

# **the** REBEL magazine

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EAST CAROLINA COLLEGE, GREENVILLE, N. C.

FALL 1963



## About Our Contributors

**Bernice Kelly Harris** is a noted North Carolina novelist. Our interview with her was conducted at her home in Seaboard, N. C. The questions were made up by our staff.

**Sue Ellen Bridgers** was once Associate Editor of the REBEL. She was recently married to Ben Bridgers, a former contributor to the REBEL. Sue's short story in this issue is her third appearance in the magazine. Marital bliss has not interfered with her creativity.

**Bud Wall** is not a regular member of the staff. We have enough trouble as it is. Bud is a senior from Monroe, N. C. His work has appeared in shows and galleries throughout the country.

**Pat Reynolds Willis, B. Tolson Willis, and Sanford L. Peele** are members of the Greenville Poetry Group. Mrs. Willis is married to B. Tolson Willis, who has a moustache. Sanford L. Peele is unmarried and has a beard. They are frequent contributors to the REBEL.

**William H. Grate** is a member of the English faculty. His book review in this issue marks his first appearance in the REBEL.

**Dwight Pierce and Fay Nelson** are members of the staff. Dwight has had poetry published in the past by the REBEL. This is Fay's first appearance.

Since art is an integral part of the REBEL, a few words should be said about our new art staff.

With this issue, **Duffy Toler** assumes the duties of Big Chief of the REBEL's art staff. He is assisted by **Ben Hill, Doug Latta, and Louis Jones**. Duffy deserves high commendation for his efforts on this first issue of the academic year.

**Louis Jones** begins his second year as a member of the art staff. Louis illustrated the short story, *Gentle Defender*.

**Doug Latta**, a transfer student from Mount Olive College, is a newcomer to the REBEL. The portrait of Bernice Kelly Harris was done by Doug.

**Ben Hill** drew the pen and ink illustration for the book review section. Ben, a senior from Kinston, N. C., is also a new member of the art staff.



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# EDITORIAL

Richard B. Sewell in his *Vision of Tragedy* states that the artist must have two postulates for his tragedy: man is free, free to choose, and evil is real, ever menacing and inevitable. These postulates only seem valid at a peak of civilization when dogmatic, static modes of thought produce a sophistication that mitigates the moral and ethical foundation of civilization. The resulting struggle so rends and warps the society that the bewilderment and inexplicability of the primitive view of "original terror" returns.

This is what the Negroes' civil rights movement has done to the South. But then the Southerner has always been at the limits of his possibilities finding his philosophies no longer effective in fighting the "original terror" of immediate and inimical destruction. This is what Faulkner capitalized on and other Southern writers who are able to mirror the South's people. This is the reason for the South's present dominance of the "American literary scene."

The Southern people are daily confronted by their annihilation. It is the problem of physical welfare. It is the problem of living with other people. It is the problem of preserving heritage so that each generation will not have to start all over again. It is the problem of trying to live instead of just exist. It is the problem of ascertaining the value, purpose, and best form of government. It is the problem of anti-social behavior and how to deal with it. It is the problem of the proper use of natural resources. It is the problem of the proper use of knowledge. It is the problem of Why are we here, Whence did we come, and Whither are we going.

The "sophistication" of the new South has mitigated the moral and ethical foundation of

American civilization. It was not meant to. The Southern Middle Class saw their nation after the Civil War and Reconstruction in debt, financially and intellectually impoverished, politically corrupt, and suffering from an inferiority complex. They set about to "redeem" their land and in doing so these merchant-industrialist redeemers fixed the modern South's patterns of race, politics, economics, and law—the "white man's burden," minority rule through "court house rings," the dollar is god and how to get it is the religion, and the caste system.

These are also the patterns that the Southerner is no longer finding effective in the confrontation of his problems. There is a perceptible alteration in the "sophistication" of the New South. North Carolina is faced with statistics such as an estimated 5,000,000 population by 1967-68; only 32 percent of North Carolinians over 25 have a high school education; in 1960 the per capita income for the state was \$1,574 while for the United States it was \$2,223; 25 percent of all North Carolinians live on farms and only 8.6 percent of these farms have an annual gross sale of \$10,000 or more (the national average is 21.5 percent). The state has prepared itself for these social responsibilities with the North Carolina Fund.

Yet "sophistication" and tragedy still remain. It can be the story of a mother whose child goes to an over-crowded under-staffed junior high school while nine blocks away there is a partially completed stadium worth \$35,000 built from voluntary donations collected by a committee of eight respected businessmen. Or it can be the story of the child. Or it can be the story of the eight respected businessmen.



In 1939 the University of North Carolina Press published its first non-fiction book. That same year the Mayflower Society awarded its cup for the best published book by a North Carolinian, for the first time, to a woman author. In both instances the book was the novel *Purslane* and the author was Bernice Kelly Harris. Since then she has had six novels published by Doubleday and Company. Doubleday will publish a seventh, *Santa on the Mantle*, this Christmas season. Also next year the University of North Carolina Press recalling its event of a quarter century ago will publish a book of Mrs. Harris' reminiscences, *Southern Savor*.

Mrs. Harris lives in Seaboard, North Carolina where she taught public school for many years. She is now teaching a creative writing course at Chowan College.



## *Interview with*

# BERNICE KELLY HARRIS

**Question:** How did you come to know the rural class of people?

**Answer:** I grew up in a country community in Wake County—an unusual country community that produced some great people. One was an ambassador to Germany (there's a marker in the community to him). It produced religious leaders, leaders in education, doctors, and one writer that I know about. I knew the people; they were the salt of the earth.

Gerald Johnson in reviewing *Purslane*, which depicted country life, headed his review in the *New York Herald Tribune* "Hilarity among the Sharecroppers". Of course Gerald Johnson knew my small farmers were not sharecroppers. But in that decade so many novels were concerned with the down-trodden, the despairing, the depressed farming people of the South that the reviewer used that surprising heading—the surprise word "hilarity" to suggest that happiness and contentment are found among farm people; that was be-



ing overlooked in that particular decade. Then, of course, I have known Northampton people; I've known the small farmers and the landlords of big plantations who have had a great deal of land. I've known sharecroppers who've worked for them. I've heard their stories; I've had dozens of interviews that I have taken among the farming people, among them, the sharecroppers. So I feel that I have known the people that I write about.

Do we ever really know people, though? There was a poem. I can't think of the author, but it was a recent poem in a magazine that asked that question or, rather, suggested this. (I'm paraphrasing.)

Always we walk among unknown people, guessing them. And sometimes there is a pulse that pounds in a rage of recognition, so that we come to know the people we guess as somewhere ourselves.

There is established this identification with these unknown people that we walk among, guessing them. In other words, there is mystery in people, and I have just said, "I know the people I write about." But do I, really? I have perceived something about them, and I have recorded that perception, illuminated it, I hope.

*Question: In Bernice Kelly Harris: Storyteller of Eastern Carolina by Richard Walser, you have said that you have never completely created a character. Do you transplant them from their original situations, or do you leave them in the same situation in which you find them?*

*Answer:* I transplant them, if that seems to be indicated. I was called a storyteller of Eastern Carolina, but I never have felt that I was much of a storyteller. My concern was with people, and I put them in some kind of story. But in the sense of plot complication and situation, I have never felt that I had strength in that respect. I do think that I have interpreted people. I have given meaning and significance to those facets of character that I have perceived.

For instance, there is this character, Caroline, who has been called memorable. She has been used in two novels and a play. This was an insignificant little woman, illiterate, who had an aspiration, a very lowly one, it seems. The ambition of her life was to live among landed people and have a grave among them after she died. For that she worked, she slaved—she was truly a voluntary slave. No one wanted her to work the way she did, but she was working for a cause, for an identity of a sort. She was a homeless little woman,

and the Black Beast of her life was the Poorhouse (as it was called in those days). She was willing to do anything to keep from being sent there. But her ways were not tolerable to the people among whom she lived. Finally places gave out, and she was sent to the County Home. There she found an identity. That had been in her struggle all the way along, though it never was really defined or understood. She became "Miss Caroline", this little woman who always had been just "Ca'line" among old and young. When she left the people at the County Home to visit among her former employers, she told them that she would be back soon. They would say, "Hurry back, Miss Caroline. We shall miss you." She became restless, even among the landed employers that she had formerly served, and finally said that she had to go back home. Home for her was being Miss Caroline, being missed. So the people felt that she had rejected them, and one woman expressed it, "Ca'line's gone off to the Poorhouse and got the big head." And a big head it was—the same kind of big head that every person has who has longed for an identity and finally gets it.

There are many people like this that I could name. Sounds a little presumptuous, a little pompous to be naming my book characters, but they were drawn from life. And your original question was: Did I "... transplant them from their original situations..."? Many of them remained in their situation, and a story was contrived or developed which fitted their situation or fitted their character, as perceived.

There are areas in people unexplored, just as there are areas in space; and they mystify us. We don't know why. We have to assign motivation sometimes. I'm thinking of one of my characters drawn from a person in real life. He was a man who had a strange compulsion to feud with his neighbors even when there was nothing to feud over. He had to fall out with people, and after that he had orgies of making up. The neighbors were mystified. Why did he do it? Then during these orgies of making up, he gave such extravagant gifts that they were afraid they would boomerang and give him something else to fall out about. The manner of his death was no less mystifying than that of his living. He drank laudanum, and the only clue they had to his manner of death was his exclamation repeated over and over as his neighbors walked him, trying to keep him awake. Before he settled into his last sleep he said, "Leave me alone. Just leave me alone. I want to sleep a thousand years." They carved on his tombstone the words: "Must Jesus



bear the cross alone and all the world go free. No, there's a cross for everyone, there's a cross for me." It's in the cemetery in the country churchyard at the old neighborhood in which I grew up. The neighbors realized there was some cross, there was something they called a cross, some strangeness about him. And we assign motivations. Perhaps it's presumptuous, but we have to perceive and interpret and then assign motivations for what they do. And so his motivation was not assigned to him, but to a young man that I had in the first novel who drank laudanum, and the motivation is clear in this case.

**Question: Why do you write?**

**Answer:** I expect my answer is that of other writers—"I don't know." I do know that I was impelled—I always wanted to write. There was nothing in my background to prompt it. Actually, when I was a little girl, novels were not in very good repute among the good people. And that did not mean just the trashy kind. We had some; we had some trash that we passed around among one another. I used to order Mary J. Holmes' novels for seven cents a copy. But at the same time I was reading Dickens and Scott and Eliot. But novels were not in such good repute. And I wanted to write one. I wrote a novel when I was eleven years old. It filled a whole tabet full of words, but it was poor stuff. A cousin of mine who was my agent (we were eleven and twelve) asked a State College professor (it was A & M then) to read it. He commented about the youth of the writer. That's all he had to say. That's about all he could say. It was terrible stuff. But I wanted to write good novels.

When I became a teacher I transferred my ambition, or my desire to write—I don't think it was ambition—to producing a writer from among my students. (That's one of the reasons that I am trying to do a creative writing course over at Chowan College. I did one a semester last year, and I discovered some talent. I'm still interested in discovering writers.) So that lasted until the 1930's, and I tried after I stopped teaching to organize a group of women who might write a play (my interest at the time). But I was unable to get too much out of the community women. I wrote some plays. One of the community plays was bought by Samuel French, incidentally. Then I started writing myself and the first part of the 1930's I wrote plays. But the characters that I had in these plays called for more treatment than I could give them in the one-act plays. So I wrote *Purslane*, which depicted the people that I had

known when I was growing up—something of their fineness, of the salt of the earth that they really were.

I am thinking of the woman at seventy-six who joined an adult illiteracy class, and who learned to read the twenty-third psalm, which was the ambition of her life. I heard her read it one afternoon. There was a great deal of militancy in her reading, as there was in her living. Her philosophy of life was not to make a mess of living or of dying. Though that is stated negatively, she lived it affirmatively. When the time came for her to go, she made her own preparations. She did not want to bother neighbors. She knew that her time was at hand. So she dressed herself as she wanted to be buried, and sat in a chair waiting for death as for company. She's buried not very far from here. And that woman—her militant living—has been helpful sometimes when I was hesitant about things. There have been many people like her that I could bring to mind. She's one.

So I believe that people have impelled me more than any other one thing. I've never known any outstanding dramatic happening to prompt me particularly. But I have known dramatic people, to me they were dramatic. I believe that most writers have something of that impelling.

**Question: How do you teach creative writing?**

**Answer:** I noticed that Reynolds Price suggested in his interview in the *Rebel* that in creative writing courses the most important thing is to read. I couldn't agree more with him in that respect. I enjoy reading the North Carolina writers at present. I think we have a wealth of writers in North Carolina. We have, each year, a writers' conference. I think when we come together we realize just what literary vitality there is in North Carolina. And of course your own professor at East Carolina will remain among my favorite authors—American authors; I don't mean North Carolina writers, I mean American. He's a true artist. That is true of others in North Carolina, too. I have a great many favorites. And it would be difficult, really, though it would be helpful, I know, for me to specify just who maybe influenced me. To tell you the truth, they are somewhat out of style—Dickens, Scott, and Eliot. When I was a child I read them, along with Mary J. Holmes. They have influenced me to this extent—they made me want to read, love to read. And reading is a great part . . .

I was interested, too, in Mr. Price's statement that to call it creative writing is a little pompous. It is hard to name. It is hard to give a name for



what we try to do in these courses. We don't teach, that is clear. We don't attempt to teach when we are conducting a course, but the most important thing is to create a climate of appreciation for the ideas that the young people have, to encourage them to develop these ideas. That's the most that we can do. If I had had this when I was young, how wonderful it would have been, I think. Someone who was interested in my ideas. They weren't very important then, but they may have been shaped toward importance.

I had a course at Meredith College that was organized for three students who wanted to write. But we read, and our only writing was an impression of the things that we read—not that we wrote anything creative, as we call it. But we wrote a sort of theme on the work. Mine was O. Henry—and now he is out of style, too!

**Question:** How have you overcome the problem of articulately expressing the inarticulate character? Or maybe it is not so much articulate expression as articulate perception.

**Answer:** By selecting significant details and by selecting something of the philosophies of life found among the inarticulate. That sounds like a big word to apply to these insignificant people. (No one is insignificant, however.) But they do have a philosophy of life, and they express it in words which are not always used by the articulate, but they are able to say a great deal that is inspiring to the person who perceives what they are trying to say.

I listened to the rural people talk. Accuracy was no virtue on the part of the writer at all—faithfulness to the dialect, that is, the idiom of people. For many times I jotted down notes as they talked and recorded their manner of talk. Some of their expressions (these are incidental, really) help to portray the circumstances of their living. They do not have anything to do with the human qualities of the people. They are outside, they are external, but they help in the realization of persons.

**Question:** Do you consider yourself a local color writer?

**Answer:** You spoke a minute ago about the *Storyteller of Eastern Carolina*. Eastern Carolina happens to be the locale, but I have hoped that there is a universality in my people that does not confine them to a certain locale. (That is except, as I said, these external things like the manner of their talk, their customs.)

I had an intimation of universality when I looked at the jacket cover of the first novel, *Purslane*. On the jacket that was sketched for the University of North Carolina Press there is pictured a Wake County farmer with a hoe. And in the background there is the farm woman. Robin Darwin, who incidentally is the great grandson of Charles Darwin, drew the jacket sketch for the English edition. He pictured the same people, but in English dress. The English would understand these rural people. They'd understand them, particularly because the man in the foreground of Darwin's sketch, who is supposed to be Uncle Israel of Wake County, is John Bull—the epitome of John Bull for the English people. And as we look at it we see that these external differences have nothing to do with the human qualities that are portrayed.

I was interested in that observation, also in the fact that a reviewer of *Janey Jeems* in New York wrote that she had spent two hours one summer afternoon in the Blue Ridge mountains of North Carolina. She wondered, as she looked at these mountain people, what they were like, what their manner of life was, how they talked. "Now," she said in the review, "I know because I have read *Janey Jeems*." *Janey Jeems* happened to be a story about two lovable Negro characters who had aspirations. They were of landless generations, and they were of slave ancestry, as is stated in the book. They translated their aspirations into white steeples to worship under and into what they called title deed land to pass on from generation to generation. At first I was disconcerted by the reference to my Eastern North Carolina characters who live near Elizabeth City in the cotton and peanut country—I was disconcerted that they were placed in the mountains. And then I thought, "Well, I've made the point after all. These human qualities could be placed anywhere, among people anywhere." And I believe that has bearing on the universality that I said I hoped my people have. Then there was a writer in New Zealand who chose the very same title that I did the same year, or about the same year. I never would have known about it, but he happened to see a review of *Sweet Beulah Land* in some papers that were brought there, he said, by United States Marines. So he wrote me, telling me about his work. I have a copy in my bookcase upstairs. He called it *Sweet Beulah Land*, and it was about the rural people of New Zealand. He said that though there are differences, of course, there is a striking similarity in those human qualities that I wrote about in my *Beulah Land*.



**Question:** Would you say that the strength and greatness of the Southern literature lies in its portrayal of rural areas and rural people? Would urbanization destroy the South's literary output?

**Answer:** I believe that as long as there are people, changes such as from agrarianism to urbanization are not going to destroy the interesting aspects of living. Human relationships remain. They suggest stories. Stories come out of these. So urbanization is not going to destroy the literary output as long as there are people, and people aren't going out of style. They will continue to interest and prompt perceptive persons to write and record their qualities and the triumphs of spirit that are to be seen.

There was a little old woman here who used to peddle garden produce, and that was at a time when other people were going on relief. But she preferred to peddle butter beans and blackberries, just as the peddlers, in days when I was a child, peddled their goods. She peddled her sacks of garden produce; and when her sales were inadequate to pay the rent on her little shack, she was evicted. (That was the story of the 1930's, when so many evictions occurred. People had to take up residence in—well, in churches sometimes. I wrote a play about a family that did take up residence in a church after eviction.) She set up housekeeping alongside a highway right out from town. What an open house she had. It was all in good humor, good spirit. The vitality of people will not change under urbanization. And that is fast coming, because the people of *Sweet Beulah Land* are so different in Northampton County now. The sharecroppers that were so prevalent then—landlords who had twelve, now have two or three. That has changed so greatly. But in what-

ever circumstances of living they find themselves, there is a story about people.

I read a story not long ago about the time when there would be a world of concrete and steel. One marmalade tree was left on earth—just one tree. And the town fathers wanted to uproot it. It was a tourist attraction, but they could not spare the spot of earth. It all had to be concrete. But one person loved earth enough to plant and guard and cherish a little shrub, a tree. As for me, I have a sense of the land and I can't imagine how it would be to a writer without it. But then Carl Sandburg in his poetry, of course, interprets the industrial. And so there's poetry in steel and concrete. There are stories of people who are going to be in a world of steel and concrete. They will be different from the stories of the land, but there will be stories, I believe.

**Question:** Politicians and newspapermen are describing the "New South". What is the "New South" that you see?

**Answer:** The New South that I see has to do with the change from an agrarian to an industrial South and even more to a change in people's thinking. Writers will be affected by the change in manner of living and of thinking. They will not have the South of Thomas Nelson Page. But they will have people—people with aspirations different from title-deed land to pass on from generation to generation, but with aspirations even in a world of concrete and steel, with frustrations and with crosses to bear, with something of mystery in them, with triumphant spirit. Yes, we're changing our thinking and our customs. We wouldn't go back. I wouldn't go back. Sometimes we love to reminisce about the good old days, but I like the days that we're living in.



# THE NAMES AND FACES OF HEROES:

## A POINT OF VIEW

By

Pat Reynolds Willis

As too often happens, a second book is discussed and reviewed in terms of the excellence and stylistic accomplishments of its predecessor. This critical timidity usually presupposes a prophetic quality in the first work; too often it becomes a sort of soothsayer forecasting critical acclaim or damnation for the second attempt in which the writer must, with some Herculean effort, surpass himself. In the case of Reynolds Price's *The Names and Faces of Heroes*, a book of short stories, we have found too many reviewers touching lightly on the stories; or obviously waiting for another novel; they recall the art and excellence of *A Long and Happy Life* conjoined with only a smattering of critical interpretation of the various stories to be found in the writer's latest offering.

This singular fault may be attributed to the contemporary opinion of the novel as the pinnacle of prestige and money making; even the best story writer is often forced to grind out periodically a

novel for the edification of his publishers and the public. Mr. Price, although in all probability not a victim of this particular demand, has been unworthily used by some reviewers who are seemingly novel-crazed and cannot put aside for a moment their obsession, in order to interpret fully works of art in a legitimate medium. In short, a few stories included in *The Names and Faces of Heroes*, even more strongly than *A Long and Happy Life*, indicate that Reynolds Price will take his place among the giants of contemporary fiction. In at least two of the stories, Price has not only revealed a mastery of the traditional form but also has managed structural innovations usually reserved for much longer works.

In order to attempt even to approach a just examination of *The Names and Faces of Heroes*, this observer feels it necessary to approach each story individually; for the short story must be



taken as an artistic entity, and no amount of groupings according to theme, situation, style, etc., can justify a "book" review when obviously unity results only through the fact of binding. Even the thematic quest for heroism found in Price's stories only loosely binds these separate works together.

The two stories that are easily the most ingenious indicators of Price's future stature as a writer are "Troubled Sleep" and "The Names and Faces of Heroes." The latter is perhaps also the best and most moving story in the book. Both stories make a rather peculiar and successful use of the I-narrator as two persons: one, the actual boy participant in the story; and second, the mature man who, revealing and telling, finds insight that may be gained only in recollection. In both stories, the first is a boy, perhaps in early puberty, and the second is the boy matured to man who recalls. In each there is also a merging of past and present, so that the awareness of the man is found in the patches of light and shadow of the boy's perception.

"Troubled Sleep" is a relatively simple story of a boy and his hero cousin, Falcon Rodwell, who learn of love after a quarrel, by the light of the moon, and in the adolescent worship of a life in death. There is indeed in this story the lack of articulation that Rosacoke Mustian, in *A Long and Happy Life*, suffered from. But this is finally alleviated through a spiritual and physical touching, a thing so delicate that the boys in their proper ages cannot fully realize. This joining is particularly evidenced in the boy narrator's dream of Falc on the raft and in the mature narrator's evaluation that "he (Falc) turned just his eyes toward the sound of his old name, but they looked straight through me and on past as if I had never come at all this way to join him." And at last the two boys are spiritually joined when "I turned towards him and—not knowing what it was to be Falc—I laid my arm on his chest which was the part of him in the light, and sometime—sleeping, I think—he took my hand."

In the title story, the narrator relives for a moment a time and incident when, as a boy, he understood without knowing it the conception of hero. There is in this story a curiously surrealistic quality that casts the light of a child's incomprehension and distortion over his father, so that this parental symbol of religion, manhood, and love is revealed through a montage of times and places to produce a man's pattern of life and hero. The boy, the participant, is unaware, but the man, the recaller, has found in the boy's sight and hear-

ing an insight into the father. It is this timeless awareness that gleans from the boy's participation and the man's recollections a hero stronger than the father in life because late realized. Heroes finally are not made by war or by personal bravery, as the boy thought; they emerge from knowledge and love, as the man discovered.

As in the first story, the realization comes only after both sensual and spiritual revelation, for in both stories the ideal and/or the perception must be firmly grounded in the body; and exploration must be complete and comprehended before the coming of insight and maturity. And in these stories, insight comes with a merging of the then and now; past must be present; present, past before a full understanding is attained. Technically, these are the most exciting stories in the book; but in "The Names and Faces of Heroes," technique and subject matter are so married as to produce as fine a short story as any this observer has read.

In a similar vein is "Michael Egerton," a hero much like Falcon Rodwell of "Troubled Sleep," but here the hero labors under the burden of a broken home and a new father to replace one he is not ready to replace. Yet this story is so weighted with stock situations and stock reactions that it becomes hardly more than a rather objective variation on a theme which has, unfortunately, too few variables to explore. Unlike the other two stories, "Michael Egerton" has no intricacy of presentation—which is definitely needed—and there is little in the story except the wonderful fluidity of rhythm that is characteristic of Price's style. Michael Egerton, like the others, is belatedly recognized as hero, but one wonders why it should matter since the narrator, although aware, is apparently not moved.

Another hero, indeed and recognizably so, is Uncle Grant in the piece of the same name. But unfortunately, this piece is not a story—only a sketch—and it became little more than an autobiographical reminiscence which, interestingly enough, reveals the writer, his family, and all the personal particulars which the public seemingly likes to know. There is here a similarity, and perhaps this similarity is justification enough to include a sketch in a book of short stories; the writer, like the mature man, finds through recollection a man worthy of respect and admiration. He finds that the man whom he had assisted in a somewhat hurried theology of salvation had been the winner after all. But other than this similarity of theme, "Uncle Grant" is a sketch which perhaps the followers of Mr. Price will enjoy for



the specifics of names and places, times and events that must have been meaningful to the author.

The three remaining stories are for the most part competently written and one of them is quite a fine story in the traditional sense. All three reveal Price as a capable writer who knows his characters and region well. Again these are stories which involve personal perception into the matter of the heart, the matter of living and recognizing a meaningful association of ideal and reality. Each of these stories is concerned with an incident, a moment of knowing. In presentation of this moment, these stories are not unlike those previously discussed. But in technique and subject, they are decidedly in the vein of *A Long and Happy Life*.

In fact, the story, "A Chain of Love," has as its central character the familiar Rosacoke Mus-tian, still inarticulate but still sensitive to the living rhythms of those beloved and those perceived. Rosacoke, tending her hospitalized grandfather, finds in the death of a stranger and the vigil of his son a belated expression of her own inability to understand and, paradoxically, her own knowledge of a beauty that is finally life itself. Rosacoke's sorrow and her thwarted desire to express it finally erupt because "she hadn't ever told him (the stranger) of any of this kin—out loud—that she felt for them." This is Rosacoke's need and her sorrow, and even when she voiced it, safe within the confines of her grandfather's room, "her words hung in the room for a long time."

In spite of the delicate and sensitive treatment of Rosacoke's growing awareness, the story itself is a little long in getting started. Perhaps the early details regarding the grandfather, the other members of the family, the trip to Raleigh, etc., are useful in building character. But they are also a little aimless and somewhat misleading, since it is hard to determine just how these details pertain to the situation at hand. The story, however, once it gets started is moving and is a highly competent unfolding of an inarticulate sensitivity.

The two remaining stories, to this observer, have a bit of the quality of tone and atmosphere that so characterizes many of the stories of Eudora Welty. "The Anniversary" is in scene and character not unlike Miss Welty's "Asphodel," and "The Warrior Princess Ozimba" is somewhat reminiscent of Miss Welty's "A Worn Path." The first again concerns a look into the past; this time an old maid reveals the story to a Negro child while they take flowers to the grave of her fiancé.

Here the moving incident is that which occurred in the past, but the knowledge is not so much in the mind of the narrator as it is in that of the boy who listens but who knows the story from others. Here, as in "The Warrior Princess Ozimba," Price is successful in straight narration; and in the spells of silence between the threads of story, the writer completely infuses place and tone with theme.

This Welty-like infusion of the place and tone is very capably presented in "The Warrior Princess Ozimba," clearly one of the best stories in the book. Here again we have a visit to the past, the past in the form of Ozimba—old and blind and confusing all chronology into the here and now. The narrator's bringing of the 4th of July gift of tennis shoes to Ozimba is merely the impetus of the old Negro woman's excursion into the realities of time; and in this confusion of the narrator with those who gifted before him, the reader may find a beauty and a knowing that would have been impossible to conceive had it not been for Ozimba. The unperceived knowing of Ozimba somehow becomes a known truth for both her and the narrator when she, without sight, re-sees birds in chimneys across the road from her cabin. The narrator says

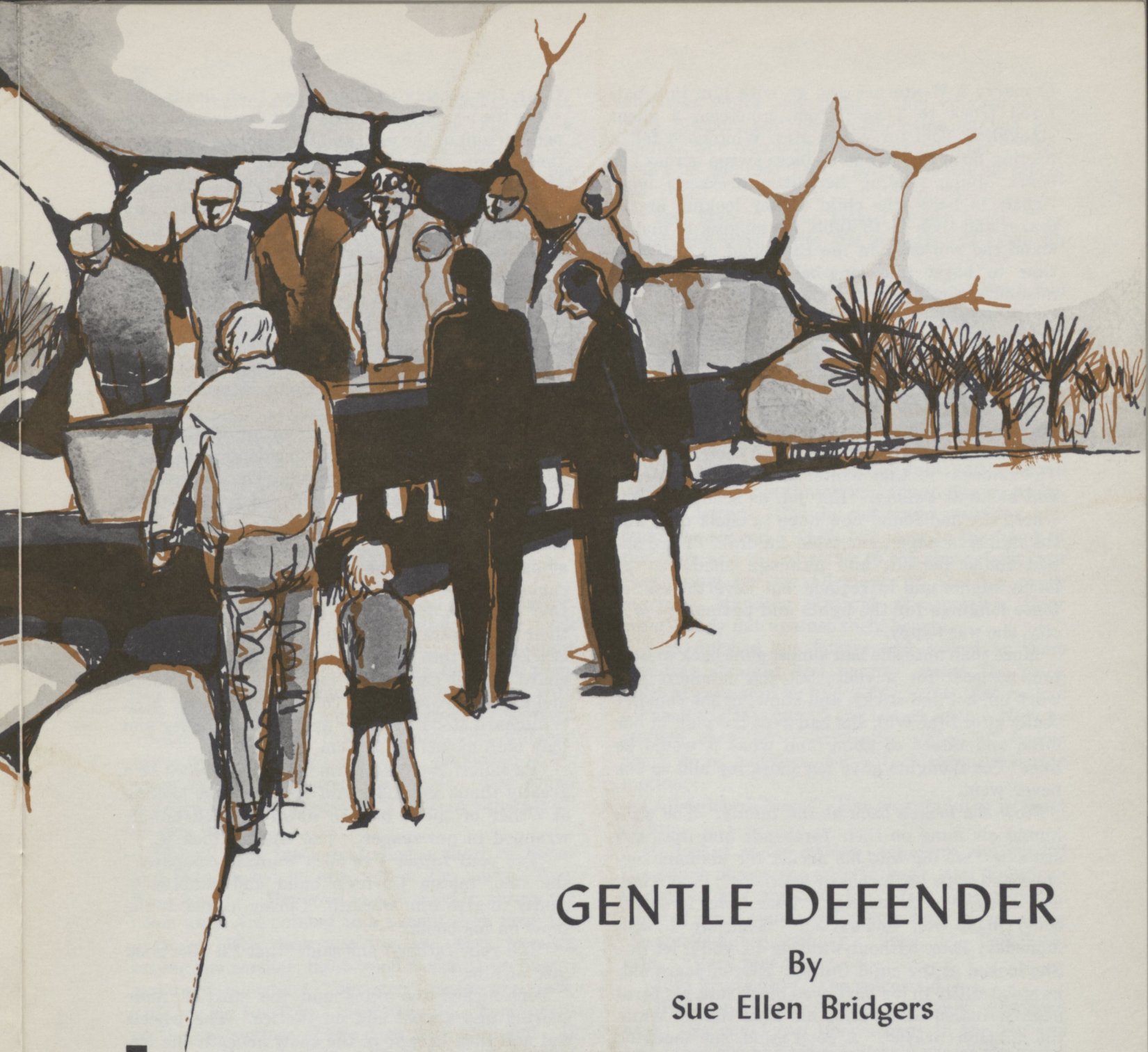
I looked without a word to where her open eyes rested across the road, to the darkening field and the two chimneys, and yes, they were there, going off against the evening like out of pistols, hard dark bullets that arched dark on the sky and curled and showered to the sturdy trees beneath.

Reynolds Price's main talent may be stated simply as a knack for telling a good story. This is the most important characteristic of the competent writer of fiction. All of these stories, even the less successful ones, exhibit that quality. And Price's ease of rhythm, his simplicity of language, and his almost tender tone toward his subject matter combine with this story-telling talent to produce a method of presentation that is gratifying and even exhilarating. Price's narrative technique, as exemplified in "Troubled Sleep" and "The Names and Faces of Heroes," is early indicative of a man who knows his craft and, at the same time, is not afraid to depart from the "safe and proven" types. It may well be that here, as the craftsman, Price will take his stand in American fiction. But it is Price's insight into and his sensitivity toward human relationships and their importance that lingers in the mind of the reader after style and technique have been put aside with the closed book.









## GENTLE DEFENDER

By

Sue Ellen Bridgers

**F**rom a distance, as Madge Whitchard moved down the road, the people gathered about the open grave were like tiny clusters of black insects hovering in the summer heat. As she grew closer the forms separated, and she shaded her eyes against the sun to distinguish the figures—the Etheridges close together on one side, the minister standing straight at the head of the grave, his Bible open in his hand, and then the others, their heads bent and their hands folded across their stomachs. Mrs. Whitchard came to the edge of the huddle of townspeople and stopped. She had

not wanted to come and now could not make herself go closer to the casket and the mound of soft dirt. It was too soon since she had stood close looking down into the grave of her husband—too soon and yet four winters ago. Forever would be too soon.

“... and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Yes, the way of peace. She looked at the family. Mr. Etheridge wiping his eyes at the memories of his life with the woman; their children—Mattie, twenty-one and lean like her mother, destined



to marry a Westerner and go with him in a battered truck to Texas; Tom, nineteen, a silent struggling Tom for whom Mrs. Whitchart felt a fleeting flood of joy and sadness sweep across her heart; Julia, holding her little brother's hand tightly in hers—the child Curley looking at the casket and then up to Julia, his longing to understand the works from the Bible and at the same time to burst into long-held tears full of his misunderstanding heavy on his face.

"... from dust to dust..." No, not dust to dust. From memory to memory, perhaps. Of the smiling lips of her husband on their wedding day. Of their trip from Boston to North Carolina full of expectancy and happiness. Of their joy in the big house all alone waiting hopefully to fill it with babies and even greater joy. And then his death. The coldness of that winter that left her barren and alone at twenty. Her job as school teacher where she had found new hope in chalk dust and the minds of eager, excitable children. Here she had found herself, and although shadowed by lonely nights and infrequent but nevertheless intense longings for the lights and pavements of a city, she was happy.

More than once she had almost gone back to Boston, at least for a visit; but the summers had worn on, hot and sticky, and knowing she couldn't really afford the trip, she had kept the plan in her mind and talked of going and what it would be like. The thoughts gave her quiet joy and so she never went.

Now she looked back at the family. The still, humid air hung on their foreheads and lips, and she saw Tom dig into his pocket for his handkerchief and wipe his forehead hurriedly. Dear Tom, she thought for a moment. Dear Tom, if only I could make you understand. Someday I will. Someday, Tom, without wanting to, you'll let me. She looked at the child Curley. Eleven years old, he stood stiffly in his borrowed black suit, his forehead wrinkled as he shut his eyes tightly while the minister prayed. A good mind, she thought. They all have good minds. Julia, Tom, Curley... Tom perhaps better than the others. She couldn't be sure. It was four years ago, Tom. I was a widow at twenty and you were almost a man. That is why it happened, Tom—not because of us but because of the time. Oh, Tom, I *will* make you understand that there was no shame in it. No shame and no sorrow.

"But deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. A-men." The minister closed his Bible, and the men moved silently to cover the grave and strow the meadow flowers across the fresh dirt. The family stood

there, the longing in their faces, their heads bent, while the people moved around the grave and stopped in front of the man and the children to squeeze their damp hands and speak their names softly. Mrs. Whitchart turned to go. Matilda Etheridge is dead, she thought sadly. Dead and buried, and now our work lies before us. Even for me there is the work—the life-giving work.

"Boston is so far," she said later that afternoon to Mrs. Baldree, her neighbor, "and I doubt it's any cooler. I think I'll just stay here. There's only one more month before school starts."

"And it'll be cold 'fore you know it," Mrs. Baldree said from her porch. "Come November we'll have a hard frost."

So came November with its biting morning air and then Christmas vacation burdening the earth with heavy snow and cold wind. The air was still icy and the snow packed hard and frozen on the road when school started again in January. Tom Etheridge brought Curley in the wagon. They stopped in front of the school and Mrs. Whitchart came out to meet them. It had taken three or four hours to drive the five miles into town, and their faces were swollen and red and their voices cracked like thin ice when they spoke. Mrs. Whitchart helped Curley off the wagon. His hands and knees were so stiff he could hardly move. Mrs. Whitchart stood with her arm around Curley and they both looked up at Tom.

"Pa said if you'd keep 'im till the ice thaws he'd greatly thank yuh," he said and, without looking at either of them, handed down a small bundle wrapped in newspaper. The teacher took it.

"Tell your father I've been wanting company," she said, taking Curley's hand and rubbing it gently to give him warmth. Curley looked at the snow on his boots.

"Tell your father," she said, "that I'll take good care of him."

Tom flicked the reins and the startled mule snorted and almost slid on the ice. The wheels slid and then caught in the snow beneath the ice. The wagon screeched and then moved.

"Bye, Tom," Curley yelled. The wagon was moving faster. Tom's back was straight and thin, and the inside flap of his wool cap was pulled down inside his coat collar so that he seemed not to have a neck. He didn't turn when Curley called to him.

"Maybe he couldn't hear you," Mrs. Whitchart said when she looked down at the boy and saw tears like flakes of snow sticking to his cheeks. But she knew Tom had heard. She cuddled the child against her side and led him gently into the warmth of the schoolhouse.



Tom Etheridge had been late to school that first morning. He stood in the doorway, his hair a dark, tangled mass across his forehead, his big hands dug into the pockets of his dungarees, his head bent forward as if he had to stoop beneath the threshold. He had walked the five miles into town, across the barren cotton field, catching now and then a thin, brittle cotton stalk and pulling it up with one quick jerk. When he reached the road, he had walked on the far side from the fence and field, beneath the pine trees, and had moved slowly, brushing the dust from his shoes and the cuffs of his pants as he went. Now he stood in the doorway feeling his height and looking first for his eight-year-old brother Curley amidst the faces, then at the front of the room—the blackboard freshly washed and glowing with rich blackness, the teacher's desk on the platform, shining like the board and not yet soiled with sweaty fingerprints and spilled ink. The room was quiet, as if its cleanness commanded reverence.

"That's Tom," a voice said.

Tom looked at his shoes and then at the teacher. She was standing near the window, her back pressed against the window sill. Tom thought she was the prettiest woman he had ever seen. She smiled, and her face was suddenly alive with tiny creases at her mouth and eyes. She went toward the front of the room and Tom watched her skirt move against her legs. He looked at his shoes again and cleared his throat. The sound growled and then cracked. "I'm Tom Etheridge," he said slowly.

"Tom." The teacher studied a sheet of paper and then looked at him. "Oh, I'm sorry, Tom. Find a seat." Her eyes moved quickly across the room until she pointed to a vacant desk near the window. The desk was big and dark looming among the smaller, light-wood desks like a heavy, awkward monster. Tom stood beside the desk. "It's too big for Tom," the voice said. Tom touched the flat surface of the desk with his hand. It was smooth and clean. Then he bent himself until he appeared folded and slipped into the seat, his body never touching the writing slab in front.

"I told 'ya," the voice said. "It's too big."

Tom slipped to one side as far as he could and looked at the vacant space beside him.

"You don't mind, do you, Tom?" the pretty teacher was saying.

"No, Ma'am."

"I really think you'll find it more comfortable," she said, smiling.

"Yes, Ma'm."

The teacher was standing in front of him. Her

skin was white and clean as his mama's milk-glass pitcher, and her words came clipped and gentle. She was holding a sheet of paper. "You aren't on the list, Tom. Did you come to school last year?"

"Yes, Ma'm." Tom looked at her hand. The fingernails were white and smooth. "I came till spring."

"I see." The teacher was nodding her head, and the brown curls piled high above her white forehead danced with the movement. "I've been having all the chil—pupils—write their names on the list Tom. I'd like you to write yours." The words were not demanding but seemed to tell him that writing out the letters was a wonderfully exciting thing to do.

With the paper in front of him and a pencil tight between his thumb and index finger, he began the letters. She did not stand watching him make the solemn T-O-M, but went to the front of the room and talked softly to the class about how they would say the allegiance to the flag every morning, standing straight at attention, their right hands flat against their hearts.

Tom finished the letters and looked at them standing straight and narrow across the page. Julia always said he had a fine print, that he had a knack for making all the letters even. Now he studied each letter critically. The "t" looked short, so he lengthened it with a slow, deliberate motion.

"All finished, Tom?" She was standing in front of him.

He looked at the letters once more and shoved the paper across the desk to her. She picked up the paper and glanced at it. Her eyes were the color of wood smoke rising in a hazy spiral above the smoke-house chimney. "Very nice, Tom," she said. "Very nice."

"Tom prints good," the voice said.

"Hush up, Curley," Tom muttered, his head bent. He could feel the vacancy in the air and knew that she had moved silently across the room.

"I'll be very proud when you can print like that, Curley," she said from the platform.

Tom looked at the books stacked carefully on his desk. None of them were puckered and ragged. He lifted down the top one and put his hand flat on the cover. He could feel the tiny threads worn through to the cardboard. Then he opened the book. *Learning Figures* he read from the first page. There was writing on the page done by a scribbling hand and a dull pencil. Tom found his eraser in his pocket and rubbed it against the page. The eraser was so small and rounded that



Tom could barely keep it in his fingers. He had had the eraser for many years, since he first came to school, and now he looked at the black smudges where he had used it on the page. "Ain't worth a damn," he thought bitterly and crammed the eraser back into his pocket.

The inside cover of the book was covered with names all written in ink, some printed with fat, round letters and some sprawled across the page in hurried, careless long-hand. Tom studied the names. "Alice Albright—1901." That was Molly Albright's oldest sister. He looked around for Molly but she wasn't there. "She's too old, I reckon," he thought. "Mattie Etheridge—'04." His sister. He had Mattie's book. He smiled and turned the page. Slowly he turned them, one by one, noticing now and then Mattie's thin, slanted pen strokes and smiling at what she had written. "George and Mattie" he read and then a few pages farther "Mattie loves Willie." He closed the book, thankful that it, with his sister's girlish love, belonged to him, to be kept close within the silent caring of his heart.

After school, he stood outside the door waiting for Julia to leave her circle of friends. Curley saw him and leaving the younger boys came to stand next to his brother, his face flushed and proud. "I thought you wont coming, Tom," he said. "I shore was glad when yuh did."

"I don't know if I'll come tomorrow," Tom said, looking at his books.

"Whose books you get? I got Johnny True-love's spelling and Frankie Burton's reading," Curley said.

"Nobody's," Tom said, still looking at the books. "Tell Julia to come on," he said. "I'm gonna start on down the road."

Curley ran off for Julia, screaming her name and spilling his books as he went. They caught up with Tom about a quarter of a mile down the road.

"Wait, Tom!" Julia screamed while Tom stopped and waited in the middle of the road, watching the dust fly up about them and Julia's yellow hair bounce on her shoulders as they ran.

They slid into him with a flurry of thick dust, their faces red and their chests rising heavily for breath. Then they walked silently, careful not to kick up dust, their heads bent against the afternoon sun.

"I like the teacher. She's nice," Julia said. "Don't you think she's nice, Tom?"

"Tom might not come back," Curley said.

"Oh, Tom. You better. She liked you. Didn't you hear what she said about your printing?"

Julia shook her head back and the yellow hair fell about her shoulders.

"Yeah." Tom kicked the dust. It covered his shoes and he kicked again.

"I bet you're the best pupil she's got," Julia said.

"She's pretty, ain't she, Tom?" Curley said.

"I don't know," said Tom.

"She is pretty," Julia said. "She's got the nicest hair. I bet it's soft as a tabby cat."

"She's got a funny way of talking," Tom said slowly.

"That's 'cause she's from up North. Annie said her mama said she was from Boston. You know where that is, Tom?"

"Unh-uh."

"It's up North," Curley said.

"We know that, silly." Julia scratched her neck. "She came down here with her husband and he died so she just stayed."

"She ain't very old," Tom said.

"Annie's mama said she's just twenty," Julia said. "That ain't much older'n you, Tom."

They crossed the road and began walking down the cotton rows. "Anyway," Julia continued, "I think she's real nice."

"We got a pretty teacher," Curley said to his father that night. They had finished supper and Matthew Etheridge sat on the porch, looking at Curley's books by lamplight. "Pa, Tom says he might not go to school anymore."

Matthew Etheridge closed the book and struck a match on his shoe. The tiny flame moved in the darkness to the bowl of the pipe and then disappeared for a moment. Curley heard his father sucking on the pipe and then saw the little puff of smoke rise from the bowl. Mr. Etheridge leaned back, his feet on the porch railing. The chair creaked as he moved. "Sometimes, son," he began, "when a boy's almost a man, he sorta gits between things and don't know what he oughta want and like. So he don't want nothing' and he don't like nothin'."

"Tom ain't like that, Pa," Curley said. "Tom knows lots of things."

"Yeah. He knows lots of things and lots of things he don't know. Tain't nothin' wrong with that. He just ain't sure what he knows is right."

"I don't understand, Pa."

Mr. Etheridge slid his feet to the floor and the front legs of the chair settled on the porch. "When you're sixteen, you will," he said as he shut the screen door behind him. Curley sat there awhile, smelling the tobacco from his father's pipe and listening to the water drip from the pump into



the bucket in the yard.

"Curley!" It was Tom.

"I'm comin'," Curley answered. Taking the lantern, he went into the silent house.

A few weeks later, Tom Etheridge stood in front of the blackboard, his back to the classroom of empty desks, looking at the figures on the board. He stood on one foot, the other foot propped on the floorboard. The figures were not his. The numbers were big and round, unlike his own straight, narrow ones.

"You can't take the little numbers from the big numbers all the time, Tom. When you have a big number like 326 and want to subtract 236 from it, you have to take the 3 from the 2 even though it looks like you can't." Mrs. Witchard stood on the platform next to Tom, a piece of chalk in her hand. She copied the problem on another section of the board and said, "Now watch, Tom."

Aloud as she followed the subtraction of the numbers, her voice quiet and patient. "Now do you see?" she asked. "If you don't, Tom, we'll do some more tomorrow."

"I ain't sure," Tom said. His face was sweaty and wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

"Well, don't worry about it. Subtraction comes hard to me, too," Mrs. Witchard said. "You just keep working at it."

Knowing the lesson was over, Tom stepped down from the platform and went to his desk. His books were turned sideways in his desk and he bent down to pull the right one out.

"You going home now, Tom?" Mrs. Witchard was standing behind her desk, a yellow sweater over her arm.

"Yes, Ma'm," Tom stood up with his books under his arm.

"I thought I'd go down to the spring for awhile. If you're going that way . . ."

"Yes, Ma'm." Tom wiped his eyes again and then rubbed his sweaty hand on his pants.

"Good," she said breathlessly.

The spring lay deep in the woods and they followed the dogwood trees, their splintery branches bare and brittle, until they came to the soft earth where moss lay like a blanket across the ground and the water bubbled softly beneath the surface.

"Do you ever come here?" she asked softly.

"I used to. Me and Julia. We found it a long time ago."

Mrs. Witchard sat down on the moss. "It's so cool. I miss the coolness, Tom. In Boston . . ." She looked up at him. "Oh, sit down and stay with me awhile."

Tom laid his books on the ground and then sat down, his legs under him.

"You won't get moss stains on you," she said. "Sometimes I lie down—the ground's so cool and I never get it on me."

Tom straightened out his legs.

"When I was a girl in Boston, we had a pool. It was tiled, of course, and very artificial, but I liked it." She was taking off her shoes and Tom could see her white legs beneath her skirt. "You don't mind, do you, Tom?" she asked. "Sometimes I just want to feel the ground with my feet."

"I got to go home," Tom said suddenly.

"Oh, Tom, don't spoil it," she said gently. "I really haven't anyone to talk to—except women, of course, and they—well, you wouldn't understand, being a man."

Tom looked at the pool of water. "Julia and me—we used to come down here and wade in the water. It's too cold though."

"Is it? I've never even put my hand in." She leaned forward and her hand disappeared beneath the water. "Oh, it is cold." She smiled and drew her hand from the water. The whiteness of her skin glistened with wetness and she touched her cheeks and neck, leaving tiny droplets of water on her skin.

"I like your country, Tom," she said suddenly. "I like your people. Family's strong here. I like that. It's strong in Boston, too." She smiled. "Will you get the farm, Tom, since you're the oldest son?"

"Yes, Ma'm. I reckon so. Pa don't say nothing 'bout it, but I reckon so."

"That's the way it is in Boston." She was still smiling, and the tiny creases in her face were so close Tom could have touched them without hardly moving.

"I got to go, Mrs. Witchard," he said.

"All right, Tom," she said. "So have I."

He watched her pull on her shoes and lace them. He wanted to help her but he couldn't move. Then she stood up. "I'm ready," she said. He got up. His pants felt damp where he had sat.

They walked slowly through the woods. Tom touched the branches of the dogwoods as he walked and then let his hand rest on his hip, not quite in his pocket. He didn't move it when he felt cool fingers against his palm. He felt his hand sweat and then his face and neck turned red, but he didn't look at her or turn away. The cool fingers moved around his hand until the palms were together, his heat against her coolness.

The afternoon was hazy with dust and heat. The woods was dark with the shadows of sunlight



against the tall pines; and their foot-steps soft and slow on the narrow path, made short rustling sounds.

They were almost at the end of the path where the woods met the road when she stopped and, still holding his hand, pulled herself up to him until her breath was across his face and her breasts touched his chest. The kiss was gentle, as if her lips had barely found his. Then their mouths were tight and damp against each other; and her hair, the soft brown curls across her forehead, touched his face and eyelides. He had dropped his books and was holding her. He had never held a girl before and his hands were restless against her back and then down to her waist. Then he moved. His hands hung loosely at his sides. He knelt and picked up his books, his eyes never straying to her feet close beside him or to the hem of her skirts which touched his hand as he fumbled for the books. He walked toward the bright opening in the trees, was suddenly on the road and then into the cotton field across it. An old colored man in the next field walked behind a plow turning up cotton stalks. He was singing and the deep, mournful tune found Tom and brought swift, hot tears to his eyes. "Nobody knows my sorrow . . ." Tom wiped his face with his sleeve. "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Glory . . ." The tears sprang into his eyes again and his body shook as he choked and swallowed. "Hallelujah."

**T**hey were standing in the kitchen, a massive room full of the smell of cured ham and damp wood. "You can sleep here, Curley," the teacher was saying. The bed, a narrow quilted berth, was in the corner.

"You can have your own basin there and this can be your closet." She was opening the pantry door and showing him a bare corner with shelves and a pole across the top with hangers on it. He looked at the bundle wrapped in newspaper.

"I'll get you some pants and shirts and things," she said.

The boy sat down on the bed and opened the newspaper. A plaid flannel shirt, neatly folded, lay on top. He moved it and looked for a moment at the white underwear. "Mama used to make me shirts and things, but . . ." his voice trailed off in a sigh.

"Well, Curley, why don't you put your things on the shelf, and Saturday I'll get you another pair of overalls and a shirt." She looked at his

wool coat on the hanger. It was worn and the red plaid was faded to a rosy color. It had been Tom's coat.

"You don't need to do that, Mrs. Whitchart," the boy said. He was sitting on the bed holding the underwear.

She sat down beside him. "I want to, Curley," she said. "I miss not having someone to do things for."

"Mama use to make me things," Curley said.

"I know," she said gently, her hand resting on his. "Now I can make things for you."

She stood up. "Now, Curley, how about helping me get the wood off the back porch." She pulled his coat off the hanger and held it while he slipped his arms in. "Curley," she said suddenly, pulling him down into a sitting position next to her, "how would you like to have another name?"

"My name's Etheridge," the child said. "Like Pa and Tom."

"I don't mean Etheridge," Madge Whitchart said, smiling. "I mean Curley. Your hair isn't very curly anymore and you're almost a man. What do you say we call you by your real name?"

"It's John David," Curley said, careful to pronounce the words distinctly. "I know." She touched his cheek. "What do you think, Curley? Maybe this is a good place to do it—here away from your real home."

"Yes, Ma'm," he said. "Mama called me Curley, but that was 'cause I had such curly hair. I guess it would be all right."

"John David is such a fine name. I know she'd like it."

Mrs. Whitchart clapped her hands together. "So which will be it, John or David or John David?"

"What do you think?" Curley asked.

"Oh, I don't know. John." She thought a moment. "David . . . I know, Curley, why don't we call you Jay."

"Jay," said Curley softly. "Jay."

"It's a sort of nickname," Mrs. Whitchart said, "like—like Tom is short for Thomas."

"Jay," he said.

"Yes," she said, pulling his coat tight around him and buttoning it quickly. "Jay Etheridge. Mr. J. D. Etheridge."

The boy laughed and the laughter sprang into the room to fill it instantly with pleasure and warmth.

"Let's get in the wood, Jay," Madge Whitchart



said. And then, stooping to face him, she said, "It's all right, isn't it, Jay?"

"Yes, Ma'm. It's just fine." The boy was smiling. The smile spread across his face and then, as if it had moved from him to her, she was smiling, too. The tiny creases around her eyes and mouth came with the smile and her eyes, the color of wood smoke, were alive with the joy within her.

A month went by. Jay learned to answer to his new name, to love the kitchen where he spent his afternoons and nights studying his lessons at the table with the smells of hot food and burning wood about him and being warm in the quilted bed, curled up in the darkness while the flames lay in glowing ashes in the fireplace. The ice did not thaw and Tom did not come into town. Suddenly it was mid-February. Jay made a special valentine—a red paper heart with scraps of lace he found in Mrs. Whitchart's sewing basket around it and the words BE MY VALENTINE printed with blunt, white chalk across the front. On the back he wrote, LOVE, JAY. He didn't give it to her at school where the other children gathered around her desk to watch for her pleased smile when she opened the special one—the valentine from each of them. He put the card on her plate at supper and, unable to watch her as the others had while she read it, he looked down at his plate, humming softly to himself. Finally, he looked up. She was leaning forward, her elbows on the table, her head bent over the plate, and the valentine in her hand.

"Mrs. Whitchart," Jay said.

She lifted her napkin from her lap and touched it to her eyes.

"Jay," she said, her head still bent. "Jay."

"I made it. I took some paper from the package at school, and then those pieces of lace outa your basket. I didn't think you wanted 'em."

"You go on and eat, Jay," she said, her voice quiet and quivering as she rose. "I don't want anything right now."

"It's all right, ain't it?" Jay asked.

She was almost at the door. "Yes, Jay. It's all right."

He ate his supper silently, careful not to drop his knife or to slide his chair on the floor. When he finished, he washed his plate and glass and was putting them away when she returned, her eyes red and her face freshly washed and powdered.

"Jay," she said. "Do you know, Jay?" She stood with her arms around him and suddenly she pulled him close to her, holding his head against her breasts. "Out of all the valentines I've ever

had, yours was the only one that was really meant," she whispered.

She had never put her arms around him before, and now he felt the warmth of her body and the sweetness of her lavender smell became a part of him. He pushed himself closer to her until his head ached with the smell and, not understanding what she felt and said, he knew he loved her.

In early March, the ice began to thaw. The sun burst red and hot in its new found freedom from the clouds; and the earth, soft and damp with thawing, was dark and rich. The country people had begun coming into town. Slowly they came, the wagon wheels turning in the soft dirt and stopping on the wide main street where the stores stood waiting.

Madge Whitchart was in Mr. Milstone's grocery store when she heard the creaking rusty wheels moving slowly to the center of town. She paid Mr. Milstone, and her grocery basket on her arm, left the store to stand on the wooden sidewalk. It was Tom. Inside the store when the creaking sounds had been only sounds, she had known, and now she stood waiting for him to see her and stop the wagon. He looked up, his eyes black beneath his hat and his mouth a narrow line clinched hard at his jaws.

"Tom," she said. He saw her lips move and form the word. "Tom."

He pulled his hat down on his forehead and flicked the reins across the mule's back.

"Tom," she cried. "Jay—Curley . . ."

The wagon was rumbling down the street, but Tom's body didn't give with the rhythm of its motion. She leaned against the hitching post and watched the wagon turn the corner and disappear.

"Are you all right?" Mr. Milstone was saying. He was wiping his hands on his white apron and the smell of fresh meat was about him.

"Yes—yes," she started.

"I thought you was 'bout to faint," he said.

"Oh, no." She was smiling and brushing loose curls from her forehead. "I'm all right, Mr. Milstone. Really."

She walked home slowly. The basket was heavy on her arm and she could feel the indenture of the handle on her flesh. "So he didn't come for Jay," she thought.

"Flour and sugar," Tom said over the counter to Mr. Milstone.

"Flour and sugar," Mr. Milstone said thoughtfully as he moved down the row. "Mrs. Whitchart was in here awhile ago," he said, bending over the flour barrel. "She's still keeping the boy, isn't she?" The flour dust rose and stuck to Mr.



Milstone's apron and arms.

"Yeah," Tom said.

"Fine boy. He comes in sometimes for the groceries. Fine boy." Mr. Milstone pushed the lid down on the flour barrel.

"Has he grown much?" Tom stared at the floor. "I ain't seen 'im."

"Sure has." Mr. Milstone's voice rose over the pouring of sugar into the metal can. "That Jay is some boy."

"Jay?"

"Everybody calls him Jay." Mr. Milstone was back behind the counter looking at Tom. "Sixty-five cents," he said.

Tom stretched to pull the change from his pocket. "Sixty-five cents," he said, dropping the coins into Mr. Milstone's hand.

"You oughta go by and see that boy," Mr. Milstone said.

"I got to get home," Tom said. And then, turning suddenly at the door, "Don't tell 'im I been," he said.

"Sure, Tom," Mr. Milstone said, his forehead wrinkled into a frown.

Mr. Milstone watched Tom untie the reins from the post and climb on the wagon. "Anna!" he called to his wife at the back of the store. "Anna, the next time you see Madge Whitchart, you tell her Tom Etheridge's been in town!"

Anna Milstone came from the back of the store, her iron-rimmed glasses barely on her nose. "Why?" she asked.

"Well, he ain't goin' by to see the boy." Mr. Milstone put the money in the cash box and slammed it shut.

"It ain't none of our business what Tom Etheridge does," Anna said.

"All right, Anna," Mr. Milstone said. "All right, but I still think she oughta know."

I want to know, Madge Whitchart thought as she and Jay walked home from school. I don't want to pry. I know how they carry their hurt silently, but I must ask him.

"Jay, where is Julia?" she asked finally.

"She got married," Jay said. "Right after Mattie went off, she married Johnnie Sullivan."

"Then there was just you and Tom and your father?" she asked.

"Yeah. Pa got sick, though. Me and Tom did all the chores." Jay sat down on the porch. "Mrs. Whitchart," he said, "why don't Tom come?"

She sat down beside him and took the books from his lap. "He will," she said gently. "When it's time, he'll come." She put her arm around

him. "Do you want to go home, Jay?"

"It ain't that," Jay said slowly. "It's just that sometimes I miss him and Pa. I don't see why he don't come."

"He will," she said. "I promise. He will."

April came and found the teacher waiting anxiously for Tom to come. She wanted Jay to stay with her. Her need for him had grown with her love, but the silent wondering within her about Tom made her frightened. Finally, torn by Jay's longing to see his brother and her own fear of seeing him, she walked the five miles to the Etheridge farm.

Tom was on his knees beside a block of earth covered with white cloth. He had pulled back a section of the cloth and was examining the small green plants, his fingers touching gently the tiny stems and leaves.

"Tom," she said.

He looked up. His face, dark and scowling, moved as he squinted his eyes and his jawbones clinched beneath his cheeks as his mouth moved. He stood up slowly, his frame unfolding until he towered over her.

"Tom," she said again softly.

"Curley," he said. "He's all right?"

"Yes." She rubbed her forearm with her hands and her skin was white against the greenness of her dress. "He's grown at least an inch, maybe more. I bought him some new pants and shirts and things." She was smiling and the lace across the bodice of her dress rose with her breath.

"I'll pay you," he said. "When the crop's in, I'll pay you for it."

"No, Tom," she said quickly. "You know I didn't mean that. I love him. I want to give him things."

"I didn't want to take 'im there," Tom said slowly.

"I don't blame you," she said. And then, looking up at the sun she added, "It's so hot out here. Can't we find some shade?"

"There ain't much shade around," Tom said and bent back over his tobacco plants.

"Please, Tom," she said. "I want to talk to you."

He stayed at his work and so she stood next to him, her shadow cast across the white cloth.

"The plants are pretty," she said. "I remember the first time I saw tobacco. It was like a jungle, green and wet with rain. The blossoms were still there . . ."

Tom didn't answer.

"I remember that I wanted to pick one but the stalk was too high to reach. My husband said it



was sticky and coarse, anyway. I thought they were pretty though, and fragile looking."

Tom loosened the dirt around a plant with his fingers.

"I missed Julia," Mrs. Whitchard said. "Jay—we call him Jay now—said she married the Sullivan boy."

"Yeah, as soon as she could," Tom said. "You call him Jay."

"I thought it was better." She sighed. "He won't want to be called Curley when he's a man." She smiled. "He liked it fine when I told him Jay was short for John like Tom is for Thomas. He misses you, Tom. I don't think he wants to come home as much as he wants to see you. I didn't know what to tell him when spring came and you didn't."

"I just didn't," Tom said. "I've been busy."

"How's your father, Tom?" she asked. "Jay said he was sick."

"He killed himself. I found him in the shed, hangin' there so frozen he swung like a piece of timber." He shrugged. "So I took Curley to town."

"To me," she said almost to herself.

Tom turned his shoulder, his eyes black in the shadow of his eyelashes. "Where else could I take 'im?" he asked coldly. "I couldn't let 'im stay here

and see it, could I?"

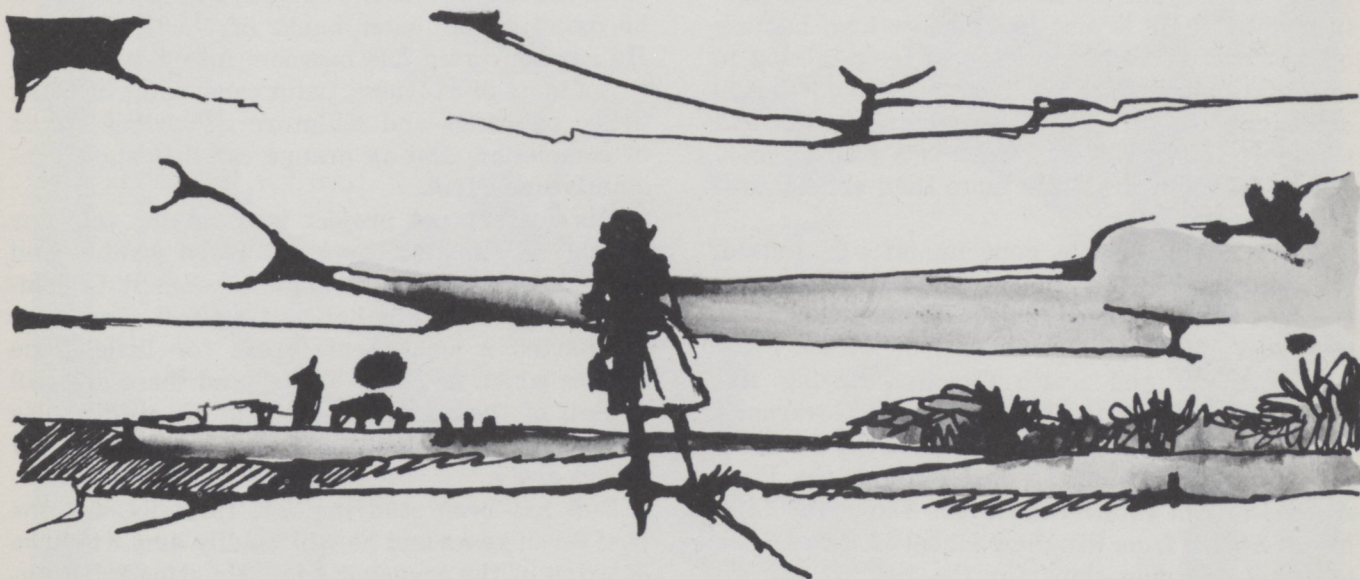
"I want him to stay with me, Tom," she said softly. "He misses you and your father, but maybe I can be some sort of mother to him." She looked down at the tiny plants. "So many things are small, Tom, and then suddenly, big and lovely and out of reach. I don't want that to happen to Jay and me."

"I'm gonna sell the place and go somewhere, get a steady job," Tom said softly. "I'll send you money." He touched the green leaves gently.

"Will you come by sometimes and see him? You don't have to see me. Just tell me and I'll not be there." Her voice was trembling.

"I'll come. It won't matter when," he said.

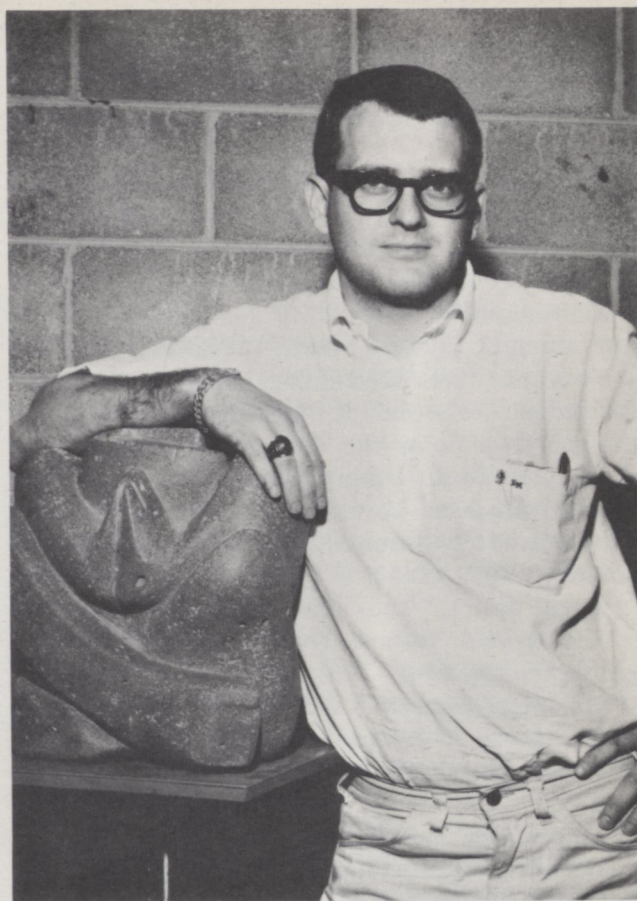
Tom knew she had gone. Her shadow moved across the cloth and disappeared in the dirt. He turned his head after a few minutes and saw the bottom of her skirt lifted out of the dust, then the skirt itself, the small waist, the white lace collar, tiny brown curls against her white neck, her head, billowing brown waves caught in curls at the crown. Then he bent back over the plants, lifted one out of the dirt, and touched the leaves until they bent back and showed the center, a tiny white beginning of a blossom that in July would burst into a flower, pale pink and fragile, reaching toward the sun.





# BUD WALL

## *Artist*



"Enigma" is a word that fits Bud Wall very well. There is little agreement among his friends as to what he really is. He is colorful; he is unpredictable; he is egotistic. And—the one point in which everyone seems to agree—he is extremely talented. He is also inarticulate and, because of this, one would hardly suspect from talking to him that he possesses the great sensitivity that is evident in his art. Ask him why he paints and the most you are likely to get is a puzzled look. But in terms of art, he is more than articulate—he is eloquent.

Bud's talent has not gone unnoticed. Indeed, although he is still a student, he is already something of an established artist. Some of his more impressive accomplishments include: First Prize in the North and South Carolina Spring Art Show; First Prize in the All Florida Governor's Art Show; Second Prizes in three of the Sarasota Art Association shows; Third Prize in the First Annual Miami International Art Show; the Gold Medal Award from Ringling School of Art; and he staged a one man show for the 1960 Miss Universe Pageant. *Le Revue Moderne*, a Paris art journal, recently published a biographical revue of Bud and his work.

Bud (his full name is Weldon Texas Wall, III)

and his wife, Nita, live on the outskirts of Greenville in a modern apartment fairly overflowing with artwork of every description. He is fond of pointing out that two small tables in the living room are made from the ruins of a shipwreck that he found on the outer banks of North Carolina. He has converted one bedroom into a studio and it is a maze of canvases, paint cans, paint brushes, drills, paintings and sculpture in various stages of completion, and an orange cat that stays constantly underfoot.

His current pet project is an Aztec calendar which, he explains, he has always wanted and plans to put under the shower when it is completed to give it a weather-beaten effect. Last year he started a small scale craze for little stone statues which he calls "Tiki's" and there are still several of these standing around his studio. He admits that he cannot find it in himself to throw things away.

Bud has been studying art, formally, for the past seven years and he will readily admit that he is tiring of the academic life. He attended Ringling School of Art in Sarasota, Florida, for three years, a junior college for one year, and has been at East Carolina College for the past three years. He will graduate in the Spring of 1964.

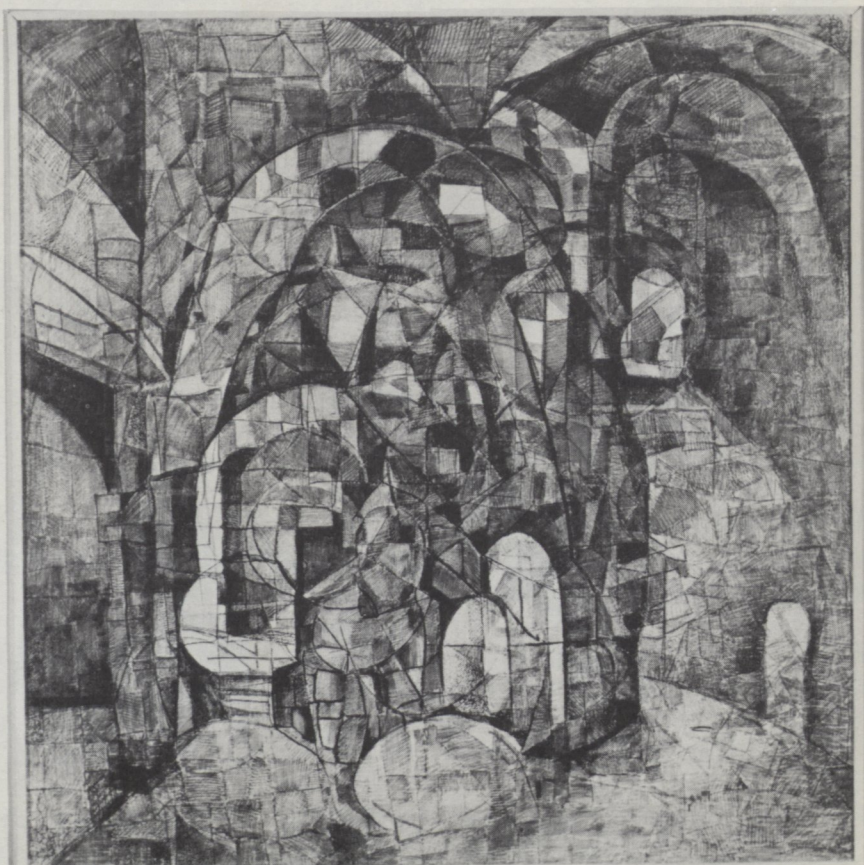






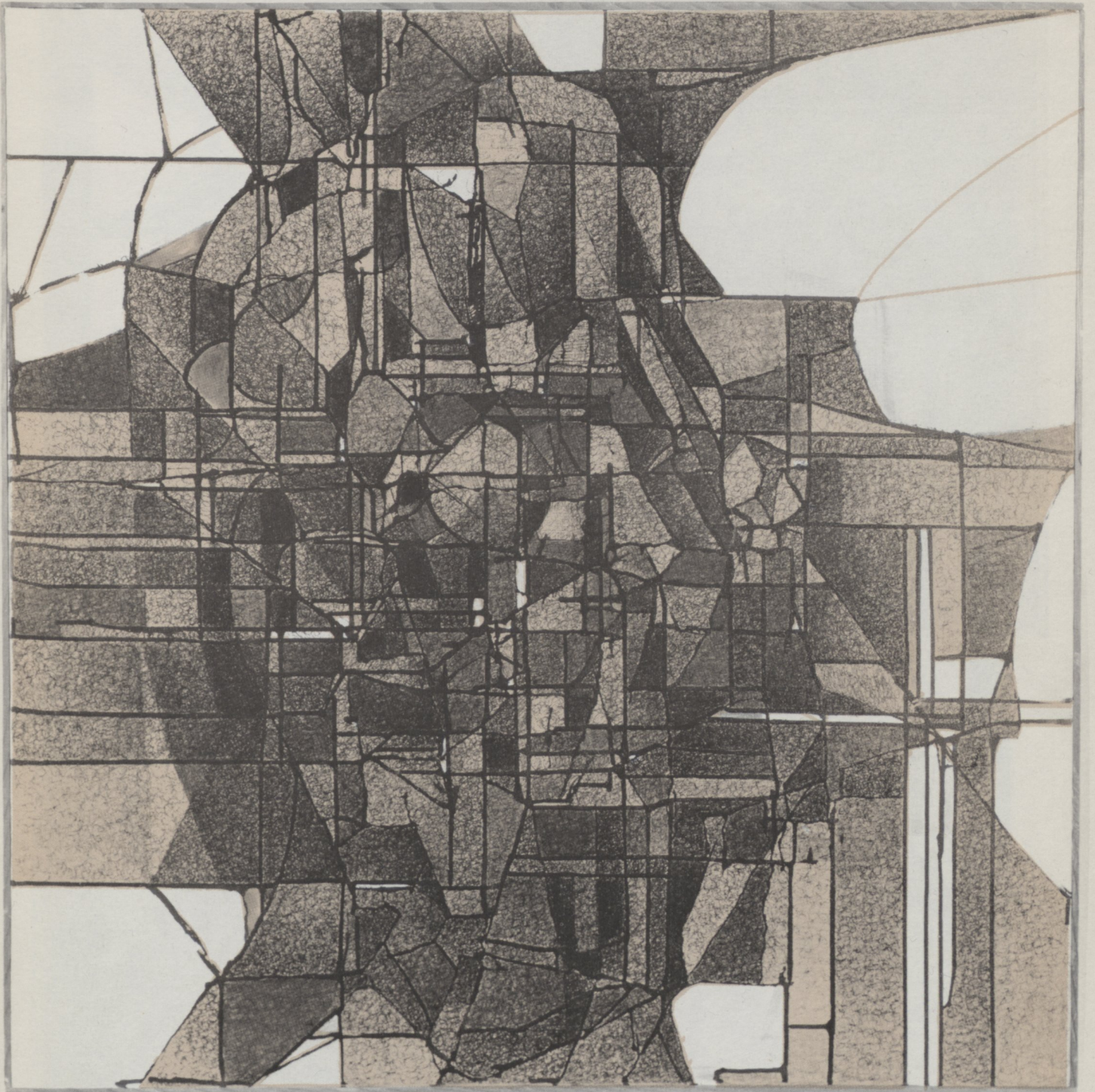


**BLUE RAIN FISH. Polymer.**  
*Third Prize, First Annual Miami National Art Show.*



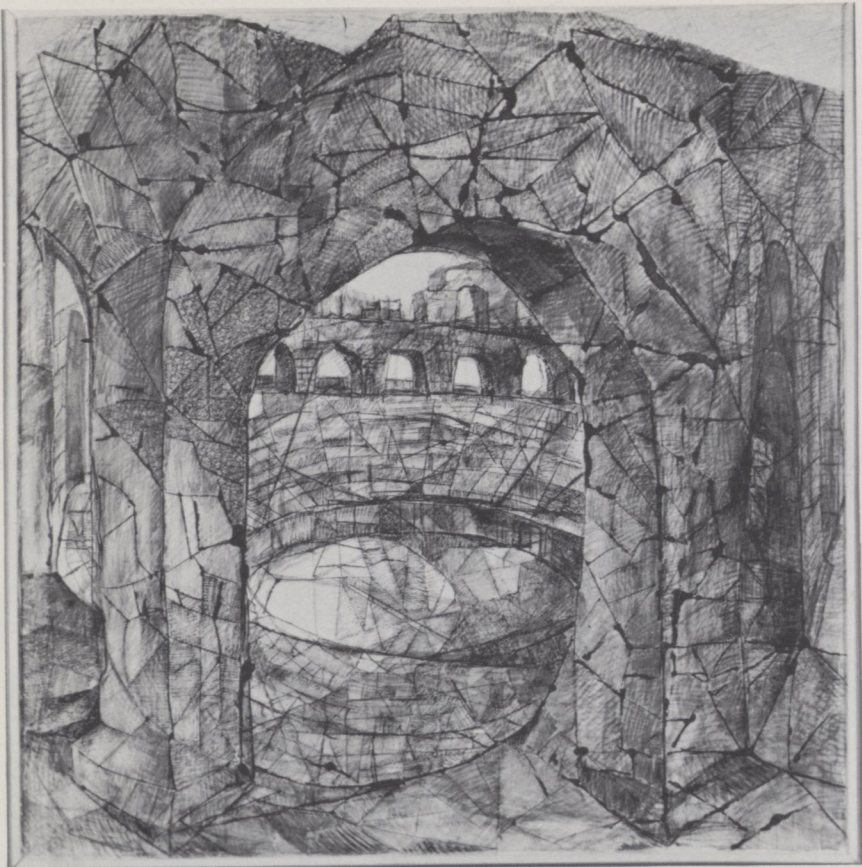
**CATHEDRAL RUINS NO. 1. Pen and Ink.**





MOTHER AND CHILD. Pen and Ink.





AMPHITHEATRE. Pen and Ink.



BAITHOUSE. Oil.





58



*One year ago four poets (now decreased by one) associated together in an experiment of communal criticism and discussion of their own poetry. They made no attempt to stylize a poetic movement but insisted on retaining their individual expression and theory. One year has passed and they feel that the atmosphere they have created has been beneficial to their poetic output and manner.*

## GREENVILLE POETRY GROUP

### *Ave*

Come, lady, where the camilla is spent  
    (We called them japonicas in the early spring  
    When jonquils, once wild daffodils,  
    Met some morning sun  
    And opened womb-like mouths to fetch  
    That down a little too warm for season.)  
Like a brown cloud-covered moon  
Where the touch wrinkles and saddens.

A tulip tree blooms beside the window.  
Inside, the very young tinkle with poetry  
That hardens on their lips  
Like so much ice when spring comes  
Arm-in-arm with a winter  
Who will not hasten to another hemisphere.  
Come, lady, where tulip tree  
And camilla grow, a row, a row.

Teach me, lady, those centuries  
Of spring blooming and new color  
Born of seeds planted—  
    (Some say in the late fall  
    By the wind before the earth hardened;  
    And some say from bulbs  
    That forsook their natural tenure  
    To lie dormant  
    Until some shaking warmth awakened them.)  
Teach me, lady, the icons of summer.

—PAT REYNOLDS WILLIS

### *Dry Arrangement*

We shall put away the flowers of this day  
As two committing dry arrangements of the fall  
    to fire;  
When chair, couch, wick and broom,  
All furniture of these, the familiar rooms,  
Have fed flame, then this will, too.

Art is, after all, something like the match girl,  
Saving what is best till breath cannot care  
To distinguish snow from the gathering glory  
Frozen beneath the lamp.

I will not play love carried to the brink of moon-  
    light  
Nor symmetry of care, like pears,  
Polished where the lingering sun banks a golden  
    line.  
Oh, no, it was living all the dumb mouse panto-  
    mime,  
All the furious scratchings in the wall,  
The exit-entrance riddled cheese;  
We built, moved in, and then tore down  
A mine and thine sensation of sacrifice.

Here, having all that I gave up,  
And will gladly give again till gone,  
I reconstruct the porch, the window,  
The cupola, and now the dome,  
Circa 1880—institutional Gothic,  
Tasteless to the bone.

—SANFORD L. PEELE



## *Winter Walk*

The leaf meal lies fallow under my feet,  
lifting mold in the swing of my walking,  
raising veins past silver faces;  
and before my foot, the succulence  
of a surging season gone,  
turning before my eye the organic dust  
once known as heat and liquid motion—  
motion the moon turns out in scuddy clouds—  
The night has brought ice,  
holding fast young limbs in their notches,  
and bearing gray smoke from my mouth.  
I see all, shown in dew,  
pearling the weaker limbs  
and painting the broken leaves  
until they are of that promise,  
the promise drawing me close beside this creek,  
holding me fast to my most secret place.  
Though my head rings with cracking ice  
and my feet sting with winter breath,  
the promise still holds my eye  
to the drooping of the trees,  
fixing the wit inside me  
now upon that flash of white—  
heavy wing and fluted thigh,  
ancestral bird, Heron glide!  
And I must sing again the leaf meal,  
the season gone, the motion,  
and I must sing again the motion of my thigh,  
sing again the crusted ice on young limbs,  
the breath that makes smoke in the night  
and sing again the remembered heat  
and the wind in the swing of my thigh.

Heron, Heron,  
Rise to my thigh,  
Rise to my mouth  
And set my tongue to glide  
Home fast with the truth I own.

—B. TOLSON WILLIS, JR.

## *Of Tongues and Rain*

I hear the oak beside my window moan,  
Moaning over the wind,  
wind that holds me tight in my sheets  
and I feel the oak lean,  
hear it heave and let go a limb  
cracking on the wind,  
and the crack becomes a sigh;  
The sigh in the throats of woman  
loosing a child after long labor.  
And the coming of the rain  
in thunder and in cloud  
tasting of trees and bearing the scent of the young  
fills me with the knowing of it,  
and I am dazed in the lightning's flash all green,  
and in the night above the wind  
I hear the lapping tongues of earth,  
earth full of tongues and rain.

—B. TOLSON WILLIS, JR.

## *The Coming of the Rain*

I stand ankle deep in mud  
soft furrowed earth—the lips of a grave  
the sides of it yawing away,  
falling back like the slack arms of a youth.  
I knew the rain would come,  
bringing a blessing to this ground  
for my mind is filled with fertile memories;  
I knew, just as I knew his face,  
just as his soul must know,  
the tear I shed for remembered days;  
And the knowing has a song,  
a song of rising in the morning  
and walking out together—  
I know that this is not the stuff of prayers,  
though they too have their place,  
nor is it of nail or hewn boards  
and that's the beauty of it.

—B. TOLSON WILLIS, JR.



*"Between the essence and  
descent falls the shadow . . ."*

They gather there, love's court of barbered  
Variables, upon the margin of full light;  
Pale, bejeweled, soothed by one's own proximity,  
They twitter and subside into the graceful  
Posture of a twilight penance. Borne upon  
That golden rack, imagination with her  
Lacquered nails must preface sweat, the ancient  
wound,

And give directions flow, turn the lamb  
Into her fold, ring down the dark perfection  
Of this night. And thus they come into  
The bright arena harried by the sighs  
They cannot now remember, are aswirled  
Like gilded leaves into a vague tableaux,  
Verisimilitude breaks thereon and drags  
Unredeemed, a broken likeness to the heart.  
Laocoon has here the human twist,  
The serpents repeat their ritual of possessing  
While mankind writhes for a shadowed audiences'  
benefit.

We cannot see, saddled with mind's August light,  
The shadow of their art lifted in release,  
Are held upon the raging floor  
By phantoms of their cruel extravagance.  
Lip to lip, jelly of ambiguous mold,  
Their ardor swings the sterile goal  
Toward its spent conclusion; mirror  
Of our partial pendulum, we hang  
Upon the strained reflection of  
A grief called love; sperms rupture  
In the human fern, uncurls a massive  
Fist of mangled absolutes to wither  
In nature's uncompromised sun.

Our loves are more, much more,  
Than this procession of bare feet  
And bared performance of love's inmost hour.

—SANFORD L. PEELE

*Gray-Glassed Fruit In A Bowl*

Insensitive to yesterday pain,  
I did me remember morrow—  
Gray-glassed fruit in a bowl,  
The two are one.

Moon was yesterday—  
Sanctioned silence of ivory—  
Carved in cold stone  
And pressed into the sky;  
Too high to touch,  
Near enough to chill.

Morning moon is morrow,  
Still high, still cold,  
Yet carved and pressed;  
Better the then than tomorrow  
For past is sheen ago,  
And afterwards still to shine.

—PAT REYNOLDS WILLIS

*Aerial Vintage*

Effacious astronaut, time blooms  
In a vision of the hemispheres  
Twirled like a green ring  
Between the magi's tapered fingers  
All transparent, wholly motion  
Made marvelous; while art,  
The siren song in menopause,  
heaves herself upon a rock  
To see what having always seen,  
The ritual soul, rubbed  
In the glowing dark  
Amends nothing, drives nowhere, no-one  
Nearer than the jubilee of yet  
Another circling achievement.

SANFORD L. PEELE



## *Your Pain*

Your pain for me is circumscribed  
To fit my fever; to outlast  
The days and nights of heaven overstarred  
And fancy fixed habits; to come  
Again in hours of dawn or before the night;  
A wished for seeking, your pain and called;  
Returned to the twilight; oh, then!  
Let the chase of it sing  
And moan in the reeds and rushes and in stirrings  
Of water, and the light of it  
Softly float downward to the grace of the eddy.  
And let the little fishes open  
Their mouths and drink the salt taste, brine tongues lapping;  
For evening descends, quilts ablaze  
Cover the sprinkling of the pain and all  
Is quiet—slumbering against  
My breast, the head of it secure.

—PAT REYNOLDS WILLIS

## *An Axis of Smoke*

Healer of the body's wounds,  
defiler of the vain or humble face,  
metronome of humanity's breath,  
maker of dire hours and glorious seconds,  
we of the world's most immediate mark  
have wrought you to a dispassionate abstraction  
and we stand beyond fear's gothic door  
innate in our own desperate guises.

These are the last lean words  
before I assume my place,  
wheel half-way round  
as though upon an axis of smoke  
and turn the soul's bright stones  
upon an opaque mirror's face.  
Sigh out the season's latent resolve  
before we turn about again.  
Time, you are our impunity.

—B. TOLSON WILLIS, JR.

## *Sacramental Gift*

The air, thinned to utter blueness  
At the edge, demands a ceremony, simple  
And serene. Your voice, a bee  
In the tall clover of your throat, conveys  
A current of that joy, torn from the far  
Spring, where what might be is scarcely  
More than a golden crocus banked with snow.

Obsequious days, providential and obtuse,  
Drop off the rim of value, a clutter  
Of dray suicides, balance nothing, and  
Tip the equilibrium of this green  
With scarce a gray moth's feather weight.  
Thus, drudgery to imagine more,  
Resolves into the darkness of your hair  
Falling toward my face.

We have survived an issue of repentance  
Posted on the intervening time  
Between this ascension and that other.  
Our passion has no dedication now  
To the chaplet, wreath and weary  
Ostentation of yet another lovely pose.  
We now know the dramatist personnae  
Flaming on the verge of sorrow was  
A nimble acrobat of private justice  
Quick to pry the hot advantage home.

—SANFORD L. PEELE



## *Art Noveau*

Michaelangelo, high among the stars he made,  
Converged upon a higher blue, the tent  
Of heaven come alive with muscle and  
Aching bone ripped to God-head.  
What strips of flesh the dwarfish Florentine  
Stitched across heaven's open eye are not  
The song come whole from any gutter  
The world gives nor furious pick meal  
Parcel, politics, or labored love,  
Unravelling on the eve of art's accomplishment.

Thus, the raucous rumor of art espaliered  
On "ology" or "ism" would ooze the paint away  
Were all led loquacious to the feast  
Where free men find no freedom in a face  
Unlike their own, yet them, their multiplied  
Amazement honed into a singular sufficiency.

Come through the catalogue—critical  
Compendium of the mice that tie their tails  
For one free ride on the problematical  
Hurdy-gurdy of an age's only wholeness,  
Who cart away the cheese they quarried  
Crying how they've blessed the trap.

Amphigerous apostles of the golden cage,  
They twine their lost Aprils round  
The sucker of the rose, deveined,  
The perfumed particle, they wear it  
In the curled accoutment of powdered hair,  
Bald assertion, plumed in very baldness,  
Bears the follicle to fashion for  
Definitive beauticians of "is" and "ought"—  
Petite appointment for a classic bun,  
Rage of the well-reddened roots this year.

Extravagance and laughter, the art in art  
Inbred, promotories fed on iridescent light,  
Low, where tumbling toward the waves, Circe  
And her sailors ply their furious trade,  
Love and war and tales of mounting twixt  
The twain;—

whole joyous hag of the possible heaven,  
You lead the wide biography of pain  
In upward, spiraling light; uncurling  
Your fistfuls of gay foam,  
They stream into that grotto of the night.

—SANFORD L. PEELE

## *To The Hostess*

Should I summon quaint words,  
my comely, winsome; my dearest lass,  
and allow their archaic tones  
to preserve a distance more than years  
between our deft accoutement of smiles?  
Or should I play the silent fool,  
standing by the door,  
making breaths with a chessman's gait  
behind dull hooded eyes?

Elevators are for such thoughts,  
but tonight they merely absorb the time  
from mezzanine to numbered door,  
for I have a dozen gladiolas as a lark  
and reasons to leave early.

—B. TOLSON WILLIS, JR.

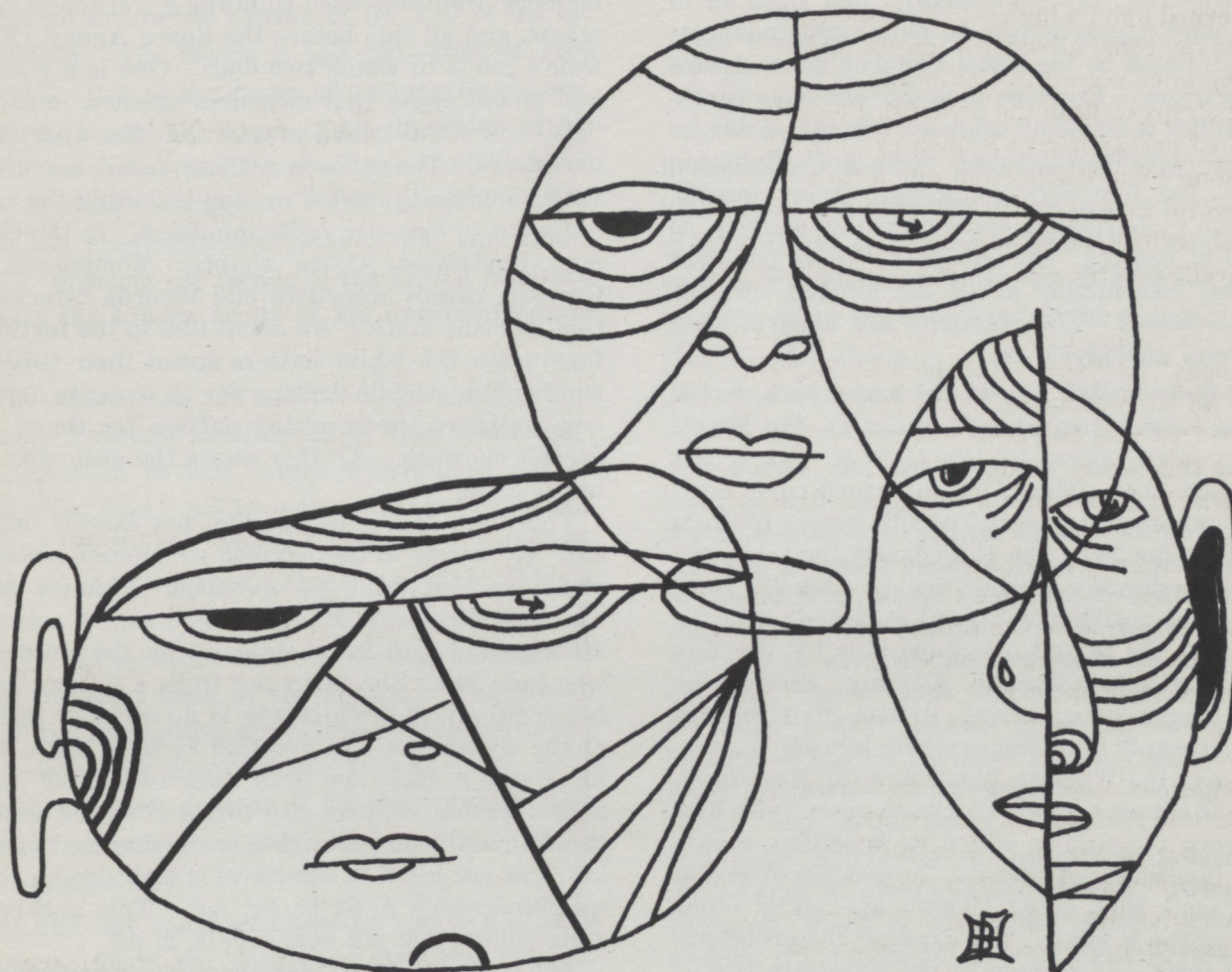
## *A Glaring Vindictiveness*

A glaring vindictiveness—some minutae  
Which men term noon—  
Will swell to ebbd pre-eminence  
In fall days without long light;  
But one old frost-eyed man,  
In solitary corduroy  
Brown as his hand has been,  
Rankles one new match of sun  
To fire his pipe.

—PAT REYNOLDS WILLIS



# THE REBEL REVIEW



## Look Ma, No Hands

V. By Thomas Pynchon. New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1963. 493 pp. \$5.95.

The literature of absurdity multiplies. Another novel joins the procession of absurd plays and novels popularly classified as "beatnik." Novel is a loose term and this is only loosely a novel, but who expects form and organization in an absurd universe? In fact, the essence of the philosophy behind the book and the whole movement, if we can call it that, is the complete denial of relations, not to speak of values. This is particularism. The

universe consists of particular objects and events related to each other in no meaningful way.

There are no such things as personality or character or motivation. The human being is an infinite succession of discrete psychic states. There is no "I" that remains constant, not to speak of a "soul." Ego is an illusion.

Some Victorians and their predecessors, the eighteenth century French atheistic rationalists, the idealistic reaction intervening, maintained a set of values strangely similar to the Christian by



retaining faith in "the army of unalterable law," that is in science. But the new science is lawless—relatively, uncertainty principle, quantum mechanics, etc. Science has let man down. "I can connect nothing with nothing," and not only Margate sands. Nihilism.

This is the "new philosophy" that puts all in doubt with a vengeance. In philosophic passages barely related to the story Pynchon promulgates his doctrines. Previous philosophers have reached similar conclusions and advocated suicide or at least withdrawal to an aerie *a la* Robinson Jeffers, but like high metabolism flying insects, Pynchon's characters choose frantic activity as a kind of beatnik "engagement." Have you ever watched flies flitting about the kitchen, swatter in your hand? Their actions are absurd. See the pretty analogy?

The quest motif, one of the archetypes, is the basis of much literature—*The Odyssey*, *The Faerie Queene*, *Huck Finn*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and so on. Therefore an absurd novel must feature an absurd quest. The title refers to Stencil's quest for "V", who is evidently feminine and possibly someone's mother, maybe Stencil's own. Neither the reader nor Stencil ever finds out who V is. Get the point? Perhaps it is "V for Victory" ironically viewed. Anyway, Stencil, no longer young, is a former British civil servant become beatnik bum and devoting himself to seeking V over the Western World and the Near East, until a Mediterranean waterspout mercifully lifts and drops the ship in which he is sailing, a ship with a figurehead of Astarte, the goddess of sexual love. Isn't that cute? There are many other echoes of the V motif. For example the promiscuous Victoria—all women in the novel are that—and the savage former village colony Vheissu to which Godolphin, the seventyish Britisher would like to return. But mainly Godolphin wants to return to the South Pole in the dead of winter and not "because it's there." He had completed a winter trek there previously, but for some vague reason had never admitted his feat. Get it? All quests are spinach.

The other leading character, a young American named Profane doesn't quest at all; he just drifts from sewer to sewer—literally: that's his line—but mainly from one female to another. By the way did you know that sex is absurd too? Practically all the women in the book are nymphomaniacs (wish fulfillment?) and all the standard perversions are mentioned and accepted, except possibly necrophilia. Mara, an avatar of Astarte, exemplifies this when she disrupts the Sultan's

harem, eunuchs and all. But none of it is any fun at all, simply a natural act like defecation.

The real absurdities of modern technology also attract Pynchon's notice. One of Profane's numerous jobs is with Yoyodyne. A New Jersey toy manufacturer discovered that his machinery could be more profitably used fulfilling government contracts, and all this before the Space Agony. Profane's job is to watch two dolls. One is a rubber and plastic thing that measures crashes, impacts, "g's" and suitably and measurable flies apart under stress. The other is a transparent mannikin with simulated internal organs including the sexual, used to measure radiation doses. In the German Southwest Africa chapter Mondaugen, a German, calmly measures and records "sferics"; that is, radio static. All about him in the fortified farmhouse the white settlers spend their time in riotous living while waiting for an army to arrive and massacre the revolting natives for them. It doesn't show up. All this shows the absurdity of imperialism.

There are surrealist touches, not exactly original. A woman in the African compound wears a glass eye containing an operating clock for iris. The Bad Priest in Malta, pinned under a beam after an air raid is taken apart by the children, who hate him. She turns out to be a woman. On her scalp under a white wig is a two color tattoo of the crucifixion. In addition to false teeth, she too wears a glass eye with clock iris. Her high heeled golden slippers are pretty, but she wears them on artificial limbs that easily come off. And last, but not least, in her navel is embedded a star sapphire which must be cut out. This anti-religious allegory is not very subtle, is it?

Art is absurd too. Slab the painter daubs canvases, each depicting somewhere Cheese Danish #56, a breakfast offering of the Automat.

The time sequence extends from the 1890's in Egypt through both wars to about 1957. It is necessary to show the absurdity of the whole modern world, of everything within living memory, of British imperialism as well as the Cold War and the Age of Prosperity.

The work is not satire. Satire presupposes values and Pynchon professes none. What is the book then? It may be an attempt at a great philosophic novel. As such, I fear it is unsuccessful. Or it may be a *jeu d'esprit*, a loosely organized picaresque narrative that was loads of fun writing. However, I fear Pynchon means to be serious. But the drive to show off gets the better of him. "Look Ma. No hands!"

—WILLIAM H. GRATE



## The Sin of Their Race

*Go Tell It On the Mountain.* By James Baldwin. New York: Signet. pp. 191. \$.60.

James Baldwin has created a novel of strong characters—a veritable palate of people with whom he covers the canvas of *Go Tell It On the Mountain*. The theme is age old—that of “the search”. It is of the desire of a young Negro boy, John, to exceed the bonds of the tradition of his evangelist father and the confinement of his race. It is of John’s struggle to stand on equal footing with his unsympathetic father, who sanctimoniously presents the facade of the Lord’s Anointed despite the hidden fruits of his unsanctimonious youth.

The characters are attended with scrupulous detail. Through skillful use of the “flashback”, Mr. Baldwin reveals forces which have shaped each individual. All have places in the “congregation of the Saints” and yet each has a completeness, an independence. Under scrutiny, John is perhaps the least successful of the characters. It may be his symbolic role . . . or that he seems to have the least faith of the author. Whatever it is, all the undulating semi-climaxes fall perhaps a little flat at the denouement. It is as if Mr. Baldwin were a little dubious of his character, writing a little more from a previous conviction than a present one.

At any rate his other characters have a definite potency. They are Negro and they are endowed with a racial urgency. The novel portrays their fears—fears of awful realities at the hands of whites, fears even to walk into a white section of a city, or past a group of white boys congregated on a sidewalk. There are insults shouted, brutal injuries . . . the dreadful confinement because of the sin of their race. They are fearful and they are struggling for their only glory in salvation.

It is from this—the glory in salvation with the impatient rhythms of the prose, the strong motion of the narrative, the feeling with which the characters are presented—that the novel is endowed with a reminiscence of the Negro Spiritual. And from this lusty, rhythmical quality comes the true beauty of the work.

Mr. Baldwin is a Negro writing of Negroes, and writing well. Above the social outcry there is undeniable artistry.

STAFF

## And Freedom In Bondage

*Look to the River.* By William A. Owens. New York: Atheneum, 1963. 185 pp. \$3.95.

*Look to the River* is the story of a young boy in search of freedom. Jed, the boy, is gripped by memories of an unhappy past. Born with a spirit of adventure, Jed takes to the open road. Jed bounds himself to a farmer for \$12.00 for which he must chase blackbirds out of the cornfield from March until January. The blackbirds are Jed’s private dream and symbol of unlimited freedom . . . of life. Into this world of bonded freedom comes John, the peddler. With an air of excitement he had never known before, Jed listens to the stories of the road, of the world, and of the freedom he could have as John’s helper. Bound to the blackbirds and to the farm, Jed accepts a watch from the peddler to seal their bargain. Jed will go with the peddler when he works out his bond. Later in the year of loyalty, because of a “stolen” watch, because of an old biscuit, and because of human compassion Jed begins to run. Each successive incident makes freedom seem further and further away.

William A. Owens has used four incidents in the manner of pre-climatic climaxes. These incidents are given in a capable artistic style, but without the extensive coverage that is needed to assure the reader of their importance. Mr. Owens leaves the reader in a vacuum between each of these incidents. The final involvement with the complete plot leaves much to be desired. When the plot approaches denouement, the reader is still left insecure as to the importance of the pre-climaxes. This technique may well be employed to advantage if the author has sufficiently involved the pre-climaxes within the complete story. This reviewer feels that this involvement has not been attained to that degree which the rest of the novel requires.

In *Philosophy of Composition*, Edgar Allen Poe has said, “It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting . . .” Mr. Owens has certainly achieved this standard,



but it has been achieved at the expense of the reader and the quality of the novel.

*Look to the River* is a strongly appealing novel. It could be called an expanded "story that is short." Each word wields power and molds a character as challenging as Tom Sawyer, as enchanting as Jane Eyre, and as unpredictable as Huck Finn. The events described hardly seem important in the face of the fierce defiance that Jed exhibits. To become involved with the character, Jed, one must forget the basic theme, freedom of individual desires, wants, and needs. *Look to the River* approaches the plateau in literature reserved for simple, yet adequate books about youth and its freedoms. This plateau is not overpopulated by books with the power, the appeal, the compassion, and the understanding of William A. Owens' *Look to the River*.

—DWIGHT W. PEARCE

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## Wonder of the World

*The Great Infidel.* By Joseph Jay Deiss. New York: Random House. 1963. 595 pp. \$5.95.

Sainte Beuve, one of the greatest of all French critics, once declared that all literature, if it was of any merit at all, enriched the human mind. Joseph Deiss's *The Great Infidel* does have a lasting effect on the mind. It is, however, more tiring than enriching.

The Infidel, Fredrico II, King of Sicily and Holy Roman Emperor, was a free thinker who did exactly as he pleased. His sexual, religious, po-

litical, and scientific ideas were so completely unacceptable to the period in which he lived that he was excommunicated three times.

In order to retain the loyalty of his subjects, Fredrico was forced to fight the Papacy constantly. Mr. Deiss has conscientiously reported each minute and repetitious detail of the battle. The Pope labeled Fredrico a sodomite, a murderer, a sensualist, an infidel, and a traitor. Fredrico accused the Pope of exploitation of the peasants for his own private gains, of lack of concern about the welfare of the people and of corruption.

As a whole, Fredrico's life was rich, full, and certainly never without excitement. His entire reign was marred by invasions from hostile neighbors and by revolutions within his own kingdom. Fredrico's skill and versatility in handling these constant problems was a marvel, and his title, "Wonder of the World," was a richly deserved one.

Perhaps because one can never really know another completely, especially from reading documents and historical accounts about him, Fredrico seems unreal. Mr. Deiss at first made Fredrico seem warm, intelligent, and highly capable. After a while Mr. Deiss seemed to lose complete touch with his character. His sole purpose became relating as many facts about Fredrico's later life as he could. The results were a dramatically changed character and an immediate loss of the reader's interest.

Thus, a book that showed great promise became completely bogged down in the wordy battles between the Pope and the King and in a seemingly desperate attempt to relate every possible fact about Fredrico's life.

—FAY NELSON



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## MATHEMATICS

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**College Algebra** by A. Adrian Albert. Phoenix Science Series.

**Vector Analysis** by Kenneth S. Miller. Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc.

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE

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**ABC of Relativity** by Bertrand Russell. Mentor. (\$.50).

## SOCIOLOGY

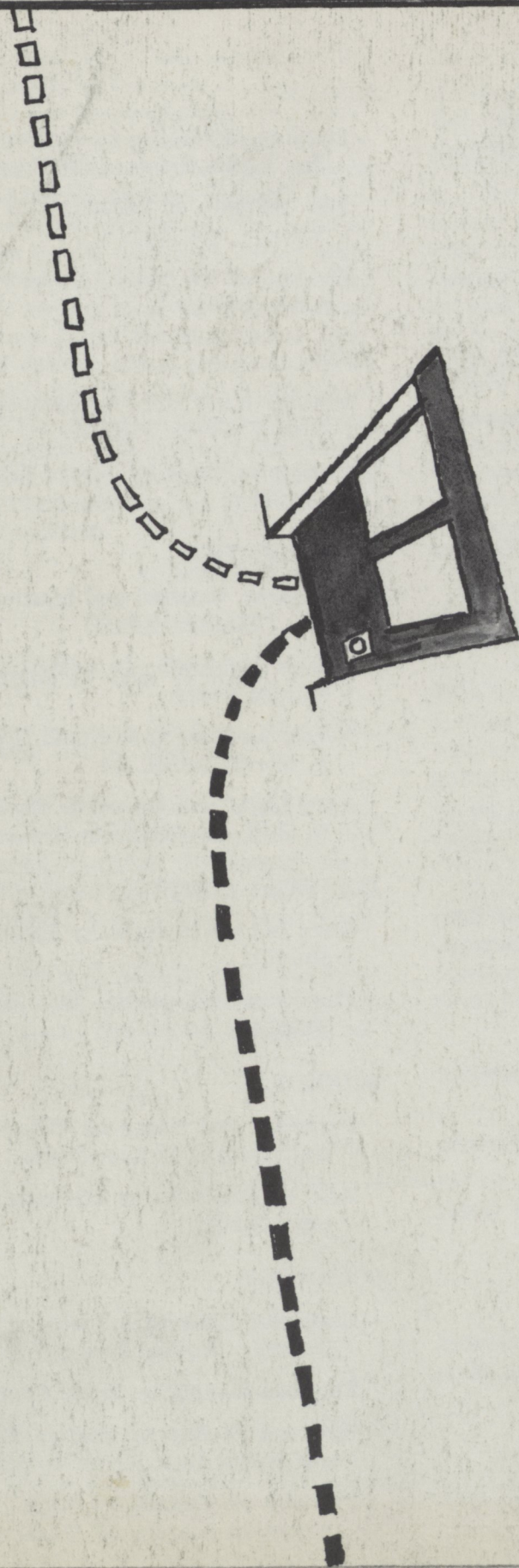
**Caste and Class in a Southern Town** by John Dollard. Anchor Press.

**The Sane Society** by Erich Fromm. Rhinehart.

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