeared  
that repeatedly said to me, "You will die; you too will die."

Then, I saw many wild things  
in the unreal dream I'd entered;  
I didn't know where I was,  
seeing women move about disheveled,  
some weeping, and some wailing,  
shooting fiery darts of grief.  
Then little by little, I thought I saw  
the sun darken and the stars appear  
(both weeping);  
I saw birds fall from the sky,  
and felt the earth tremble;  
and a man, pale, his voice faint, appeared,  
saying, "What are you doing? Haven't you heard?  
Your woman, once so beautiful, is dead."

Bathed in tears I lifted my eyes  
and saw like a rain of manna  
the angels returning to the high sky,  
a small cloud before them  
toward which they all sang, *Hosanna*;  
and if they'd said more I'd tell you.  
Then Love said, "I'll hide nothing from you;  
come see our lady in state."  
My lying delirium  
led me to see the dead woman,  
and when I perceived her,  
I saw the women covering her with a veil;  
She had with her true humility  
that seemed to say, "I am at peace."

Seeing her perfect humility,  
I became so humble from grief  
that I said, "Death, I hold you so dear  
you must be a gentle thing  
now that you've been in my woman,

and you should feel pity, not disdain.  
 I so wish to be one of yours  
 that I truly look like you.  
 "Come, for my heart asks you."  
 Then I left, free of all pain;  
 and once alone,  
 looking toward high heaven, I said  
 "Blessed is he who sees you, beautiful soul!"  
 You mercifully woke me then.

This canzone has two parts. In the first, speaking to one not identified, I tell how I was freed of a delirious fantasy by certain women, and of how I promised to tell them of it; in the second, I tell of how I told them. The second starts here: *As I thought*. The first part is divided in two. In the first, I say what certain women, especially one of them, told me before I stopped fantasizing, and in the second, I say what they told me after I stopped fantasizing, starting: *My voice was*. Afterwards, when I say, *As I thought*, I say what I told them of my fancy. This has two parts. In the first, I sequentially relate what I had imagined; in the second, saying at what hour they called me, I thank them discreetly. And this part starts: *Then you called me*.

\* \* \*

XXIX. According to the Arab system, her noble soul departed at the first hour of the ninth day of the month; and according to the Syrian system, it departed in the ninth month of the year, since the first month is Tixyrin the first there, our October; and as we figure it, she departed in *anni Domini*, in which the perfect number nine had been completed nine times in the century she was placed in, the 13th Christian century. The reason the number was so friendly to her could be because, according to Ptolemy and according to Christian truth, the heavens that move are nine, and also as most astrologers see it, these heavens working together affect the earth. This number was sympathetic to her to show that at her birth the nine heavens were in perfect conjunction. This is one reason, but when I think more about it, according to unalienable truth, she and this number are one and the same, by analogy as I will explain. The number three is the square root of nine since, without

help from any other number, multiplied by itself it becomes a nine, that is, three times three equals nine. So if three is the only factor for nine and the factor of miracles is three, that is, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, who are three in one, this woman was befriended by this number nine to make it clear she was a nine, a miracle, whose root, that is, of the miracle, is uniquely the miraculous Trinity. Perhaps a subtler person could see a more subtle reason, but this is the one I see and the one I like best.

XXX. After she left this world, the above mentioned city remained widow-like, naked of all dignity, so, still weeping in this desolate city, I wrote to the leaders of the land about its state, quoting from the prophet Jeremiah, who says: *Quomodo sedet sola civitas*.<sup>\*</sup> I say this so no one will be surprised that I quoted the words above, almost as an entrance into what follows. And if someone wished to reprimand me for not transcribing here the words that followed these words, I excuse myself this way: all along I wanted to write only in Italian, and the words which follow are all in Latin, so that would contradict my intentions. I know my best friend would want me to write exclusively in Italian.

\*How lonely is this city!

XXXI. After I wept long and my eyes were tired and unable to vent my sadness, I thought of finding relief with sad words, and I decided to write a canzone to try while grieving to explain why so much pain tormented my soul. So I started a canzone that begins: *The eyes hurting over my pained heart*. And so that this canzone will seem more widowed at its end, I will divide it before I transcribe it; and I will use this method from now on. This unlucky little song has three parts. The first is prefatory; in the second I discuss her; in the third I speak sadly to the canzone.

The second part starts: *Beatrice has risen to the high skies*; the third: *My pitiful little song*. The first part is divided in three: in the first, I tell of what moves me to speak; in the second, I tell to whom I want to speak; in the third, of whom I want to speak. The second starts here: *And because I remember*; the third here: *And weeping*. Then when I say: *Beatrice has risen*, I speak of her, in two parts; first, I give the reason why



she was taken away; then, I tell of how others wept at her passing, and start this part here: *Her sweet and noble soul*. This has three parts; in the first, I say who does not weep for her; in the second, I say who weeps for her; in the third, I speak of my state of mind. The second starts: *But sadness and a need*; the third here: *Weeping from need*. Then when I say: *My pitiful song*, I speak to this song, telling it which women to go to and to stay with them.

The eyes hurting over my pained heart,  
and having suffered greatly from weeping,  
have given up.  
Now, if I want to vent my pain  
that is killing me,  
my words must take the place of tears.  
And because I remember speaking  
willingly of my woman with you,  
dear ladies, while she lived,  
and because I will only speak  
to women with gentle hearts,  
weeping, I will speak of her, now that  
she has in a flash risen to heaven  
and left Love and me both to suffer.

Beatrice has risen to the high skies,  
to the peaceful realm of angels  
and stays with them, having left you, ladies;  
she wasn't taken by cold  
or heat, as others are;  
but only by her great goodness;  
for her humility's light  
shot through the skies with its virtue,  
making the eternal Lord marvel  
and a sweet desire  
overwhelmed Him to spread well-being;  
and from down here He called her on High,  
because He saw that this harsh life  
was not worthy of such a gentle thing.

Her gentle soul, full of grace,  
left her lovely body,  
and now glories in a place worthy of her.  
Who, thinking of her, does not weep  
has a stone-hard heart, evil and sick,  
where kind spirits cannot enter.  
No filthy heart, or low  
mind can know her worth  
and give into tears.  
But sadness and the desire  
to sigh and die from weeping come  
and strip the soul of any peace  
from one who understands at times  
what she was, and how she left us.

Great sighs cause me pain  
when in deep thought  
I recall her who split my heart.  
And often when thinking of death  
a sweet longing overcomes me so  
that my face turns pale.  
And when this longing takes over,  
awful pain so surrounds me  
that I shake from the hurt I feel;  
in this state,  
in my shame, I hide from people.  
Then, alone and weeping,  
I call Beatrice and say, "Are you really dead?"  
and speaking to her saves me.

Weeping from pain and anguish  
rips my heart whenever I am alone  
and would distress others if they heard me;  
There is no tongue that can tell  
what my life has been since my woman  
went to her other life.  
Still, dear ladies, even if I wanted to,  
my life has grown so bitter

that I could not tell you clearly what I am;  
it has grown so vile  
that each man seems to say, "Get away,"  
when he sees how wasted I look.  
Still, if my woman sees what I am reduced to,  
I still hope she will pity me.

My sad song, go and weep now;  
and find the women and girls  
to whom your sisters  
gave great joy,  
go among them,  
child of unhappiness.

\* \* \*

XLII. After this sonnet, I had a splendid vision which made it clear that I should stop writing about this blessed one until I could write of her more splendidly. Therefore, I study diligently to do so, as she knows. If it pleases the life-giver to allow me a few more years of life, I hope to say of her what has not been said of any woman. Then, may it please him, the Lord of Courtesy, that my soul should see its woman, that is, blessed Beatrice, who gloriously looks in the face of He *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*.

**CANTO XXXIII (& 1/3)**

(for Dante Alighieri)

CIRCLE NINE: COCYTUS

ROUND THREE: PTOLOMEA

*Compound Fraud*

*The Treacherous to Guests*

*Pedophile Priests*

*Cardinal Law*

*Dante and his guide, Virgil, descend through the depths of the Inferno where the sins of treachery are punished; these are the sins of the LEOPARD, which ambushes its prey when it is least suspected. The poets encounter the very worst of these sinners, many of whom are locked within the frozen lake of Cocytus. They slide and stumble to the third round, called PTOLOMEA after Ptolomeus in the book of Maccabees who invited his father-in-law to a banquet and then murdered him there. Ptolomeus, and the others of this circle, have committed the sin of TREACHERY AGAINST HOSPITALITY--that is, they have kindly invited guests to their homes, offering them sanctuary and council, only to exploit their good will and innocence. Dante further learns that this sin is so horrible that it is punished even before death: the sinner's soul flies down to Hell to commence its eternal punishment as a Demon possesses its body while it still lives in the world above. Before leaving Ptolomea, the poets discover an additional ring in the concentric circles of sinners in Cocytus. Here, they discover a special section devoted exclusively to the PEDOPHILE Priests and those who conspired to cover their serial sexual abuses of children. The priests appear as leopard seals, predators of the Antarctic that prey on baby seals of other related species by ambushing them from beneath the ice. Dante has never seen such a creature, but Virgil, now a shade with divine sight, knows all the creatures on God's earth. The Demons punish these sinners by luring them to the surface and torturing them, just as they lured and abused their innocent victims. The Demons then flay and skin them, revealing naked, kind-faced priests underneath (here, they cannot hide their true predator nature and must wear it on the outside). The priests, in turn, are then skinned by the Demons revealing again the leopard within (in the*

*end, Virgil explains, they are one nature). Dante speaks to one CARDINAL LAW, a sinner who conspired to cover up the priests' predation.*

Reader, forgive me if in my haste  
I failed to tell of a sin so cold  
It could only be punished in that waste

Where those who betrayed human warmth and trust  
And preyed on the pure and innocent lie  
Locked in the icy lake of Cocytus.

Perhaps I, like you, didn't care to hear  
In the howling winds children wailing  
As though crouched behind a wall in fear.

"Master, what is this desolate tract  
And why is it here?" My guide replied grimly,  
"This ice conceals a terrible fact:

The waters beneath are fed by the spring  
Of all the tears shed by innocents,  
That freeze when they reach this remote ring.

Hidden deep lurk predators with kind smiles,  
"Good Shepherds" who feed on innocent lambs,  
As Leopard Seals on pups--the priest pedophiles."

To me such beasts from the opposite pole  
Were alien, but my master knew all  
Of God's creatures, even those without souls.

Through the frozen haze my master compelled  
Me to spy a troop of demons, who,  
Instead of pitchforks in hairy claws held

Jagged harpoons, clubs and steel augurs  
And a small pen of seal pups just stripped  
From their dams, forlorn and beleaguered.

The demons paired off: one drilled a hole  
Down through the ice, and one tied a leash  
To the trembling pup's neck--its sole

Chance for survival from the attack  
To come from below. It wailed for its ma,  
The demons' clubs behind their winged backs.

Then, it rocketed up through the ice,  
A fanged sea beast--all spotted and sleek--  
Man turned to monster, exposing its vice.

It lunged forward toward the pup's bleating,  
Its black lifeless eyes filled with hunger,  
Its huge maw wide, the pup retreating.

But before it reached the paralyzed babe,  
The demons quickly yanked it away,  
Then harpooned the beast as it cursed and raved.

"The nature of these fiends" my master told,  
"is to prey on the pups, ambushing them,  
Then pray for their victims to save their souls."

I saw what he meant in the collars of priests,  
Worn around the sleek necks of the monsters,  
By which the demons hauled up the beasts

Onto the ice where they skinned them alive,  
Defanged them and with circumcision knives  
Left them for dead, of their manhood deprived.

And then, Reader, imagine my fright,  
When inside that leopard skin was revealed  
A kind-faced young priest, all naked and white.

“Here, they wear their true natures outside,  
The inverse of their kind natures above  
That concealed the predator inside.

But don't be deceived,” he went on to say,  
“in the end they are but one nature.”  
The demons then proceeded to flay

And skin the kindly priest and from inside  
Emerged a leopard seal, vile as before:  
It dove back down the icy hole to hide.

“Worse than Ugolino!” I cursed him, appalled,  
“who, starving himself, ate his starved children,  
But you, Father, plied yours with Peter and Paul!”

At the next hole down, however, a man  
Not a beast had been caught and was questioned  
By several more of that troop of the damned.

“Yes,” my guide replied before I could ask,  
“go question him and learn what treachery  
He made for years with his holy mask.”

The sinner recoiled as I drew near  
And shivered from fear as much as from cold  
Dreading the tale he must both tell and hear.

“I elected popes,” he puffed up his pride,  
Despite standing naked in the ice  
“and at one's funeral did I preside.

I dwell now among the damned as you see,  
For feeding these beasts and covering tracks,  
For this I pay for all eternity.”

No sooner did he complete his thought  
When he tried to jump back down the hole  
In the ice through which he was first caught

But three gaffs did his attempt frustrate  
The demons bound him with thick fishing line  
And dangled him down the hole as bait.

“Would you like to confess? Care to atone?”  
The demons mocked. “Here! Instead of that cross  
Around your neck try wearing this millstone!”

“No need to fret!” as he sank fast I cried,  
“There is no cause for concern--these leopards  
Are quite tame--it’s their *victims* who lied!”

At this insult my master rejoiced,  
Hugging me close and slapping my back,  
“Yes!” he shouted, “you have made a wise choice!”

But he stopped his praise when he caught sight  
Of my troubled expression: “My son,  
What darkness now can I bring to light?”

“Master, that sinner hasn’t yet died;  
Cardinal Law still lives. Why has his soul  
With Minos’ coils already been tried?”

Then my master heaved a heavy sigh  
As one who must relay a painful truth:  
“This sin is so vile we don’t wait till they die.

Their souls fly to Hell leaving behind  
Their bodies to be filled by Demons  
Who consecrate the host and the wine.”

I wept for the children, victims of lies,  
In Hell on Earth, but my master replied:  
“Grieve not: this day they play in Paradise.”

Thinking of this, I kissed my crucifix  
And braced for the rest of grim Cocytus.



**ROUSSEAU'S, "A CARNIVAL EVENING,"  
A JOKE, BEAUTY, AND THE SUSPENSION OF TIME.**

This essay is a deliberate misreading of Rousseau's work, "A Carnival Evening." If we change the title to read, "A Carnal Evening" the experience of the piece would be significantly changed. We might then imagine the "couple" to be either coming from a sexual encounter or going towards one.

It is partly to this point that I shall speak, as well as to the idea that there is evidence which suggests a suspension of time has taken place. It is this state which heightens the erotic nature of the painting. There is another element which will deserve center stage and that is the beauty of the painting.

The viewer is challenged to come to terms with many disparate elements. The viewer is challenged to experience "non-normal" space and time, as well as a multitude of parts which somehow do not fit together into a "logical" configuration. The lack of this so called "logical" order makes it difficult to experience the elemental beauty of "A Carnival Evening." This state of affairs heightens what is most beautiful in the painting.

The first physical element that suggests a suspension of time and a change in the physical laws which organize the distribution of light is the illumination of the moon. The light from the moon does not seem to be the source illuminating the couple or the forest. We assume that the forest would, in fact, appear to be more dense and less well-lit as our vision follows the line of sight from the "front" to the "rear," yet the density of the trees remains the same as well as the intensity of the illumination. The couple are as brightly illuminated as the moon, suggesting either a source in front of them or that somehow they are the source of their own illumination. There are also stars visible around the moon which "normally" would not be possible.

The bank of clouds, visible behind the forest, extends all the way across the painting from right to left and from the middle all the way

down to the imaginary line which represents the visual end of the forest behind the couple. In an “ordinary” space this configuration would be impossible, unless our line of sight was directly on top of a steep mountain slope, for there is no scenery, other than the clouds visible through the forest, which strangely shows a lack of density.

The trees are bare of leaves and the tops of the front row extend beyond the “line” separating the bank of clouds from the sky. The only way this line of sight could be possible would be if the viewpoint of the observer was at a sharp drop in front of the couple walking away from the forest. So, again an illusion is created that the couple is on top of a precipice of sorts.

The couple has come from no discernable path, nor does it appear that they are going in the direction of one. In fact they appear to be suspended off the ground and floating. They are floating in the same way that the bank of three clouds to the upper left of the canvas is floating. Directly to the left of the couple is what appears to be the end of a fence and a winged roof of sorts. It is not clear what is holding the roof up. There is a light on the back part of the roof. What is a fence doing there and why does it end in that particular manner?

In addition to these mysteries, I believe there is an erotic and sensual character to this piece that should not be overlooked. It is the erotic component couched in the wistful beauty that explodes outward to the viewer as if thrust up from the unconscious. Here we have the meaning of the suspension of the natural laws, for the laws of nature are suspended in the unconscious. This painting is a representation which has thrust itself up from the unconscious in the guise of a joke.

The humor lies in the misreading of the title. This was a “carnal” evening and the couple having left the world of everyday concerns are about to re-enter. The night of ecstasy was experienced outside of the rules which guide the experience of everyday life. This piece is not just a dream remembered but a visual representation of the deepest wishes of the artist and perhaps of all of us. Overtly this sounds like we all wish to make love under a full moon, in a forest, under the view of a massive bank of clouds in a night of reveling. Well, perhaps; but there is something that doesn’t ring true about that, after all, as discussed earlier, is it really a moon, a forest, a bank of clouds? Who is the couple? Why is time suspended and what is the purpose of the joke?

What if we see this scene as a re-interpretation of the expulsion

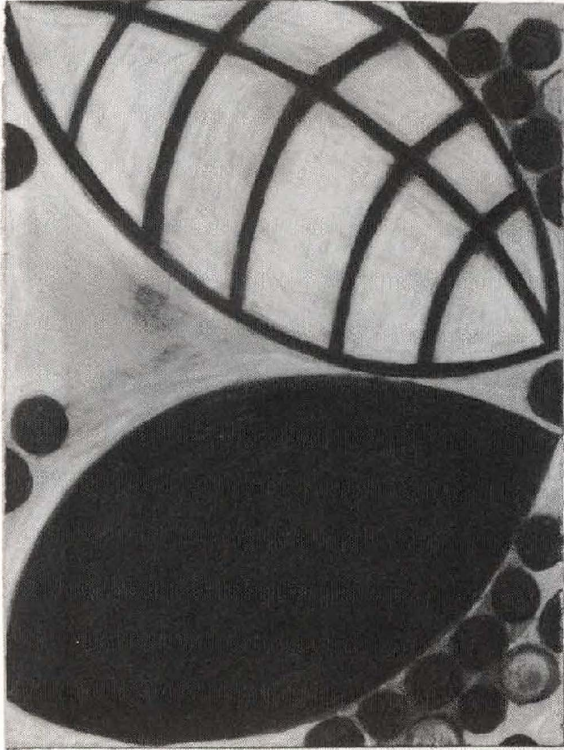
of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden? I believe then we would be able to construct accurate answers to the questions. The significance of the idea of Adam and Eve in this case and of the re-interpretation by Rousseau is a reversal, where the idea of the “fall,” from grace to sin, changes to, from darkness to light. In an analogous fashion Rousseau is also proclaiming himself to be an artist. Not only an artist of the ordinary sort but a special kind of artist who clearly acknowledges that his art will speak from him and no one else. We may then say that this is a painting which is both amusing and about Rousseau’s relationship to his muse, him giving birth to himself.

On the night of knowing each other “carnally,” for I am assuming that after the “apple” they did more than just feel shame, they may have felt good leaving the “garden” and going out to meet their destiny. The suspension of time is about to come to a rapid end, for time is suspended in the “Garden” to which we may never return. Who wants to anyway? There is no creation there outside of God’s work, for humans to be able to create they must be in “time” and hence have to take their chances with eternity. This is the truth of it all, for Rousseau took his chances by being the unique kind of artist that he was and only time has proven him to be one of the “best.”

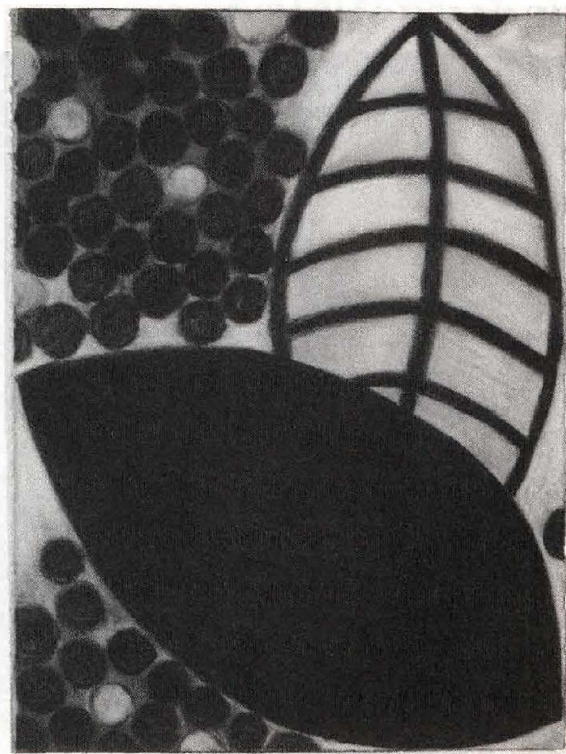
In this interpretation, the forest lays barren and the gate to the left is the gate to the garden they have been expelled from. The moon is the light of the Lord, which no longer shines on them and yet they have provided themselves with their own illumination, the essence of the act of creation. Once again Rousseau has come to terms with his “muse” and accepts his role in the act of creation. Imagine, in the next frame, time begins to “roll” and they go on to create the carnival that life might become for people who have the courage to see beyond their limitations, to see into their very source of creativity and allow it full expression. I believe this painting is Rousseau’s “seeing” and choosing the path which we have, in our “future’s present,” seen him taking. The path that is not immediately clear only becomes clear as he acts; the light that does not shine is the light of our vision and the vision of generations to come who will gaze upon this painting in wonder, experiencing its beauty.

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**URBAN LIFE**



**NECESSITIES**





**SANDY HOOK, NJ**

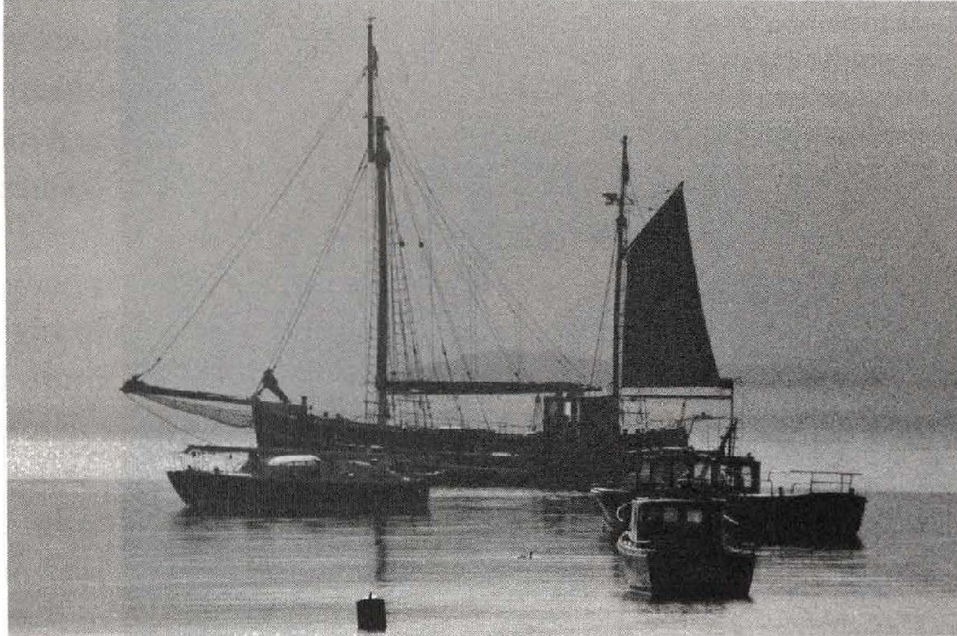


**ROMANIA**





**ISLE OF MULL, SCOTLAND**

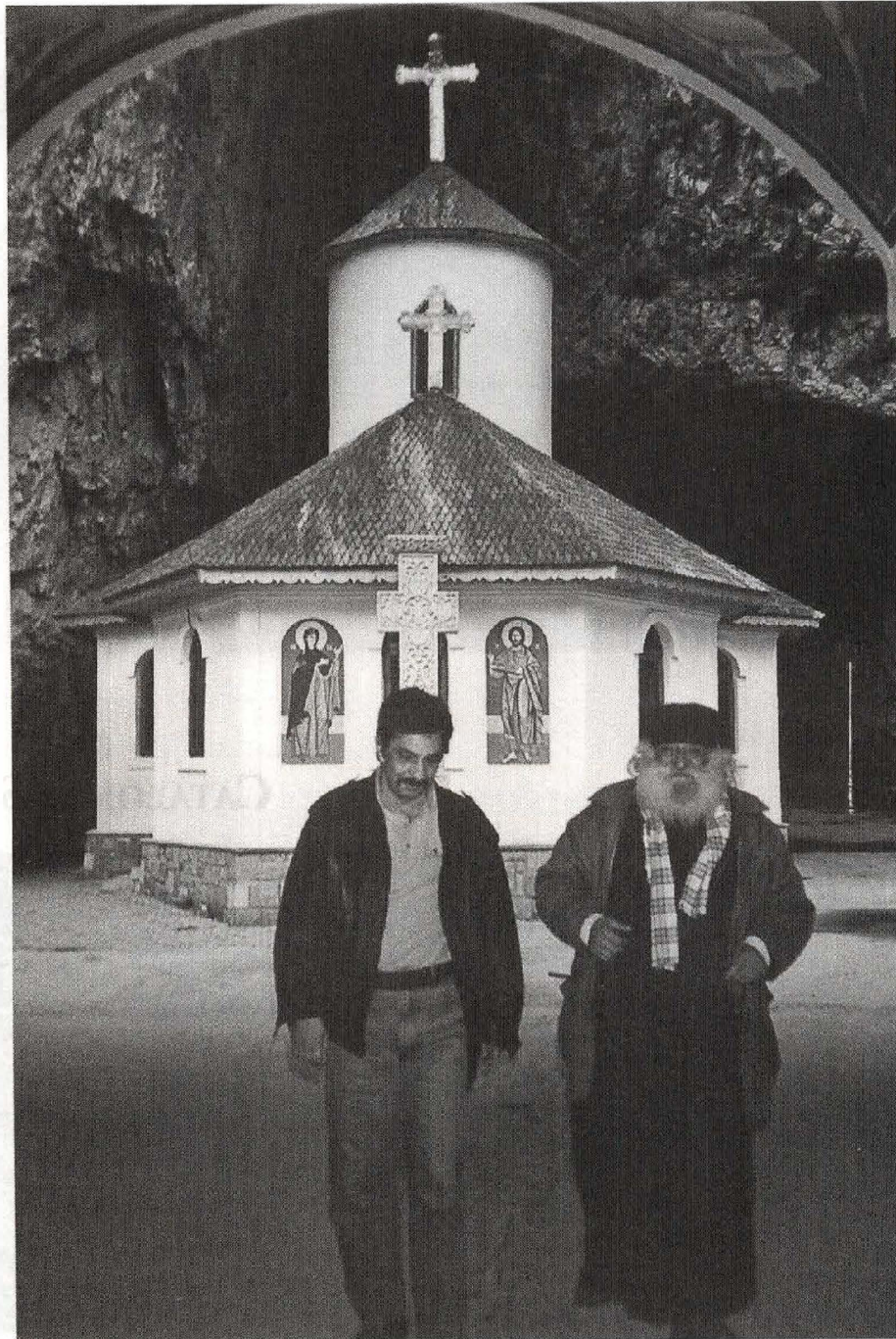


**CATALONIA, SPAIN**





**ROMANIA TWO**



## THE PRESTIDIGITATOR VANISHED

My assistant in red satin and fishnets  
is unemployed, for I am vanished--cape  
wand, accoutrements, top hat and rabbits  
tumbled aimless, inanimate in the museum of escape--

a gone obstacle made miraculous by  
slight of eye, obliterated in the airy hysteria  
of mimicked space, fragmented into passersby  
in high square heels and dresses printed with wisteria

or others in sneakers, boots, sandals, even  
the occasional Oxford. Upturned faces,  
sunlit in the city, shining in light, take heed

of the walk/don't walk and dream bona fide heavens  
woven from the filigree of invisible electric traces,  
while here I lie, cut in ribbons which refuse to bleed.



## A WISH TO STAY NEVER CAN

A father's hand  
flat on  
the green gurney sheet.

The muted sweet  
scent of  
cut grass.

A tarnished  
napkin ring  
engraved with

an unknown  
uncle's  
name.

The reptilian feel  
of old money.  
Corroded black batteries

ready to explode  
in the damp  
garage.

The cat chasing  
crickets and  
old leaves.

Sequins,  
sequences  
and symbols,

inconstant as  
this late September  
sun, its gold

peeling off  
everything as  
night drops

on blacktop,  
revealing  
the one true thing.

## **THE MANDOLIN BOY**

It was a long and lonesome hike  
through day and dusk  
and moonlight, two  
thousand feet clear  
up the mountain--  
so powerful is love.

Fingers of pine stuck up  
thick from the rocks,  
their shadows  
suspect in  
moonglow  
and midnight wind.  
There was light  
enough for Clarissa  
to make her way  
along the gravelly  
mountain trail, though  
a wisp of cloud,  
like a clipper's sail  
she'd seen in a picture book,  
now and then  
crossed Dian's eye  
and cut the soft  
shaft of light  
that kept darkness  
from swallowing the night.

Once she was spooked  
to her knees as a bat wheeled by  
crazily climbing the sky,

then dropping down  
God knows where.  
The air was cool  
and breezy against Clarissa's  
cheeks and neck.  
But her blood was heated  
with love uncertain of return.

Then her ears picked up a sound  
come low and hauntingly  
like smoke wreathing  
through the mountain pines,  
a mandolin strain blent  
now with the owl's  
punctuating hoo  
and with the cricket chirp  
deep in trees.

## **GROWING UP BOY**

I grew up a boy  
In a small New Jersey town  
A curb-kicking, khaki-wearing  
Rifle-bearing boy.

In an overgrown lot  
Near the Johnson place  
I came of apple age

Hid better than any boy  
Under thick pitch pine  
Lay real low  
Barely breathing  
In the deep damp night.

Reared a dim-wit dog  
With a collar like a belt  
Ran with him stump crazy  
In the baseball sun.

Drove a dented Duster  
With a cracked tail light  
Tweaked its engine twice  
For the tall-tale game.

Upshot  
Grew tall  
Grew breasts  
Had a baby one day.

Stuck my head out  
From under the pine  
From under the cap  
From under the hood

Held that baby  
In my scratched, raw hands  
Knew that it would be okay.

## **AT IT AGAIN**

This time I'm a cowgirl,  
Waiting for the rumble  
Of wagon wheels at the gate  
Of the Quick Draw Corral.

Back at the ranch house,  
A beef stew simmers for the  
Cowhands who come hungry  
From rounding up steer.

You're at it again, you say,  
Returning to camp with a fish pole  
And flashlight and seeing me  
Straddle a log like a horse.

Come sundown, I do dishes  
At the spigot on our site.  
The mess kits clang  
Like cowbells in a storm.

You zip tight our tent  
To keep the critters out.  
I lift high the screen flaps  
To let the moonlight in.

## STEEL PIER SCIENTOLOGY

High up we were,  
And *far, far out* over the Atlantic,  
Far enough out to hear the roar  
Of the water, whipped and churlish,  
As it hit the pilings under the pier.

Life, of course, was different then,  
In the bleached-board days  
Before the betting tables came,  
And at Wonderworld Aquarium,  
*If you were lucky*, an electric eel  
Would light up like a live wire  
In a murky, saltwater tank.  
And under a sign marked *Amusements*  
A lame-looking chicken  
Would dance to a rusty old tune,  
For a dime's worth of feed.

And there were starlets,  
Dozens of gold-sequined starlets,  
Lined up on a mile-long stage,  
Followed by tall boys in tap shoes and vests,  
And later, at night, by young couples  
Who whirled to the sounds of brass bands.

*Exotica, yes.*

*Hitherto stories untold.*

But it was past the roasted, turned peanuts,  
Past the purple, wrapped gypsies,



Past even the deep-diving bell,  
Where the double doors closed,  
And the real entertainment,  
Queasy and quixotic, began.

All of the other acts, jelly-fish paled  
When compared to the stunt  
Of the deep-diving lady on horseback  
Who leaped from a platform  
Forty feet over the heads of the crowd  
And landed, unruffled, on a shivering steed  
In a pool of cold water, causing a tidal-like wave  
That rushed from the top of the tank  
To the wind-whipped Atlantic below.

And later a night  
On our long car ride home,  
Still tasting taffy, we dreamed  
Of the dime-driven, drama-filled day,  
Returning renewed to our cardboard stove boxes,  
Thereafter tumbling, unfazed and unstopped,  
To the foot our own back yard hill.

## **INLET SERENADE**

Come summer  
Draw of the diesel  
Roil water, jetty rock, gull caw  
We would eel-slip into the sea  
And breathe,  
Wait for the water  
To warm in our suits,  
Plunder the inlet for lobster and lure.

Oh, hey, the pirate days,  
Tank back, salt hair, stiff jaw  
With a lamp like a headlight  
In an alley at night,  
We would canvas the silt-sandy floor.

Carry a sac like a pirate we would  
Stuff it with silver fish-flash  
Fin shuffle, air bubble  
Delicious, deep undersea dance.

Night dive  
Rock-a-bye waves  
Pull of a copper mint moon  
Stay low, rise slow  
Swash-buckle, big boulder crawl.

And even then  
In the kick-fin days  
Pirate, bounty and growl  
You waited, fiddle jetty-tide,  
Swaddled me sweet in a towel.

## WEDDING BEAN WISDOM

My aunt, halitosis, whispered word-wise  
With imbibe on the night of my wedding.  
*Each time together, the first*  
*Year of marriage, you put a bean,*  
*Any bean, in a jar*  
As the band belted Beer Barrel Polka  
And father, e pluribus, kept an eye  
On the capon-cost envelopes  
Because it's not always friends at a wedding  
And salt-over-shoulder, garter on girl-thigh,  
The band took a clock break  
And my patent purse aunt,  
Rose loon-like for the powder room talk.  
*For the rest of the years,*  
*Each time together, you take a bean,*  
*Any bean from the jar.*  
Slip-hoist, hands dry,  
Powder room coitus advice  
From my aunt, halitosis,  
As my father, e pluribus, put the loot,  
Where it's safe, in the car.  
*You plan to serve bean soup*  
*With good bread now and then.*  
*Why a soup with the so many beans?*  
*Or you never see the bottom of the jar.*

**AT THE MARKET**

*“in the shadow of the Mosque of the Caliphs”*

Fish tanks in shards, the paper said,  
“exploded into the faces  
peering into them”;

Ghazil market, Baghdad,  
crowded on a Friday as  
the “cautious but hopeful parents

led fun-starved children by the hand,”  
hard to say what’s normal,  
busy market Friday or the

recurring reverb of homemade bombs.  
Intermittent power outages,  
water finally clean enough to drink,

but no phone and an uneasy pall  
that hangs like the smell of sewage  
and uncollected garbage

that lines the streets.  
Here, a cell phone rings,  
playing polyphonic sample

of Beethoven’s fifth as  
old woman in thick coat beside me  
orders roast beef, salami,

bending at waist pointing  
through glass at precut meats.  
What if this cold case blew,

bomb tucked away in  
brown bag or box of burgers,  
shattering glass and bits of wooden beams,

scattering them like schrapnel  
“into the faces peering into them”?  
Imagine the blood, the fear,

thirteen dead, the paper said,  
another fifty-seven wounded,  
store owner collecting guts in bags,

debris scattered on the brick walk  
in the open-air market.  
Clean tile floors, crowded aisles,

Saturday morning,  
PA Dutch Market in  
the old Drug Fair on Route 27,

the Mennonite merchant  
carting fruit to his produce stand,  
listens to numbers being called

as I wait to buy  
yellow cheese and turkey breast,  
pints of fresh blueberries

and deep-green pickles,  
as the girls roll dough  
into pretzels behind me,

as the cars come and go  
in the lot outside,  
the late fall breeze

kicking leaves along the ground,  
the morning's rhythms resolute  
in their regularity.

*Quoted material is from a front-page news story by Stephen Farrell in The New York Times, Nov. 24, 2007.*

**(AFTER LORCA)**

1.

Rose quivering  
in October's gusting  
cool,  
last petals  
swaying  
falling  
scattered  
like dust to wind

2.

to you  
I am open as  
a vein to air  
to the breeze  
to the season's changing strength  
open  
as a mind at the moment  
of revelation

3.

We two  
are caught in the elements,  
the mud-green algae,  
the murky depths,  
wading from the depths  
to the river's  
farthest bed,  
together

## **A WRONG FUNERAL**

A Ten-Minute Play

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Janice            A woman in her mid thirties or early forties,  
                         professional.

Mother           Her mother, 20 years older. Under educated. Only  
                         her voice is heard.

### **SCENE**

Janice's apartment. A little messy. The home of a busy professional.

### **TIME**

The present. One evening in early spring.

*The phone rings insistently. Janice enters from outside. She hears the phone and runs to answer it. She picks up and switches on the speakerphone.*

JANICE

Hold on. Let me turn off the answering machine.

*MOTHER'S VOICE booms, as if it were coming from some deep chasm of the universe.*

MOTHER'S VOICE

*(Simultaneously, ignoring Janice's response)*

Janice? Janice, are you really there? Janice pick up.

JANICE

Ma. Hi. I'm here. Can you hear me? I'm here. I'm here. What's wrong?



MOTHER'S VOICE

You never call me---

JANICE

*(She's gone through this before.)*

I call you once a week just as we agreed. Is something wrong?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Where were you?

JANICE

*(Still concerned)*

Are you okay?

MOTHER'S VOICE

*(Ignoring the question)*

Where have you been?

JANICE

Is Daddy all right?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Never mind about your father. What were you doing?

JANICE

I went to that funeral, Ma.

MOTHER'S VOICE

A funeral? Whose? Whose? Tell me whose funeral!

JANICE

*(Patiently)*

Ma, I told you I was going to this funeral.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Don't yell.

JANICE

I'm not yelling, Ma. You're on speaker phone so I can move around. I can hear you from every corner of my home and still be free. I just need to know if you hear me. Can you hear me? Ma? Are you listening? Ma? Ma?

JANICE (*Continued*)

Can you hear me? Ma? Ma? What is it? Ma? Tell me what's wrong?

MOTHER'S VOICE

*(firmly and calmly)*

Nothing is wrong. Everything is the way it should be. Everything.

JANICE

You're the one who called me. What do you have to tell me that couldn't wait until tomorrow? (No response from Mother) Okay. Okay.

*She again waits for a response. While speaking, Janice removes her coat, hangs it up and kicks off her shoes. She goes through routine things, looking at the mail etc. At one point, she places an extension in front of the speaker and goes off stage with a cordless so that the two phones carry the voices of mother and daughter.*

JANICE

Marion's gone to pieces over her loss.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Who's this Marion?

JANICE

*(For the hundredth time)*

She's a good friend.

MOTHER'S VOICE

This Marion. She's the Lesbian, right? Right?

JANICE

It was her mother who died.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Lesbians don't have mothers, Janice. And you have a mother.

JANICE

*(Avoiding that line of conversation.)*

Marion's taking it as best she can. Her mother was a very generous woman. I miss her. She was very nice to me.

MOTHER'S VOICE

You mean I'm not. I'm not nice to you. Is that what you mean?

JANICE

*(Refusing to respond to the last)*

So, how's Daddy?

MOTHER'S VOICE

I told you. Never mind about your father. This funeral, was it nice?

JANICE

It was a funeral, Ma. Some try to be religious. Some try to be short.

MOTHER

That's not funny, Janice. Funerals take a lot of effort. They wear you out.

JANICE

Her family asked me to stay with her as long as I could. They say I'm a good influence on Marion.

MOTHER'S VOICE

That's hard to believe.

JANICE

You sound like your usual self. How's Daddy?

MOTHER'S VOICE

He's dead. You're father's dead.

JANICE

Don't joke, Ma.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Who's joking? He's dead. So, how are you?

*Janice immediately picks up the phone.*

JANICE

What? How? Did you call emergency?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Why should I call emergency? Since he's already buried, it's not an emergency anymore.

JANICE

Already buried? You had the funeral? Already?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Yes, of course. I had the funeral yesterday.

JANICE

Yesterday?

MOTHER'S VOICE

I guess you were sitting at somebody else's wake. Too busy to go to your own father's funeral. / If it was too much trouble for you . . .

JANICE

*(Interrupting)*

/Ma, / Ma, why didn't you tell me?

MOTHER'S VOICE

It was too much happening all at the same time. Just too much.

JANICE

Can you tell me now?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Oh, now you want to talk about your father's funeral. What's there to tell? He's dead. He's buried. The end.

JANICE

How did he die?

MOTHER'S VOICE

He stopped living. That's how you usually die. His heart gave out and he stopped living. Don't you believe me?

JANICE

I don't know.

MOTHER'S VOICE

You never could believe me. But that's what the police said. And you know what the police are like. You of all people should know what the police are like. His heart gave out. They found him just a little while after he died. So that's good. It was still early in the morning, or late at night. Depending on how you look at it. You know how your father loved to go walking late at night. Or early in the morning. Depending. He'd find all sorts of junk lying on the street. Lamps and coat racks. CD's. We had CD's before we even had a CD player. I always thought they were really flat coasters. Who knew they had music? Just imagine. You can find music in such flat things.

JANICE

*(In tears)*

Imagine.

MOTHER'S VOICE

He found everything in dumpsters. Even the dining room chairs.

JANICE

What's that about chairs?

MOTHER'S VOICE

It's very simple, Janice. Even you can follow this. He found five of our dining room chairs in a dumpster. I think he might have been looking for the sixth one. Otherwise, he wouldn't have fallen in.

JANICE

Fallen into the dumpster? He died in a dumpster?

MOTHER'S VOICE

Where else would he be at three o'clock in the morning? You know your father. He wasn't in my bed. Just think if he had died next to me. That would have been awful.

JANICE

Just think.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I wouldn't have all those policemen helping.

JANICE

They aren't always helpful, Ma.

MOTHER'S VOICE

They helped me. They may not help you because you've got a smart mouth. Nobody likes a smart mouth, Missy.

JANICE

Did you call Jamie? Ma? Did you call Jamie? He needs to know.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Your brother's married. He's got a family to take care of, Janice. And kids. Kids. Those ugly, little kids./ I don't want to disturb him. He has to fly all the way from Lubbock. And that's so far. So it's best that I didn't tell him. But Jamie would have come to the funeral, Janice, if I told him.

JANICE

/Ma./ Where is dad buried?

MOTHER'S VOICE

In a cemetery. What do you think I'm going to do with him? Throw him in a trash bag and leave him for the sanitation men? I'm not that cruel, Janice. Janice. Do you hear me?

JANICE

I hear you Ma. I could always hear you. I could hear you when you turned him away. I could hear you when he came into my room. I could hear you when he turned down the lights. You tried to hum something, pretending that you couldn't hear us in the next room.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I just like to hum. That's all.

JANICE

When he kissed me, I knew what you knew. I knew what his breath felt like, what the hair on his back felt like. When I kissed him back, I could always hear you. Even when I turned him away again. Like everybody else who turned him away.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I never turned him away. Never. He didn't want me -- He -- I'm hanging up. I'm hanging up. *(Pause)* Did you hear me? I said I'm hanging up.

JANICE

*(I dare you)*

I heard you, Ma. Go on. Hang up. Hang up!

*Long pause. She starts to hang up then.*

JANICE

Ma? Are you still there? I know you're there. I can hear you breathing.

*Another long pause. Janice starts to hang up. Quickly, she brings the receiver up to her ear.*

JANICE

You could have called me before.

*Again, silence. This must be it. With supreme resignation, Janice is about to hang up for good.*

MOTHER'S VOICE

I'm going to tell Jamie on you. He'll know what you really are. What shame you bring to the family.

JANICE

Jamie knows Ma. He's the one who got me help.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I got you help too.

JANICE

You got me the police. Jamie got me help. (*Pause*) I'm sorry Dad's gone.

MOTHER'S VOICE

I'm glad it's over and done with. The funeral. His life. You and him. Him and me. It's all over now. All of it. Try talking about it now and nobody would believe you. Nobody. You went to a funeral today, and it was the wrong one.

JANICE

I'm going to go, Ma. Goodbye, Ma.

MOTHER'S VOICE

That is so like you, Janice. You blew it. You went to the wrong funeral.

JANICE

I didn't go to the wrong one. I went where I felt safe.

MOTHER'S VOICE

You leave me out of everything.



JANICE

So long, Ma. I'll call you next week. As usual. (*Hastily*) Love you.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Janice. Don't hang up. Janice, Janice --

*Janice shuts off the phone. After a moment, and a couple of deep breaths, she dials the phone.*

JANICE

Oh, hello, Precious. It's Auntie Janice. Listen. Is your father there? Tell him to come to the phone. Please. I need to talk to him.

*Lights. End of play.*

## CAT'S TALE

This is not my story, it's hers. I tried to remember that when she leaned into me with an uneasy smile, and began it. I tried to remember to focus on the cracked teeth, the wad of white floating between them, and inhale its peppermint intoxicating fumes (she was trying to quit smoking). Her voice, husky with drink, was measured, steady as if it came from someone else, but her hazel eyes, red-veined and drooping, reassured me. I tried to remember to listen instead to the round schoolhouse clock on the wall behind me solidly beating out the seconds. And then she began.

When she was three or four or that early age when events begin to capture memory, she lived in one of those massive family style farmhouses. The house, set in the middle of a field of corn like so many others, had robin's egg shutters, tidy sloping white gables, and a double screen door which squeaked in spite of numerous oiling. Only this farmhouse never opened its doors to young boys who fast threw off suffocating ties and opened their white shirts as they rushed in on Sunday mornings; nor did it welcome visitors with a happy stove over which hung sweet clouds scented by loaves of freshly baked bread, not even the thick bubbling gravy in pots for sopping; this farmhouse didn't have a big round kitchen table to display dishes of eggs and oatmeal as family members discussed their plans for the day, slapped backs, and called each other "Bud."

Well, one morning she was sitting in the middle of the kitchen without the freshly baked bread or the big round kitchen table, waiting for the milk to be poured over her bowl of cornflakes. It was an exciting day for her since it was the first day that she was allowed to wear her bathing suit under the sundress, and that could only mean it was hot enough to swim in the lake. She tapped her silver spoon against the side of her bowl so that it sounded like the church bells across town, and glanced over at the brood of new kittens having their meal as their mother, a big tabby, rested undisturbed. It was only a few days ago that the cat had returned from another of her monthly excursions to surprise them, squeezed between the dryer and wall of the mudroom, with

another batch of kittens, five this time. From where the child was sitting on her stool, if she stretched her neck just a bit, she could see past the wide window to the lake, quiet and peacefully waiting. She lifted the spoon and scratching her head with it, began to sway back and forth on the stool.

It wasn't a peep she heard, exactly, or if she did she probably thought it one of the chicks which found its way into the house from time to time. But she knew that something very wrong had happened when her big brother slammed the milk down so hard it spilled on the counter.

"Now look what you've done!" he scowled, fixing on the floor just below her. It looked like a furry rag at first, but quickly she made out what it was. A kitten, the runt, a caramel and white one lay against the gray flecked tiles, with the leg of the stool smack in the middle of its chest. Too young to shriek, it cried out without a sound, just an open mouth which presented a slip of a pink tongue. Navigating with unseeing slits where eyes would have been, it had probably shimmied there seeking security against the cool round wood. She watched as the large, already darkened, hand lifted the leg of the stool then scooped the animal into a dustpan. A limp string of a tail followed the fur muff into the plastic-lined garbage pail, and she wondered if its mouth was still open or if it felt the earthquake of pea cans and soda bottles against its crushed heart. Did it soundless peep as tomato sauce filled the slits where eyes would have been, turning caramel and white a shiny crimson--dyeing it an uncatlike hue? Did it lap the milk-soaked paper towel which chased it a minute later, and was it sour or sweet like mother's milk? And did it rejoice for just one moment, right before the slamming of the squeaky screen door, when onion and orange peels encircled and crowned the tiny head?

When she finished speaking, she sat back and smiled. Again, I noticed the broken teeth, the furrow embedded between her eyes. I couldn't help but wonder if this all, finally, had to do with an early unsuccessful marriage, the four kids, the welfare, the heroin habit she had finally kicked, the line that curved catlike around her mouth, the droop of her hazel eyes. Perhaps. Even so, it's not my story.

## **DO THEY DO WHAT THEY SAY THEY ARE DOING?**

In essence, this is the measurement by which all American schools and colleges qualify for accreditation. My wife and I were delighted when I was appointed a consultant by the President of Navajo Community College, at Tsaile, Arizona and to assist their staff prepare for examination by the North Central Accrediting Association. We had previously camped in this part of Arizona while visiting some of the natural and scenic attractions of this beautiful area. In September 1976, we looked forward to moving to this campus for at least a year or more.

Navajo Community College, the first Indian operated college on an Indian reservation, was established in 1968. This was one hundred years after formal education was first imposed on the Navajos in 1868. Over a period of several decades, resistance to an arbitrary system declined, and Navajo leaders began to demand quality education for their people. Navajo attitudes toward formal education changed further after World War II because of heavy Navajo involvement in the armed forces and in defense plants.

Responding to an increasing awareness of the need for higher education for their people, the Navajo tribe established a scholarship fund in 1957. Financed by income from oil royalties, the fund was designed to send qualified Navajo high school graduates to college. In the early years of its operation, the results of this program were disappointing. A high percentage of scholarship students were dropping out of college. This was in marked contrast with much lower drop-out ratios for non-Indians.

As early as 1959, the Navajo Tribal Education Committee began serious consideration relative to establishing a junior college on the Navajo reservation. Whether at public school, boarding school or in college, education for American Indians made little provision for cultural differences between Indian and non-Indian students. The Navajo Tribe recognized the need for an institution of higher learning which could successfully bridge the cultural gap between the Navajo

and the non-Indian world. The initial impetus toward the eventual establishment of Navajo Community College came from this Navajo perception of the need for a bridging institution for their people

The post secondary community college, in the United States, prepares graduates for employment in business, science and engineering technical positions, assistants in education, health, social service assistants, music and art. In addition, some programs prepare students for transfer to upper division colleges and universities. Graduates receive an Associate degree. Community colleges on U.S. Indian reservations have proven effective in providing similar opportunities for the American Indian population.

In 1965 I had been appointed the founding President of the first community college in New Jersey. At the time of my retirement (1975) a colleague inquired if I might be willing to work with the Navajo Indians, who were developing a community college. My appointment would be subject to the approval of Mr. Thomas Atcitty, President of the Navajo Community College. The President suggested my wife and I meet him in Gallup, New Mexico and proceed to the college. A few minutes from the airport, we had entered the Navajo reservation and were on our way to the college at Tsaile, Arizona more than eighty miles north of Gallup. I have to admit to being surprised when the president explained the reservation was the largest Indian reservation in the United States and about as large as the State of West Virginia. The reservation included parts of New Mexico, Utah, Colorado and Arizona.

On our way we passed through the town of Window Rock, named for a huge mountain of rock that has a large window through which you can view the entire town. This is the capital city of the Navajo Nation and it is here the Tribal Council meets to conduct business. Fifty miles further of mountains and arid landscape, we approached the edge of an enormous canyon, Canyon de Chelly(shay). A large sign welcomed us to Navajo Community College. This enormous and picturesque canyon stretches from the Chuska Mountains on the border of New Mexico about 70 miles west to the town of Chinle, Arizona. For the Navajo Indian, Tsaile means where the water flows into the canyon and, Chinle, where the water flowed out of the Canyon. Here on the edge of this canyon in a small grove of pine, were 15 - 20 attractive new buildings that housed the college. Previously the campus had been temporarily located at Many Farms, near Chinle,

in a single building loaned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Bureau is a division of the Federal government responsible for providing elementary and secondary schooling for Indian children. Although the college received federal funds, it is chartered by the Tribal Council and policy is established by their Board of Trustees. The trustees and the President are required to be members of the Navajo tribe.

Naturally, we were interested to know where we might live during the coming year. The nearest commercial establishments (hotels) were more than 30 miles away at Chinle, Az. We assured the president we would prefer to live on the campus. He was obviously pleased and showed us to the faculty housing area composed of numerous hogans. This is a Navajo term for the Indian home. Historically, they are built by joining tree branches in a circle about six or eight feet high over the natural dirt floor, a hole in the center of the roof enables the smoke from the central fire pit to escape. The door always is built to face the rising sun. President Atcitty assured us we could use the Faculty Hogan reserved for visiting guests. Like the other faculty hogans, the building was round with a fire place in the middle and an opening in the roof. The entrance faced East to the rising sun. The architects for this new modern campus retained the historic aspects of the Hogan. However, the windows had glass panes, the walls were of trimmed lumber, the indoor plumbing was complete and three bedrooms surrounded the central living room with a fireplace in the center of that room. Although there was a well designed and equipped kitchen, the president assured us that we were welcome to take our meals in the student center. This was a happy arrangement for us because the nearest grocery store was 30 miles distant in Chinle. Furthermore, we looked forward to this opportunity to become acquainted with students.

We soon met with a number of faculty members who lived in adjacent hogans. More than half of these instructors were anglos (non-Indian). Most of these teachers had worked several years at the college and appeared dedicated to their careers. Their children were educated at Indian schools. The curriculum was similar to other two-year colleges. However there were many additional courses that taught Indian trades; silver smithing, weaving, leather working, language and history.

We were very pleased to live so close to these people.... furthermore, to live in the midst of these beautiful natural surroundings.

We were sure we would not be disappointed. Within two weeks we returned to the campus with our four-wheel Chevy Blazer and were ready to begin this project for what would be nearly two years at Navajo Community College.

The students at the college came from every part of the reservation as far North as Utah and Monument Valley, as far east as New Mexico and Chaco Canyon, as far south as the Petrified Forest in Arizona, and as far west as the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Most Indian students had had previous schooling (elementary and secondary) in schools established and teachers employed by the U. S. Bureau of Indian affairs. In nearly all instances these were boarding schools for they were too distant from the students' homes for the children to return home at the end of the day. The students were nearly evenly divided between boys and girls. At the college, the students were housed in dormitories. Although most students were of the Navajo tribe, many were from the smaller Hopi tribe, Yacqui, Apache and smaller tribes. A few students came from other tribal reservations in the western United States. There were also a few Indian students who did not live on reservations.

A friend inquired if I had learned the Navajo language, I had not but there is one word widely understood. If you are in a border town, for instance Gallup, New Mexico you might see signs with the word Yatahhey. This is an invitation of welcome: "Come have a drink." Unfortunately, this has led to a major problem. A large number of Indians are prone to alcoholism, which has become a major problem among the population. Incidentally, during World War II hundreds of Indians served in the Army, as "Code Talkers." Because of the uniqueness of the Navajo language, the Japanese and Germans were unable to decipher the Indian language.

The community college has made it possible for young men and women to begin higher education in a culture with which they are familiar. They are prepared to work in health occupations, business, engineering or as science technicians, and this has opened doors to professional schools, and advanced studies in every field of learning.

It is a delight for people who are interested in this land and its people to take their meals with the staff and students of this friendly institution. In this manner, we learn much about how the people live, their family life as well as the problems of these minority natives. We were told about the natural phenomena that have special meaning to

these people. The town of Shiprock has an enormous rock formation and the four states meet at this point. The medicine men will tell you it was this ship that brought the Navajo to this land.

Visitors to the college are met with friendliness and, if visitors wish, they can purchase meals at the College Center. This is an opportunity for those who wish to know more about the Navajo to get a first-hand knowledge. The main administration building is five stories in height. The building incorporates a museum on every floor and depicts Navajo life. From the wide windows of this unusual building, the beauty of Canyon de Chelly captures the interest of all visitors.

The Elderhostel organization frequently holds week long seminars at the reservation. Many adventurous people plan their own trips to the reservation, staying at comfortable motels at locations such as Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Chaco Canyon, Petrified Forest, Canyon de Chelly, Window Rock, Hopi Reservation. There is much to see and do and a lot to learn about these interesting people who came before us. The Elderhostel brochures are in the LaPosada libraries.



**REGRET**

Buried in a corner of the closet  
Crumpled two-button navy blue jacket  
Tossed aside like that  
It seems to be waiting for memory.

It was her jacket  
Falling softly into my hands.  
I pick it up off the floor  
And press it to my cheek.

In spite of the years  
It smells of her still.  
Chicken soup and Brillo  
Her powdered sun-dappled skin.

I put it on  
Feeling in the pockets for  
Kleenex, safety pins, and  
Pennies picked for luck.  
And when I pull it tightly across my chest  
Feeling the cloth which  
Once rested close to her heart  
I wish she were here  
When she is not  
As she wished I was once.

**PURPOSE**

After another day  
of fighting lines  
and running the maze  
of mini malls,  
I flip through the delicate pages  
of my son's 3rd grade bible;  
a sidebar notes  
that the ancient Israelites  
were known for their clay pottery;  
Jars were used for everything.

It is then that I realize  
I am deep within  
the earth waiting  
for the heavy rains  
to wash the topsoil away.

**HEARING THE NEWS - NOVEMBER, 2008**

The Amazon below, seven miles through the dark  
The baby, long moaning, finally gives in to the night  
The movie, silent, pale  
Sleep resists, thoughts of possibilities invade  
The earphones bring me back: 'in the still of the night'  
The flight attendant almost sings  
"Our long national nightmare is over."

**DID YOU GO GENTLE**

Did you go gentle?  
I pray you saw God  
Thought it over  
And then said yes  
In sleep is good  
If the dream was yours  
And the time yours  
And of course God's  
Then gentle  
Just might be  
The way to go

## WHEN WE SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN

When we see each other again  
It will be like the first time.  
You will be waiting for me,  
And I will come alone at dawn.

You will show me to your friends,  
And I will follow in your footsteps.  
You will tell me more about Leonardo,  
Captain Cook, Buddha, Mozart and Gasset.

We won't go riding horses along sugar cane fields,  
Nor rowing before noon in lazy crystal waters,  
But we could glide together from here to a star.

You will show me to the Father,  
And we will shower in his light.  
I will wonder at his glory,  
I will wonder at his might.

As it was at the beginning, forever and ever...

**BOTH TIMELY AND TIMELESS: A REVIEW OF  
SANDER ZULAUF'S WHERE TIME GOES  
(DRYAD PRESS, 2008)**

*Where Time Goes* is the third and latest collection of poems by Sander Zulauf, editor of *The Journal of New Jersey Poets* and co-editor of the anthology *The Poets of New Jersey: From Colonial to Contemporary*. In his latest book, Zulauf has poured out a beautiful, fluid meditation on our construction and perception of time. From our anxiety over its flowing past to the back eddies of memory to the meaning that we struggle to fish from it, this book flows like a clear brook—timelessly beautiful and profound. Concurrently, Zulauf chronicles his own coming to terms with the passage of time and does so in a way that guides and instructs his reader without ever preaching or sounding pedantic or sentimental. Indeed, it is Zulauf's light touch and sophisticated use of humor and ironic distance when dealing with the most serious and profound subjects that readers have come to love about his poetry in general, and these talents are clearly on display at their height in this book.

The early poems reveal an existentialist angst involved in resurrecting memories, fishing for deep meaning in them, desperately trying to catch and hold them, and reluctantly releasing them back into the unyielding current. In both "Studebaker" and "Fathers, Sons, Canoes," Zulauf begins by exquisitely conjuring boyhood memories of fishing trips with dad and friends: along with the speaker, we "[watch] the sun disappear / Over Pennsylvania and darken / The river with mountains" and breathe deep "Steak and smoke smells / Mixed with loosening spring." But just as we begin to bask in the shared memory, Zulauf changes course and introduces a dark existentialist undercurrent: the human frustration at being pulled along and ultimately down by time: in "Studebaker," despite the father's advice ("When in doubt / Go straight down the middle, / You'd say, straight down the years"), we can't escape. Ultimately, "All the friends [slip] into the rivers, / [Wash] down the

undertow to make / The silt of Heaven,” and we are left to “absurdly cling to fragments.” In “Fathers, Sons, Canoes,” Zulauf introduces the undercurrent in the form of a photo he remembers taking of the idyllic fishing trip. Upon closer inspection, however, he discovers his father’s hidden frustration (reminiscent of Theodore Roethke at his finest):

My dad standing there  
Clenched teeth, clenched hair,  
Clenched left fist,  
Nervous for us all  
And only now I see  
his flooding anger  
His fear at wasted time  
And he unable to control it ...

The sentiment is echoed in “Frank’s,” Zulauf’s lyric memory of taking his wheelchair-bound grandfather for his usual haircut. After evoking the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the barber shop and its memorable characters, “Singing razor strops & scissor snips / Mingling with pluming / Small talk and cigars...,” we are left with the jarring image of “That faded barber pole outside / Spinning away, signifying nothing”-an allusion to Shakespeare’s musing on the transience and seeming futility of life in *Macbeth*.

Behind the existentialist anxiety, however, Zulauf’s poems also subtly reflect on the truth that time is itself a construct of human consciousness, and he suggests that we have a responsibility to make meaning of time. In “Our House Faced West,” Zulauf reminisces on the house where he grew up-the house where life came into being (the parents’ bedroom where his sister was conceived) and the house where life departed (the dream his dying mother had of being stuck in his bedroom closet, half in and half out of this world). Although Zulauf complains that “nobody anywhere will ever / Care about that house, that room...,” he wryly makes this assertion in a poem in which he infuses the house with life and meaning and shares this house with all of its meaning with each of his readers. Ironically, the west-facing house does not die, but lives on for both poet and reader. In the same light, “Where Time Goes” takes us on a tour through a series of family photos, and after conjuring the memories and lives, Zulauf reflects that the photos

Will be thrown away and everything  
Very priceless will be as unseen  
As the earth miles beneath you, dark  
As the fathomless space between  
Three bright stars,  
All the love shed,  
The hearts silent.

And yet, one should not overlook the ironic distance with which Zulauf treats his subject. This distancing, together with the fact that once again the pictures and memories live on in the poem and in the reader's experience, introduces a subtle humor to Zulauf's poems that not only saves them from sentimentalism, but also defines his philosophy on the human perception of time and our obligation to make and continue to make meaning.

Zulauf's humor is not limited to the subtle and philosophical, however. In fact, he can be downright bawdy. "Mercy" is a memory of the speaker as a young man who lets us in on his story of getting to second base with the knockout of a girl next door while her parents are away. Her name? In case you haven't guessed, the poem's conclusion brings the joke home: "Mercy! Mercy! Mercy! / Her softness, her blonde hair, / The flowers of her bra / in my right hand." Similarly, "1954" takes us back to the speaker's youth when his Aunt Ethel (mimicking Ethel Merman) exploited her young nephew's awkward adolescence by pressing him to her 50D chest and bellowing "How do ya like those milk-shakers, honey?" Although this poem ends with an image of death, the emphasis here (as in "Mercy") is on life and its celebration—its vivacity, fullness, sensuousness. Death may have the last word, but it's only a whisper, drowned out by Aunt Ethel's singing!

Zulauf brings our belly laughs up to a more reflective sort of chuckle when he turns his humor to more serious subjects, such as metaphysics. In "Uncertainty," the reflection and philosophizing are playful as the speaker applies Heisenberg's uncertainty principle to theology. The juxtaposition of the sign with the Rector's name (the Rev. Dr. Jane Tomaine) next to church parking reserved for Ritz Diner customers introduces an element of absurdity, which is then taken to a more philosophical musing as the speaker playfully wonders "whether God is / Uncertain about us, / Whether everybody / Who looks at God / And claims to see God / Changes God, / Makes God / Uncertain / To



everybody else.” Even “Elegy for Wally,” one of Zulauf’s funniest poems, after eliciting the belly laugh over the antics of a demonic pet bird, gets the reader to then say “Hmmm:” Biting our toes, our ankles, / Drawing blood on days nobody’d / Give a thought to death at all, / Only killing.”

By the end of the book, Zulauf seems to make his peace with time and grows more comfortable with the transience and uncertainty of human existence. One place he goes to find this comfort is in great poets who have passed on (but whose words remain). In “A Mickle Street Sunset,” the speaker is Walt Whitman in his last days living in Camden, NJ. Whitman tells us that he too, like Zulauf and the rest of us, struggled with the passage of time, mortality, love, suffering, war. After his share of suffering, however, Whitman tells us that he came upon the profound realization that “...this body is no prison, / But a vehicle, a means, a transporter / From one reality to another. / And in between, the best of us / Is a dream.” Zulauf seems to find strength and comfort in the wisdom and philosophy of the wise old bard, emphasized all the more by the fact that he takes on Whitman’s voice and persona. Similarly, in “Your Chair in Misquamicut,” Zulauf draws strength from James Wright’s chair, which acts as a kind of talisman uniting the speaker (and reader) to Wright’s vision of nature and a “Poetry strong enough to hold us / Throughout this lifetime’s / Sacrament of praise.” In “Marantha,” it is the exuberance of the poet and literary theorist Kenneth Burke that sustains Zulauf, Burke having lived a full life to age 96 without ever losing his passion for language and conversation, attributing his long life to “Wanting to have the last word.” Zulauf prays that Burke’s “conversation with the ‘Big Shot’ / Never ends.”

The last two poems of the book show where time has led Zulauf: to an acceptance of, and love for, the limitations of human life. In “The Harvesters,” he reflects on Bruegel’s magnificent painting of field workers, evoking the simple pleasure and beauty of their work. One field worker, “Understands the inevitable necessary labor, / Understands the wisdom of seeing it through, / Understands this work for the wholesome loaves / That will come fresh and warm to the table in winter.” In “At the End of Kaua’i,” Zulauf celebrates the beauty of the flow of time and life coming into being and passing away—all captured perfectly in the shimmering image of a school of fish. Here, the form mirrors the content with alternating line lengths and positions conjuring the iridescent shoal. With the images in these final poems, Zulauf

seems to remind readers that he is satisfied with his crop, and his catch, of memories. Their presence is enough: they are there for him to catch, and to catch him and take him where they will. These poems arise from both voluntary and involuntary memories, the latter triggered by a photo, a friend's chair, the scent of honeysuckle. Proust would be proud.

*Where Time Goes* is a magnificent work of poetry chronicling one poet's coming to terms with the passage of time. There are levels and depths of meaning and wisdom in these poems to satisfy newcomers to poetry as well as veteran readers and poets. The book is not only philosophical but lyrical and deeply human in its characters, images, music, lamentations and, of course, its humor. Dryad Press, based in Washington D.C., does the poetry justice with a sturdy 70-pound text and 80-pound cover stock; a readable and professional layout; and beautiful Imagist cover illustration. Very highly recommended.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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MATHEW SPANO

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