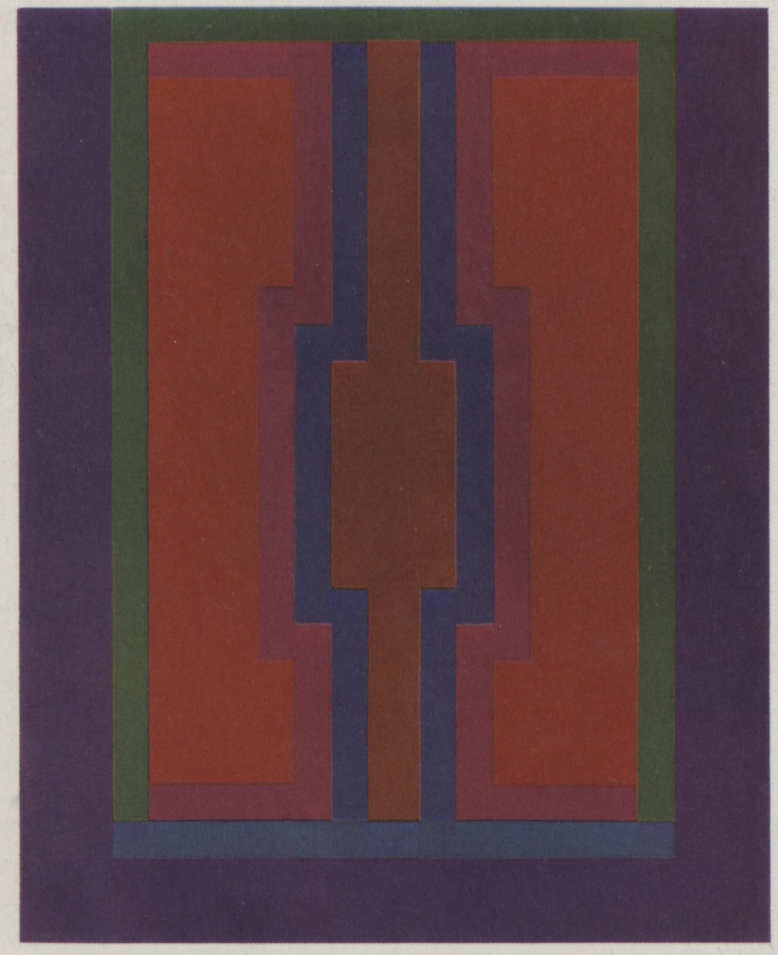
THE REBEL MAGAZINE

WINTER 1965



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Books by Conrad Aiken

POETRY

The Charnel Rose

The Jig of Forslin

The House of Dust

Preludes for Memnon - 1931

The Coming Forth by Day of Osiris Jones - 1931

Senlin: A Biography

Landscape West of Eden - 1935

Time in the Rock - 1936

The Soldier - 1944

Collected Poems - 1953

A Letter from Li Po - 1955

Selected Poems - 1961

Limericks - 1964

CRITICISM

Scepticisms - 1919

A Reviewer's ABC - 1958

NOVELS

Blue Voyage - 1928

Great Circle

Ushant - 1952

SHORT STORIES

Bring! Bring! - 1925

Costumes by Eros - 1928

Collected Short Stories - 1960

CONRAD AIKEN

INTERVIEW

The interview was held in Aiken's Savannah house on a warm, grey day in December

INTERVIEWER: The latest thing I have seen either on you or by you was the article you wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly*, "Poetry and the Mind of Modern Man."

AIKEN: That was originally done for the Voice of America and was part of a series organized by Howard Nemerov—he was the controller, and planned it—it was a very peculiar list. It's coming out published by Basic Books this year sometime.

INTERVIEWER: Then this was just your portion of it.

AIKEN: Yes, I was the lead-off man. And we were supposed to discuss our own work in relation to the times, and quote from our own stuff if we wanted to, or not. I'm told that one of the twenty quoted so much of his own work that it practically amounts to an anthology, and created quite a problem for the publisher, because it went so much over the limits. I won't mention his name; it'll come to light soon.

INTERVIEWER: There's a particular section in the *Atlantic* article that I'm intrigued with, the section in which you were talking about—well, you didn't call it the evolution of consciousness—the experience, the child's, of seeing a wasp sting a . . .

AIKEN: Locust.

INTERVIEWER: And then you said that although he perhaps was not conscious of it at the time, the experience was part of his becoming aware of himself in the universe, so to speak.

AIKEN: In other words, the joining together of all experience. The items in the events of one's life brought into relationship.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. And I wondered if you'd like to say something about your use of this totality of experience, particularly in your later poems.

AIKEN: Well, I think it's in all of them. *Senlin*, for example, is an attempt at a sort of whole totality of individual experience. That is, putting it into a frame, if you like. And so is *Osiris Jones*, so is *Landscape West of Eden*, and I think it's everywhere there. And I think maybe one of the

causes for my unpopularity is the fact that I have always aimed at this kind of wholeness, not of the individual mind or the individual bit in the poem, but of the thing as an entirety. This I think is less being paid attention to by the young poets, and I think they're all going up the wrong tree, with some exceptions.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned your unpopularity. I've been very much interested in that in relation to you. I don't know whether it bothers anyone else, but the fact is, it gets to be almost a fad, in literature, to call you unpopular.

AIKEN: Did you see the review of *Lord Zero* by James Dickey? It was in *Poetry Magazine* about a year and a half ago. In which he referred to me as an unfashionable, historic personage whom nobody read. This made me so mad that I replied, and really had fun replying. The editor of *Poetry* didn't want to print this letter and said why not just send it to Dickey. And I said no no, this is a little damaging—to call me dead before I am—an unfashionable, historic personage whom nobody reads. And it just happened that that day I'd got the royalty statements from Oxford Press, with very nearly a thousand dollars for a half year's royalties for the books. So I'm not that unpopular, and I mentioned this in my letter to *Poetry Magazine.* And had a dozen-odd letters from people like—oh who's the father of analytical criticism—oh heavens, I can't think of his name. He lives in New Jersey. I'll think of it presently.

INTERVIEWER: I have read again and again from people who say that if you are unpopular, it is because you have made your choice, kept to your work as you saw it, and have not been overly influenced by fads or fashions.

AIKEN: I think that's true. And of course we've had half a dozen fashions since Eliot and myself started out on this in the late teens and twenties which had to be fought against, and then the social consciousness of the thirties, and I don't know what you'd say about the forties. But now, of course, these generations are getting faster and faster and more and more splinterized, it seems to me. With some exceptions. There's a very good poet just being published by the Oxford Press named Fineman, who's I think the most exciting young thing to come along in a long time. He's a real metaphysical poet, and as subtle in his way as Stevens.

Of course, there's a lot in this. If you don't go along with the gangs and stay by yourself, you make it that much harder, and of course I've never read or spoken. I can't do it. I tried three times, always with disastrous results. Nobody could hear me—this was before mikes were invented—and both the audience and I suffered much too much, so I just gave that up. And of course that's a great disadvantage against these other fellows who do go around. As I said in my letter to Dickey, the average poet nowadays is a combination of travelling salesman and poet.

INTERVIEWER: If I might interject here, do you think there is any advantage for the poet in his later compositions in being able to do these public readings and get an immediate reaction to his work?

AIKEN: Well, he certainly sells his work much more.

INTERVIEWER: After-the-fact criticism would not interplay—that possible exchange—could be of any value to him as a poet?

AIKEN: I don't think so. I would think the other way, probably.

INTERVIEWER: After-the-fact criticism would not be that significant to him then?

AIKEN: No, I don't think so. I think it's a sop to vanity. Of course, there again, too, one should make exceptions. I mean, when you get a bravura performer like Dylan Thomas. He was a born showman in addition to being a damn good poet, and so it was only natural, I think, that that came easy and right for him. And I don't doubt he got genuine pleasure out of it.

INTERVIEWER: While I was reading *Scepticisms,* I began wondering if poets have always been as self-conscious and as conscious of the nature of poetry as they seem to be now.

AIKEN: Do you mean the joining of the critical faculty to the creative? I think that's always gone on, you know? Ben Jonson was no mean critic in his offhand way; and Philip Sidney; and then when you come down to later times, Coleridge, of course, was an extraordinary combination; and I don't doubt—well, Keats in his letters was obviously a very fine critic; Leigh Hunt, though he was not a major figure, but still he combined both faculties; and Matthew Arnold. So I think this has always been present; some have exercised both talents and some not. Goethe, too, to jump the channel, a very highly conscious and scientific creature as well as being a great poet. I think this is something to be encouraged. We found it, of course, wonderful fun back in the teens and twenties and early thirties— a sort of battle royal went on.

INTERVIEWER: I remember in one particular essay that you wrote, you were describing what an

Imagist poet would feel first when he came upon Master's *Spoon River Anthology*—the giant, all-too-human footprint beside his dwarf Japanese garden. For all the sting in some of the things you had to say—and some of them very devastating, I would hate to have them said about me—it seems to me that there is a relieving sense of enjoyment. And this is not only in your work, but in some of the other criticism. It seems now that I pick up some of the things in *PMLA* and the poetry journals and they all sound so . . .

AIKEN: Yes. Solemn, solemn. We had real fun out of all this, although sometimes it got pretty close to murder. There was a terrible occasion when I reviewed Amy Lowell's biography of Keats for the *Dial,* and I don't know whether you know this story, but anyway, I had just been up to London to see a specialist because I was suspected of having a fatal disease. Turned out not so, and I was going happily back to Rye on the train and got the evening paper and saw that Amy had died that day. And I'd just sent off my review of *John Keats* about ten days before, so I cabled at once to hold it up. That really was a murderous essay, and unhappily it had gone too far and Marianne Moore couldn't stop it. It came out just about two days after Amy's death, or very close to it. And a lot of people thought that this was my doing—that I'd caused the stroke.

INTERVIEWER: We have lately gotten a copy of a book called *A Dial Miscellany.* Your criticism of Eliot is there, and there are things by Eliot himself, and by Marianne Moore, and by the whole group of you people who knew each other and as you said, were fighting. But there is an air of excitement about that book.

AIKEN: I haven't seen that. Was this just published?

INTERVIEWER: I think it's been published now about a year.

AIKEN: Published by the Dial Press, or who?

INTERVIEWER: No, this was part of some doctoral work. But I wonder if you could give some little comparison with that time when the *Dial* was going on and now. For instance, the so-called New Criticism and what has grown out of it seems to me almost an attempt to make this very scientific.

AIKEN: Yes. Kenneth Burke, by the way, was the critic I was trying to think of. He was sort of the Founding Father of this—in a way. I think they've just dug a hole, these critics; they've taken all the joy out of it. This minute examination of syntax and words and whatnot just goes the wrong way. A very bad example of it is Robert Penn Warren's long essay on *The Ancient Mariner.* Did you ever try to read that? It's pretty hard going, and at the end you really don't know anything more than you started with.

INTERVIEWER: Presently, with these critics in a position of professionalism—meaning scientific, or whatever they call themselves, I seem to note that some of the younger poets are writing their poems in line with what has been set down as *a priori* requisite. This obviously was not the case when you were writing your *Scepticisms,* and your poems of that period, too. You had the community of care and interest between you and Miss Moore and Eliot and Stevens, of course. It seems to have been a more exciting and highly varied thing.

AIKEN: Well, it was a sort of friendly rivalry, all around. But occasionally no holds barred. I had an endless war with Louis Untermeyer, but we managed to be good friends through it all. I remember when he came to visit me in South Yarmouth. He sent a wire to his wife saying, "All quiet along the Bass River." I should say, well, he hasn't killed me yet. But that was important, too, to fight Louis Untermeyer, you see. I mean it was a duty, because his taste was so bad and his influence so enormous; this had to be kicked out. We didn't succeed and he managed to outlast us, though I think the influence has now waned.

INTERVIEWER: Have you seen Mr. Untermeyer's latest anthology of American Poetry? It's the revised American-British, in two volumes.

AIKEN: Is this the one in which Wilbur and somebody else assisted? I saw the American part of that, yes.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder if you would like to comment on the poems of yours that he selected?

AIKEN: I don't remember what they were.

INTERVIEWER: The best I can tell—also from his introduction to you—he's almost wholly concentrated on your earliest poems.

AIKEN: That's probably so. I've been struggling for years to make people use the Preludes, and especially *Time in the Rock,* which nobody will pay any attention to.

INTERVIEWER: I started thumbing through a few anthologies of American Poetry to see what poems of yours generally came into them, and was struck that the "morning song" from *Senlin* appears in practically every one.

AIKEN: That's everywhere, yes.

INTERVIEWER: It seems that your later poems haven't been done justice in the anthologies.

AIKEN: Very few of them have been used.

INTERVIEWER: Would you care to speculate as to

why?

AIKEN: Well, I think perhaps they're considered too long—I don't know. But on the other hand, I had a letter from James Fitzsimmons—do you know who he is? He's starting a magazine to be published in Italy, and he paid me the compliment of saying he thought my reading of *Blues for Ruby Matrix* and *Letter from Li Po*—I don't know whether you've heard the record; it's put out by the Caedmon gals—he says when he feels depressed or in need of a psychiatrist, he turns these on. That fixes him.

INTERVIEWER: I think we have heard it, in fact. A friend of ours has a collection of tapes, and I think we heard that.

AIKEN: Well, there are some of the earlier poems that have never been used and I think could have been. Like *Electra,* which is a rather complex little thing, about six or seven pages. But why it hasn't been used in an anthology I cannot think, because I think it's one of the best of the lot. And *Psychomachia,* another one which is also perhaps a little difficult, which Mr. Eliot published in the *Criterion,* that's never been even sniffed at. It's very curious. I think a lot of people when they read poetry don't want to think, and these poems are all aiming at a think, of one sort or another.

INTERVIEWER: The anthology habit seems to be so much a part of the two schools I've had anything to do with. I've seen good students, or at least superficially good students, whose only concern with poetry is the handful of things they find in an anthology.

AIKEN: They don't go any further. Yes, I suppose that happens.

INTERVIEWER: What has happened to the little magazine, anyway? I sort of got the impression that it's gone out of style.

AIKEN: Which?

INTERVIEWER: The little magazine. I mean . . .

AIKEN: The little magazines in general? Well, there are too many of them, that's the trouble. So if they could only concentrate all of them in one, we might have something; though I think the *Carleton Miscellany,* for example, is awfully good. That's the one I like best. That's fun; they have a sense of humor, Reed Whittemore in particular.

INTERVIEWER: I had the impression that there were many before and fewer now, but . . .

AIKEN: I think there are more now, because in the twenties, well, there was only the *Dial,* and others which only published two or three numbers. And not much else that I can think of. Well, the *Criterion* in England, of course.

INTERVIEWER: Well, where would you get a long poem published, aside from in a regular book?

AIKEN: Nowadays? It's very difficult; practically impossible. I suppose the *Yale Review* might conceivably do it, or the *Virginia Quarterly,* but otherwise I can't think of anything else. The old *Atlantic* might give you five pages, and did print a whole batch of Robert Graves' love poems about two years ago. But now it's a tough racket, not only to get things published in periodicals, but to get a book published, for a young poet, unless he has some sort of *entrée* somewhere.

INTERVIEWER: That which you just spoke of, the tough racket—do you feel that that is a peculiar situation at this mid-century period? It's been a tough racket all along.

AIKEN: Yes, it's always been. It was a little easier in the twenties to get a book published. There was a period, you see, when Houghton-Mifflin had that series of little green paperback books of poetry which published Fletcher and the Imagists and others, such as H.D. And the publishers were a little more adventurous then—prepared to take a small loss on a book of poems if they could sell something else, you see. Nowadays they're too chinchy.

INTERVIEWER: Could it be that it's a little more than the economics of the thing? From the critical point of view, poetry is not in its finest hour as far as prestige and its being read goes.

AIKEN: I don't know, I wouldn't say that. I think the prestige of poetry is very high in public esteem right now, perhaps higher than ever. After all, if you can sell a poet like Stevens, you're doing all right; and Marianne Moore, too. No, I think it's a wonderful time for poetry, and I really feel that something is going to boil up out of it. And in answer to your question about whether poetry could resume something like the Elizabethan spread, I think it's perfectly possible that this could happen in the next fifty years. All it needs is the right genius to come along and let fly. And old Masefield, I was pleased to see the other day celebrating his ninetieth birthday, I think, said that there are still lots of good tales to retell. I thought that was very nice, and it's true.

INTERVIEWER: I remember in the *Atlantic* article you said that there were signs that a new age in poetry might come about. This is a little obvious, perhaps, but I was going to ask what signs you had in mind.

AIKEN: Well, merely the proliferation of poetry all over the country, in all sorts of little groups and whatnot. As I say, I don't much care for groups

like that, when they get a little self-conscious like the Olson group and whatever, and the Lowell, I think, is a bad thing too. This cult of the autobiographical which he's encouraging is the sort of thing I don't think too much of. But apart from that, just the amount of activity in poetry is healthy, and it's gone right across the country. In my youth, it was only the eastern seaboard, you see, with Chicago as a kind of oasis there—Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Sandburg quarreling for it.

INTERVIEWER: With this idea of activity, when you and Mr. Eliot were at Harvard, from different parts of the country, were there any energies or little sparks put under you, so to speak, by Santayana and some of the others?

AIKEN: Oh yes, of course. We had a wonderful array of teachers at Harvard at that time: Santayana, Dean Briggs, and Nielson, and of course the famous Copey, whom I didn't think very much of—a vain little man. But all the others liked him. It was a wonderfully lively time to be there, and the very end of it too, because all those first-rate men disappeared in the next five or six years after we left. Santayana, I think, had the most influence on me. Eliot now denies that he was influenced by Santayana. A fellow named Robert Wilbur is doing a book on precisely that—the influence of Santayana on Stevens, Eliot, and myself.

INTERVIEWER: If I may pursue this a little further, I remember that in one of your articles or books you said that you went to England because you felt you had some roots there, and so you went, so to speak, in search of your tradition. Did any of that start at Harvard?

AIKEN: No, while I was still at school I already had this sort of fixed notion about England. In fact, it goes right back to the house next door where I grew up, 228 Oglethorpe Avenue. That's where I read *Tom Brown's School Days,* with that famous little epigraph which I quote in *Ushant*:

> I am the Poet of White Horse Vale, sir,
> With liberal notions under my cap.

And so I, from the age of ten or eleven, already had a bead on England, and I was only just waiting until I got there, that was all. I began going there as an undergraduate, for the holidays, and fell in love with it, especially with the Lake District, Wordsworth country; and still am, as far as that's concerned, though I finally found I had to reverse the process and come back here to reimmerse.

INTERVIEWER: Then would it be right to say that this period gave you the opportunity of standing outside your early experiences and getting some point of view to come back to in your poetry?

AIKEN: Well, there as in the Voice of America piece, I find it very hard to say at what point—I suppose this thing was jelling all the time, and probably shows itself in the work, which gets a little more American all the time, although I don't think it's *specifically* American. Poetry shouldn't be specifically of any . . .

INTERVIEWER: I'd just like to interject here: When I read aloud that first four or five pages of *Ushant,* the part with the waves and the rolling, I thought about Walt Whitman, and I was struck . . . I was wondering if you might like to comment on that passage.

AIKEN: Well, that was the first bit of *Ushant* that I wrote, and I wrote it a long time before I finished the book, and just kept it as a nugget from which to start when I got around to it. It was in 1933 that I wrote it, and I didn't then write the book itself until 1951. I had the idea and a lot of notes, but that passage was just, as it were, to set the key for the book.

INTERVIEWER: The prose in that passage seems to border on poetry in some places, and the effect of reading it is just like a poem.

AIKEN: Yes. Well, I think of *Ushant* as a poem, and it has a symphonic structure.

INTERVIEWER: In *Scepticisms,* in the section on Master's poetry, you mentioned that his discursiveness gave him a bent toward prose. How do you feel about that distinction between the prose sentiment and poetry? Maybe that's not clear.

AIKEN: I don't quite . . . I don't think there's any sharp dividing line between the two. One can run over into the other, and God knows poetry can slip completely enough into prose.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to say I enjoyed the humor in both *Ushant* and *Blue Voyage.*

AIKEN: Yes, I think they are fun; they were meant to be, anyway. I had a very curious experience with *Blue Voyage.* I was trying to sell it, way back in the twenties, and one day Max, the famous Max Perkins, rang me up from South Station in Boston—I was in Cambridge—and said he was very much interested in *Blue Voyage,* but he thought it was too short. And I said, "Well, everybody else seems to think it's too long, and in particular they object to the final chapter, a series of letters describing, amongst other things, a trip down Buzzard's Bay in a whale ship." And he said, "What whale ship?" And of course it turned out that what he had was only the first four chapters of *Blue Voyage,* which had somehow got

detached at Brandt and Brandt's, my agents, and had been circulating by itself, apart from the whole book.

The next story about *Blue Voyage* was that Boni and Liveright was supposed to publish it—they published the first short stories, *Bring! Bring!*—and by contract I was bound to give them my next book, which was *Blue Voyage*. So it went to them, and they celebrated with a solemn board meeting. We all sat in a circle and had marvelous drinks—this was Prohibition time, of course. They had a bar ceiling high, and produced these wonderful drinks. But it turned out this was an inquest on *Blue Voyage*, and one editor after another, and then all the salesmen, got up and each said, "No no, we couldn't possibly publish this thing—it's unreadable," until finally it came to the editor-in-chief, and he said he just really hadn't been able to get beyond the third page, and so would I please release them from the contract. And I said, "Well, obviously if you don't want to publish it, it isn't going to do me any good to let you publish it, so you're free." So *he* didn't think it was funny.

INTERVIEWER: Do publishers still operate that way now?

AIKEN: Well, you never know what the publishers are up to. I've been having the damnedest time with Holt, Rinehart, and Winston over my *Limericks*. They first were enthusiastic about doing the *Limericks*, and then they handed me over to a young editor who wanted to rewrite them entirely, and proceeded to do so, and just made a hash out of them. And I protested about this and the whole thing—the contract was about to be signed—and they withdrew it, because of this impasse. And Arthur Cohen, who's my friend, said, "Well, Conrad, we never really took this seriously, did we? So why don't we just forget it?" And I replied, "Damn it all, I did take it seriously; I want to publish this book." Well, then they fired this young man who was rewriting me, and everything was peaceful. But there was still some claim that there were irregularities in tone in the *Limericks*. So I said "Well, I'll just touch them up a bit," though I didn't at all; I just changed the order. I sent them back rearranged and they published the book, and now it's sold eleven thousand copies and still going strong. And it's had the distinction of having ads of it rejected by both the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*. That's really something, I think. Each of these ads had quoted one of the more harmless limericks.

INTERVIEWER: As a reason for not running the ad?

AIKEN: They were thought to be "in questionable taste." When you think of the ads that do come out in the *New York Times—The Sex Knowledge of the East*, and other such things.

INTERVIEWER: I don't want to compound Dickey's error in referring to you as a historical personage, but from your earliest volume of poetry right up until now and in Yeats, Stevens, and Eliot, and all of you people, there is a spectrum of experience in there. The modern preoccupation seems to be with somebody combing his daughter's hair, and it doesn't go beyond to include anything else.

AIKEN: There's no background to it; it's isolated. There's no feeling that there's a world out there, and that it's complex and terrifying, and we've got to impose order.

INTERVIEWER: What comes first to my mind is the "morning song" from *Senlin*, probably because it's in all the anthologies. Robert Watson in *Paper Horses* had a long poem about selecting his tie, but Senlin ties his tie in a sunrise, and there's a bird outside and an earth under his feet. With the music of the poem, there is a sense of motion and completeness; it's as though the whole earth is rolling when Senlin ties his tie.

AIKEN: Yes. Well, that's what it's supposed to do.

INTERVIEWER: If a poem takes me back through something—this is the thing which seems to be absent from poetry now.

AIKEN: Yes, it's that . . . The robin sings in the chinaberry tree. This has always worried me because robins—of course we see them in New England and they sing there, but they winter here and naturally don't sing. But last year I discovered in one of these little nature columns that the robins love chinaberries and get drunk on them, and then sing. So it's all right.

Do you see the *Times Literary Supplement*—London? There was a very fine—if I do say so, because it's very flattering—leading article on me about a year and a half ago. In that there's a very interesting analysis of *Senlin*, and a comparison of it with Eliot, and noting the likenesses and the differences. It's by Kathleen Raine, actually. I think in many respects it's the best thing ever written on the works as a whole, although she dismisses the novels and hates *Ushant*. She calls *Ushant* distasteful. She's some variety of mystic herself, and Catholic possibly, or some aspect of, and this upset her, I think. But she's awfully good on the poetry, and she makes a point that we sort of skittered around earlier, that this is poetic thinking of a sort that she says hasn't been done

since Shelley, although I'm not particularly keen on having Percy Bysshe dragged into it. But still, I think she's got something when she talks about sustained poetic thinking, and she cites as examples of that the first and last poems in my *Selected Poems*—it came out two years ago—and the first one is *Palimpsest: The Deceitful Portrait,* which is a section out of *The House of Dust,* one of the early symphonies, and the last one is *The Crystal,* to Mr. Pythagoras. And in those I think you can see really what the whole scheme is going to be, and especially so of *Palimpsest,* because it's a highly analytic piece, as of consciousness itself, and what constitutes it, at the same time turning it into a long metaphor.

INTERVIEWER: I had always thought of you as a poet, but in my junior year in college I stumbled on a short story in an anthology called *Silent Snow, Secret Snow* and I saw your name, and it was only then that I realized you wrote very good prose. I wondered if you would like to say whether you consider yourself first a poet and them a prose writer, or are they both the same?

AIKEN: I always did both—right from the beginning, even at Middlesex School for the school paper. I would have a short story in one number and a poem in the next, alternate, and at Harvard I made a point of alternating the two; I felt that going from one to the other refreshed the other medium, you see. So no, I think it's all of a piece—they all add up to one thing.

And incidentally, *Silent Snow* has been made into a remarkable short film, which I wouldn't have thought possible, but this young man named Kearney wrote me a couple of years ago asking permission. We had some difficulties with him—he didn't have a cent to back him and didn't want to pay for an option, so we let it go without the option, and a long piece came out about him in the *New York Tribune* about three weeks ago which we happened to see, so I tracked him down in New York. He was listed in the phone book, but it turned out to be his grandmother, who said that she hadn't seen him for years, in a quavering voice, and then gave me his own phone number and it turned out he was living only two blocks from us in New York. So I called him up and we went over the next morning and saw this picture in his own living room, and it's simply beautiful, an absolute heart-breaker. He didn't know that I was writing about an English town, so he's put this into a little American village, or the outskirts of, and said he had a terrible time getting enough snow and thinks he may have to substitute some bits when he's got another good snowfall this winter. But it's a knockout—runs just under twenty minutes.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose Kearney hadn't read *Ushant;* otherwise he would've known about the English town.

AIKEN: No, I guess he hadn't. I don't think he's much of a reader; he's got his eyes on movies and other things. In fact, he's done a full-length comedy which is extremely good, too. He's married to a six-foot-five strip-tease beauty who's a graduate of Hunter College. We haven't met her, but we hope to.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think of film generally as a form of artistic expression?

AIKEN: Oh, wonderful. One of the great things. Yes, I became an addict when it was still called the nickelodian, when you paid five cents and went in and saw Buster Keaton and all the others, and I've been an addict ever since.

INTERVIEWER: We aren't tiring you, I hope. Or more to the point, boring you.

AIKEN: Would you care to . . . could we have a drink? I'll call to my wife. What would you like? We have martinis.

INTERVIEWER: (Talking about the *Red Clay Reader)* I'm a little sorry that the presentation is so tricky, or whatever it is.

AIKEN: Yes, I think so. And I'm always a little sorry when this regionalism thing is pressed.

INTERVIEWER: We talked about that on the way down—that was one question we were not going to tie around your neck—what you thought about southern writers.

AIKEN: I think it's about time the Confederate flag disappeared, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Your rooms are beautiful.

AIKEN: These are lovely houses; there are two for sale next door, a bargain, too, but they're just shells. They've got to be all fixed up inside as this was, too. They were just tearing them down when I got the Poetry Society here to invite Hy Sobiloff, the only millionare poet, to come down and read to the Poetry Society, and he was taken in hand and shown this house next door, the one that I grew up in, and what a pitiful state it was in. Pickaxes had already gone through the roof. And so he bought all four of them and fixed this one up for our use as long as we live, rent-free.

INTERVIEWER: We walked along this particular row of houses several times when we've been to Savannah; they're most intriguing. We were also

wondering which hotel it was that you mention standing on top of in *Ushant*.

AIKEN: The DeSoto.

INTERVIEWER: That's where we're staying.

AIKEN: My school was just next door—and we used to go up the fire escapes, but you can take the elevator and get out on the roof and you get a wonderful view, such as there is; it's all flat, of course.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think psychologists can decide what is a poetic or creative personality? I think you dealt with this somewhat in a piece I read.

AIKEN: What was this in, do you remember?

INTERVIEWER: *A Reviewer's ABC*, I think the second or third piece in there; you were talking about Kostyleff.

AIKEN: Kostyleff—oh, yes. Well, I've more or less moved away from that position. Of course the Freudians just give up. I don't think they claim to know anything about the workings of a poet, except that it's analogous to the dream mechanism—a directed dream.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel you are directing your dreams as you write your poem?

AIKEN: Well, you could call poetry a directed dream.

INTERVIEWER: In the *Atlantic* article, I think you said something to the effect that in your poetry there was a wedding of the subject and the versification.

AIKEN: Yes. The subject finding its own form.

INTERVIEWER: What has intrigued me in your poetry is this lyrical or musical probing as far as your subject matter is concerned.

AIKEN: Of course there's this musical thing; it's been one of my handicaps, because I think Louis Untermeyer started the fashion, saying that my poems were just music, nothing else. This haunted me for forty years.

INTERVIEWER: Some people have noted in defending free forms that traditional rhyme and meter don't satisfy the needs of exploring and ordering the twentieth century world. Obviously you don't agree. Would you care to elaborate on that?

AIKEN: Just what?

INTERVIEWER: Some free verse advocates maintain that the traditional forms are not a satisfactory means of expression in the modern world.

AIKEN: That is absolute nonsense.

INTERVIEWER: I said you obviously don't agree with them.

AIKEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Would you care to elaborate?

AIKEN: Well, poetry is an art; why not use it? Anything else is to abandon it. Every resource of it should be used, and anything in twentieth century consciousness can be expressed in it. No, I think these boys and girls are just lazy, or else they haven't the gift for it.

Of course, Marianne Moore made a triumph out of her failure by using a purely numerical system. I've just written a very short piece about her for that *fesstschrift* book that's coming out this year, in which I recounted how I'd made the discovery—for I think I was the first to discover the principle. Fletcher had given me a copy of the Egoist Press *Selected Poems*—1921 or 2 this was—and I was puzzled by these and went through them carefully. I've still got the copy in which I noted the number of syllables in each line of the first three stanzas of each poem, and they're each exactly alike, using the same number of syllables and an occasional hyphen where she had to split a word—carry it over—and that's it. I suppose she found that she couldn't use that extraordinary wit and knowledge in verse because she didn't have the ability to swing it; and so substituted this other artifice—which *is* an artifice—for it. I daresay she would've been happy if she could've really done it in very fine poetry; but that she couldn't I think is evident in her translation of Fontaine.

INTERVIEWER: You were among the first to bring out Emily Dickinson. You were the first editor, weren't you?

AIKEN: Yes, I got out the *Selected Poems* in London in 1924, and that really started it. Both Eliot and Pound were very much annoyed with me for bringing out Dickinson. They did their damnedest to stop me from doing it. I think they thought this was really cutting the ground from under their feet—I mean, to have a great poet looking over their shoulders suddenly—a little embarrassing. So they pooh-poohed it and said no, no, it's just a little blue-stocking, a little country blue-stocking.

INTERVIEWER: Oh to be a country blue-stocking.

AIKEN: Yes. Yes, we were talking about Emily the other day and I remembered something that I'd noticed in the country. There are two lines of hers:

> Nature rarer uses yellow
> Than another hue

but I added two lines to this:

> If she were alive I'd tell her
> It just isn't true.

And to make it vulgarer still:

> Shit
> What of it.

How did she get that idea, that yellow was so uncommon? Good God, I mean, you start out with dandelions, you go to buttercups, you have marigolds and daffodils, goldenrod—the whole summer is just one long sequence of yellows. It's very peculiar, though I suppose maybe that she was just kept in her father's garden, and that was probably all violets.

Oh yes, and going back to Eliot, I was going to put that business straight. Well, what really happened was that Tom gave me the manuscript of *Prufrock,* rather reluctantly, too, because I don't think he really had any idea of how good it was, and was rather shy about publishing the thing. So I took it over to London, where I met Pound—I had a letter of introduction to Ezra—and tried the poem on all the possible magazines, including *Poetry and Drama,* run by Harold Monro, and the *English Review,* which was then very good, edited by Austin Harrison, and anything else possible, but they all sent it back. Harold Monro, in fact, said he thought it was cuckoo, and really, he just thought it was crazy, and so I gave up. Well then I met Ezra and showed it to him, and of course Ezra liked it at once; and he then sent it to Harriet Monroe for *Poetry* in Chicago. That's how it happened.

INTERVIEWER: You were the impetus.

AIKEN: Yes. Oh yes. In fact I took it out of Tom's hands. I don't think he really wanted to do anything with it. He now insists that I took out a whole page from the poem and that that improved it very much, but I think he's wrong about this. I don't think I did; I don't remember it at all. I think he's perhaps confusing this with what Ezra did to *The Waste Land.*

INTERVIEWER: I think I'll go ahead and confess something: I had read a couple of years ago in one of the ladies' magazines that you and your wife were famous for your martinis.

AIKEN: That seems to be a theory. We travel with them everywhere; we never could get into the car without a thermos full of martinis, and we've got a whole string of graveyards on the eastern coast that we stop at and drink martinis.

INTERVIEWER: We were also much interested that you served your martinis in silver goblets.

AIKEN: Yes, we travel with those too. I think they add to the ceremony.

INTERVIEWER: In fact, to be perfectly crass about it, we rushed out—could not afford it— and bought ourselves a set, nickel-plated.

AIKEN: Well, ours are only silver-plated. Three of them we got in England, and they're very pretty. One of them was a trophy for a half-mile race which some boy got in what I think is South Kensington School or some such. I'm thinking of having one of the others engraved with my name on it for one mile in 1903, in 3:54.

INTERVIEWER: We hear from time to time that after Stephen Spender, American poetry has more or less become English poetry.

AIKEN: Yes, I've said that. I came up with that in 1944; I said that English poetry is now written in America.

INTERVIEWER: During your years over there, did you see any indications that some young English poets were beginning again to write?

AIKEN: No. It's a very poor show. It still is, I think.

INTERVIEWER: What would you attribute that to?

AIKEN: God knows; I don't know. I think the war emaciated them, and I think the loss of the empire and all their position in the world is bound to be depressing, but I don't think that's sufficient reason for it. It's probably an accident of some kind, because they're exposed to the same winds of doctrine and whatever that we are, and they're on the whole better educated and more intelligent than we are, I think. So—give 'em time.

INTERVIEWER: I've recently met some people who said that in England there seemed to be a sense of the literary community; not strictly literary or strictly communal, but a certain community of interests; and something nicer than the same sort of thing in New York. Do you have any opinion on that?

AIKEN: Well, I suppose it's easier to get together in London than here. But of course the pub is a great institution—helps—but, I don't know. I should think in New York it's just as easy to have that sort of thing, if you want it. I stay out of literary things. I prefer to consort with the sort of lesser characters of the literary world—the young people.

INTERVIEWER: I think they meant that as young people themselves they had a chance there to see and talk with various writers, and meeting these people made London special for them in that way.

AIKEN: Yes. Did they go to these arts council meetings and that sort of thing?

INTERVIEWER: I think it was in part that and some letters of introduction that they had.

AIKEN: Of course, letters of introduction make all the difference. The old Poetry Bookshop, of course, which finally folded in 1933, was a really wonderful institution. That was great fun, because you could meet any of your coevals and

wrangle.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about these writers' conferences that people troop off to?

AIKEN: Oh horrible. No, I think they're dreadful, and these colonies like the one at Peterborough, New Hampshire, McDowell Colony, and the other one in New York, Yaddo, where you can get free room and board and whatnot, you see. Malcolm Cowley, who's a very good friend of mine, is one of the directors of this thing; he's been trying for fifteen years to get us to go there, and we just say no, although I'm told the roast beef is very good. No, I think that's deadly, that sort of thing. One writer by himself is bad enough, but if you get five in a room, it's terrible. And I doubt if really anything good comes out of it. It's much better to just go and hire a room in a lodging house and sequester yourself there in the city, and just get lost. But at these places, you've got a little sacred cabin out in the woods and have your own little lunch put at your doorstep at one PM, and are just supposed to sit there and produce like a hen in a hen factory.

INTERVIEWER: This is going to sound very naive, but after I have done this, I want to come out with it in my hands and say, "Somebody listen." Have you ever had that feeling after you have been sequestered?

AIKEN: Oh yes, very much so. I want to try it on the dog somewhere in there. Yes, Houston Peterson—do you know who he is? He wrote the first book about me way back in the thirties, not very good. He's a philosopher, and so it was more or less about the tendencies of thought in the twentieth century insofar as they showed themselves in my poetry. And he made the mistake of coming to supper with us just after I'd finished the Pythagoras poem, *The Crystal,* and, having had a few martinis, I hauled off and read it to him and his wife after supper, at the table. He was furious. He loves to talk himself, so to be hung up like that seemed to him an outrage. All he could think to do was say, "You know, I don't think you should mention cocktails in that poem—a little out of key, don't you think, Aiken?"

—Well, I hope you get something—out of this.

INTERVIEWER: I think we have personally been a great deal . . .

AIKEN: Which reminds me of a wonderful remark that was made by a now-forgotten English poet, Wilfred Wilson Gibson. Do you remember him? Frost—it was when Frost was living in England—and he went on an expedition with Gibson and I think De la Mare and W. H. Davis, the tramp poet. They went to a sort of country fair and did various things, and at some point Gibson sidled up to Frost and said, "Tell me Frost, are you *getting* anything out of this?"

December 12, 1964
PAT R. WILLIS
B. TOLSON WILLIS
SANFORD PEELE
TOM SPEIGHT

Savannah from the roof of the DeSoto

THE SWINGS

A SHORT STORY BY

ANNE W. NELSON

"Look," he said, "the part I liked best was when she stood up on that barge and winked at him. You have got to see it."

And I said, "It will make me nervous. Ever since I started writing that column for the paper that kind of thing bothers me."

"It is just that terrible job you have," he said. "Is all."

"Well, they pay me by the word and that is more than I can say for anything else I have done."

"But let's go and if you get nervous we will leave."

"No, I might not know if I get nervous," I said, "until afterwards. And then it will be too late. I would rather stay here."

"But you have got to see it. It is every bit as good as the passage in *The Waste Land.*

"That is all right. I can read that at home."

"What you need to do," he said, "is get out and live. And stop working so hard." "You are not getting any older, either," I said.

"Well, at least *I* have lived," he said.

So I opened a bureau drawer and said, "Here. Read all of this crap."

He looked at all the papers and then read several pages. I enjoyed thinking the revelation might make him a little less sure of himself. A little puzzled. Then he said that I must have been writing it for a long time.

"Ever since I went to work for the newspaper," I said.

"Really?" he said.

And I said, "Really."

He said that it was unbelievable. He did not say so though in his best stage voice, so I knew that he was genuinely surprised. I was glad I had waited to spring it on him until a time when we needed a change.

Aloud, I wondered why he considered it so unbelievable. I was trying to bait him a little.

"I just absolutely never," he said, "thought of your doing anything."

"You mean to tell me," I said, "that you slept with me all those times, and you thought that in between I more or less sat around knitting cobwebs or something?"

I knew that this was, in fact, the approximation of how he had felt. I had known it for a long time. And though it was not what bothered me, I thought it might be good for him to think I was only just catching on now. I thought he might feel less miserable about how it had been if I needled him a little and then let the whole thing drop.

"Not exactly 'cobwebs'," he said. "Just kind of always there without any wheels turning." He admired wheelessness in people.

But I said, "Uhhuh," as if I didn't get the point. I wanted to be convinced that he had been paying me a double-edged compliment.

"What?" he said, trying to draw me out in the open.

"Oh nothing," I said. And went in the bathroom and started reading the May 1964 issue of *National Geographic* with all the good pictures of England in it. And the section on Wm. Shakespeare.

He came to the bathroom door and said, intimating nasty affection, "You might be good, but you will never be great."

We both knew that he was trying to get me back for having sprung the drawer full of writing on him. But we knew why I had done that, too. We knew, in fact, how all of it was. But playing with it a little made us feel better, more alive. It was all rather a way of choosing colours or sides in an elaborate game in which we never quite wanted to beat each other.

I didn't answer him for a few minutes.

So he said, "Because you don't care enough."

I still didn't answer him.

"Because you don't care enough," he repeated. "Are you going to write about us?" he wanted to know.

"Not that I know of," I said. And I wasn't as far as I knew.

"Why not?" He tried to hide his surprise and anxiety with a feigned hurt that was not quite good enough to divert me.

"Because you could think I was not doing anything all those years," I said. Now, I was at the place where I was beginning to believe what I was saying.

"I don't understand," he lied.

"Oh yes, you do," I said. "You're plenty smart. You are not the typical reader. The circulation never even touches your numbers."

"What 'numbness'?" he pretended to misunderstand.

I could tell that he also had reached the stage where he was warming into belief.

"Never mind," I said. "Your 'numbness' is exactly what I am talking about."

"Oh, really?" he said.

"Yes."

It might be important about us to somebody someday," he said.

"William Shakespeare," I read aloud, "never had any grandchildren."

"Are you trying to start that business about immortality again?" he wanted to know.

"No," I said, "I am not trying to start anything." But I had known that was what he would think. That was why I had read the sentence in the first place. "I was reading it out of the book," I said.

"What in the hell damn book?" he said.

"The *National Geographic* in here," I said.

"Have you got a goddamned magazine in there?"

"There are several magazines in here. But that was the one on top." I wanted him to think my end of the conversation had been at random, over the first magazine I had come to.

"I have got to go now," he said. "I will be back later."

I didn't know whether to believe him or not. I had never known whether to believe what he said about when he was coming back. I just knew that he would sometime. It was like him to become suddenly serious in a discussion, feel that he had lost, and leave quickly.

"How many books do you think you can write without writing about us?"

"I have not counted them yet," I said, pretending to speak offhand.

"I have to go do something important," he said.

I was quiet, letting him figure another line to leave on.

"Listen," he said, "at first, I would have loved you if I could have."

"That is all right," I said. That was the only thing he had ever said that I was sure he believed.

Then he went out saying the part from *The Waste Land* about the golden barge.

Later that evening when he came back, we were very upset about each other. We didn't want to be together, but we didn't want not to be.

"We could take a walk," he said. "Just go out and walk, the way we used to."

"I don't know," I said.

"Down by the Presbyterian Church," he said. "The steeple will be lighted. And over in the park the swings will be swaying. And the steeple light-

ed beyond the treetops. We will know everything. And we will walk by the big houses with their soft lights. Like *Swann's Way,*" he said. "We can do it like that."

"You look too much like somebody whose family sold land to send them to Harvard in 1910," I said.

"No, if you have to look like something, I am glad it is something Southern," I said.

"Is it that bad?" he asked.

The switch at the top of the stairs did not work, so he went down to turn on the light from below. While he was trying to find the switch down there, I started down in the dark. I was still not very happy about our going to walk. I didn't want to have to get to the bottom and have to walk out with him. I wished we didn't have to be together. So I stopped midway down and waited for him to find the switch. I wished I could stand there forever. Then somebody somewhere down the street turned on a radio. I could hear music outside coming across the yards.

"Come on down in the dark," he said. "I can't find the switch."

He sounded irritable and strange. He sounded like a stranger. I couldn't make myself go down. The music from the radio came faintly through the darkness. I knew he was angry because I had not answered nor gone down.

I could see him standing in the moonlight that came in at the doorway. I could not think of anything and I did not know what to say. I wished I could say something so he would know. The music from the radio became sweeter. I hoped it would last a few moments longer. I could tell we were a million miles apart.

Love Field last summer with the sun falling like sleet. The planes falling like sleety leaves, slowly and icy with light to the runway. Or millions and millions of chrysanthemums. Wet with the nights falling forever. And the knights in their silver armour standing stiffly in old story books. The nights falling like dew. And the years. And the chrysanthemums.

The swings swayed. Over in the park the swings were swaying in the dark to the time that came from a distant radio.

Once, a bird got in a chimney at home. We could not get it out. For several days we heard it there, now fluttering, and now quiet. A flurry of wings now like rain and yet again like sleet. Fixed. Lodged. Run like the colors of an ancient cloth. Mingled with the chrysanthemums. Quiet again and again. Dark and quiet like a stone. Like a cherry pit or peach kernel wedged in the throat. Not waiting to burst with bloom. And not waiting. Somehow eternal.

I could see him standing still in the moonlight. I knew he was not really waiting for me to go down. For some reason, I could not bear it somehow for him. I could not bear it for either of us. I wanted to say something true. I wanted to say something better than we had been. The moonlight was falling like sleet and the music from the radio was gone. It had dimmed and disappeared. At least we did not have to die. We were young. We could breathe good. And our bones did not ache. We could walk a long way before our hearts stopped beating or a rock spurted like lava in our brains. Why then the world, dimmed and disappeared? The moonlight like sleet. Here. And in Ireland. In Mississippi. And everywhere. The same story, always different.

"Gabriel," I said. "I'm sorry I was so rude to you at the Christmas party that time. After all, they were your relatives—"

"I know," he said. "I figured you were thinking about something like that."

I could tell he had liked what I had said better than any of the other ways I could have broken the silence.

"I tell you what," I said, "if you still want to, let's go down back of Old Swann's Place."

"If I could remember *her* name," he said, "I'd leave you standing here and maybe go for a ride by myself or something.

"Gerta," I said.

"Yes," he said, "in a terra cotta coloured dress with a salmon pink panel."

When we were just outside town that evening, I suddenly knew that I should have stayed home. Sometimes riding in a car is not good. And there are places I would never go in a car if I could help it. The mist was rising from the river in white endless gulfs that looked like nameless masses of great flowers heaped at the feet of the town's dark silhouette. The bridge that led into town was about three hundred yards long and curved slightly in the middle so that the old street lamps along both sides made it look like a double-exposure of a starry half moon in an undeveloped picture. I didn't like the way it looked from the car. And I wished that I had either stayed home or walked. I would rather it to have been less beautiful. I wanted to hear my feet on the concrete. And to reach out over the railing and pull a leaf off the tops of the trees that grew up from the river bank. I would have liked to have seen it all up close. Not like such a big thing.

Then, when we got to the house I did not want to go to bed. I did not want to just walk through a dark house and go to bed at ten o'clock at night. It seemed cold to quit consciousness so abruptly. I wished there were a cat to put out. Or a dress to iron. Or fire to stir. But there was nothing. Only the beautifulness of everything was there. I suppose that is why the Catholics do so much with the rosary. Counting it all is better maybe than leaving it in such numerous disarray. A rosarium was a garden. That was where they got the word. I liked thinking about that.

There was a postcard from France during World War I somewhere in a book I had been reading that day. I wished I had read the message on the back of it. I wondered what people wrote to each other on postcards during World War I.

"The *New Yorker* wouldn't touch it," he said.

"What are you talking about," I replied, knowing perfectly well what he was talking about.

"Whatever you are thinking about us," he said, "is not publishable, no matter how good it is."

"I was not thinking about us," I lied. "I was thinking about a hat, a bonnet."

"Oh, God! In the middle of the night—a bonnet. God. That's about us all right," he said. "Bull's eye. About two yards off center."

"You get funnier and funnier all the time," I said. "Funnier and funnier."

I was still thinking about World War I, and it was not funny. But it *was* about us. I didn't know how it had got to be about us, but it was. I began trying to think why thinking about World War I in the middle of the night felt so much like thinking about us. Then I began thinking about the bonnet because it had slipped out of my mouth in the wake of the lie in such a way that the elaborate shape of credulity formed a great apparition-like question mark with streamers and exposed stitching where the flowers—big roses, probably, pink, out of that stiff, slick material—had been ripped away. That worried me. I kept fishing around frantically trying to come up with a spray of flowers. I couldn't remember enough about how roses on that kind of hat would have looked. Any flower would do, I decided. I could not go to sleep and leave the hat hanging there. But I couldn't place the period of the hat, and it kept shimmering into shape just under my eye-lids. Somehow not being able to place it blocked the flowers. Not one flower I could remember. Just names. Rose. Daisy. Nothing. Echoes in a big black chamber. I wanted to get the hat straight because I was afraid he was going to ask me about it. I hoped he'd gone to sleep. I knew he'd know I had been lying about it unless I hurried and saw it whole. What I really wanted to do was get back to World War I and France before I went to sleep. Something about that bothered me. I listened and could tell by the way he was breathing that he was not asleep. And I could tell that he was thinking about the hat and was on the brink of asking me about it. He almost believed I had been telling the truth, I knew. With a good description of a hat I could convince him. Flowers. Flowers. "And soft perfume and sweet perfume . . ." But that was not the one—imagine the Thames blossomless, bathed in the scents of faceless flowers. I had to save it for another time. All I could get now was "deep pillowed in silk and scented down". Deep pillowed. Deep pillowed. I couldn't get to the part of the poem about flowers.

He touched my arm. I felt strangely like a child restrained from meddling in some long-forbidden drawer or crevice. I wished he would let go. I had to open a mountain to look at some hats. Beautiful old hats. With flowers. I could hear them. But I couldn't see them. I squinted my eyes. My mind puckered into sleep; I tried to open it. The blue velvet bag with the worn white places. Soft. Ever so richly worn white. The bag with my grandmother's diamond rings in it. I held it in my hand and opened it wide until I was looking at the diamonds, and I was looking at my mind like diamonds. Hard and bright and chiseled piecemeal from the depths of the ages. Fern upon fern was all that mattered. I liked knowing that.

"Listen," he said and let go my arm.

I lifted the lid of the hall rack at home. High up at the mountain the opening of a cave appeared. Man might easily have crept out of the sea just this way, I thought. Or out of a diamond. I liked all of it so much. But I had to find the flowers for the hat soon, or he'd know.

"You don't have to cry," he said. "Did you know you were crying or were you asleep? It's all right."

For a second I hated him for waking me. Or for being awake, I didn't know which.

"You have tears on your face," he said. "At one time I would have said they reminded me of forsythia. When I was younger . . . I would have said that three or four years ago," he teased.

I hated him now because I knew I would never remember the flowers that belonged on the hat. There was the room blazing with moonlight and the bare, spindly, delicate forsythia branches as tender as shadows streaming through the window

and across the bed. Forsythia then. Everywhere. And I knew it would be impossible to get it out of the room the rest of the night.

"I think you had a nightmare," he was saying. "I really think you had a nightmare."

"I did not have a nightmare," I said. And then I didn't know that I was going to, but I said, "I was going to tell you about a bonnet."

"Not again," he said. "Honey, women don't tell men about bonnets in the middle of the night. I want to go to sleep."

"Then why did you have to take my arm like that," I said, "if you wanted to go to sleep? Why didn't you leave me alone?"

"I didn't mean to bother you. It is just that you have such nice arms for taking."

"Well, you ruined it," I said. I felt better now. I thought I wanted to hear him talk. And too, I wanted to aggravate him a little since he was so sleepy. I wanted to make him laugh. I don't know why I wanted to make him laugh, but I did.

"With forsythia," I said. I thought about how good a milliner I would have made.

"I don't know what in hell you are talking about," he said. "But I can tell you that women no longer wear hats. If you'd look in *Harper's Bazaar* or any of the fashion magazines, you'd know a little more about what is going on in the world today. In the line of hats and things. Jackie Kennedy never—"

"Jackie Kennedy never period," I said. "She had nothing to do with World War I. She has had enough."

"World War I what?"

"Just World War I."

"Well, you can't just lie in bed all night saying 'World War I'. You have to have a reason for something like that," he said.

"I want to go home," I said. I hadn't known I was going to say that, but it sounded true so I let it stand.

"You don't know what you are saying," he said.

"I don't mind not knowing. I just want to go."

"Now there is no reason to get mad because I wanted to go to sleep," he said.

"I am not mad because you wanted to go to sleep." I wished he had gone to sleep.

"If you really want to go home, I'll take you," he said.

Now, I wanted to go more than I had ever wanted to do anything. I felt out of place. I couldn't understand what was wrong.

"If you are not mad," he said, "just please tell me why you want to leave."

I didn't want to wake up in that room. I thought he was more like a stranger now than he must have been even before I ever knew him. Why did he have to say that about forsythia? Something about that had had seemed wrong. About no longer mentioning it. Like cutting the balloon loose after the gas had leaked out. Why did he have to say that?

"Forsythia is not the flower you mention to me when you have known me ten years and couldn't mention it to start with," I said.

"You can mention forsythia to anybody," he said. "It was just a nice way of saying that you had been 'weeping' in your sleep."

"You might forsythia a little yourself, if you knew what I was forsythiaing about," I said.

"Look," he said, "if something is wrong, I will straighten it out."

"Nothing is wrong," I said. "I just want to go home." I felt tired of having to live with him in so many countries, in so many areas, under so many heartbreaks. I felt as if I had been with him a million years. "Hid its face amid a crowd of stars" echoed in my mind. I had never felt that way before. I wanted to leave before it got me firmly in its clutches.

"This is a disappointment to me. A great disappointment. Sounds Victorian, doesn't it?" he said.

Why did he have to drag "Victorian" into it, of all things? But I wanted to know.

"What kind of disappointment?"

"I don't know," he said. "I just thought we were doing better. I thought we were finally becoming what we wanted each other to be. I really thought so."

I didn't want to get into anything more. I could tell that if we talked about it, I was going to get left again in some horrible hut at the edge of a jungle while he went on another black and restless safari. I didn't want to do that anymore.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Probably the nearest we ever came to anything lasting was when we were first young and didn't know what to do with any of it."

"I am still young," I said. "But this time I am going to start from the grass up." I didn't know what that meant, but it sounded like something I thought.

"You know what this means?" he said. "If you really want to go, you know what it means, don't you?"

I couldn't answer him because I didn't care whether it meant anything. I just hoped I could

leave. I wanted to say something to make him laugh, though. And then I wanted to slip into it something true. I wanted to fix it so he would take me home very quickly without pulling it all down upon us.

"You remember all the times," I said.

"What times?"

"The ones you didn't meet me," I said. "At the planes, and the boats, and the trains. Everything."

"As a matter of fact, I don't know what you are talking about," he said.

But I knew that he knew exactly what I was talking about. He always prefaced his biggest lies with the words, "As a matter of fact."

"How about that time in Nice?" I said. I could tell he was game by the way he became suddenly alert. Intent.

"Oh . . . Nice," he said. "I didn't know you had held a grudge over a little tacky thing like that."

"And all the times you had to go to all those fronts," I said. "Now in stiff armour, another time in sheepskin, yet again in khaki. Always prowling and parading off into something. Dragging me over the face of the earth and stranding me in the far reaches of the universe."

And then as I was saying all that, I knew that that was how I felt. A great and empty loneliness sounded like flack—I think they called it.

"Take me home," I said. "I just want to go home. I am afraid something will slip off the page somehow into what we have done. I am afraid that all we have done has been something that slipped off a page. And I don't want to do it anymore."

"You know that this is the end," he said. "You know that you have already gone too far, don't you?"

I hoped we knew what we were talking about. I wished it were possible to start at the beginning somewhere with people. To know where it was you were whenever you got there. "Woman Bathing" by Picasso. Like that. Not forever. But once. Just once. Not to go from frame to frame. From page to page. From day to day.

"You are going to start a new life," he said. "You are getting ready to start a new life. That is what is wrong. And you are afraid."

"I am not afraid," I said.

I was tired of him and the whole thing. I was tired of knowing that everything we could ever do was something I would hear or read or write or guess at. Happiness. Joy. Sorrow. Life. Death. All of it. Too pat. Too much on the end of the tongue.

"You will have to dress," he said. "If I am going to take you home . . . If I am going to take you home after all these years . . ."

I knew he was being dramatic to mock us both. And I wished he didn't have to take me home. That I could walk. Just go out and through all the forests and across whatever waters and deserts were there.

"You don't want to die, do you? That is what is wrong with you," he said. "You don't want to die in the rain like Catherine Barkley or with the asp at your breast that way or many and many a year ago in a kingdom by the sea—"

And he was right. I didn't ever want to do that part of it. But I knew I couldn't save both of us.

LINES FOR MY DAUGHTER'S SEVENTEENTH YEAR

Suddenly beholding myself reflected totally, lovingly,
In the twin mirrors of her larkspur-eyes
(The ME MYSELF—sans every worldly stage
On which a Hamlet ever nurtured his cicatrice of soul;
Or a Punchinello, clowning in peppermint,
Ever played Liar with the laughter of tears),—

Seeing FOREVER miracled in her marigold-morning gaze,
I, for a moment at least, share
With Dante and Blake and Emily—and Cambrian Dylan, on fire for the Infinite—
An intranslatably real vision of yew and heather . . . heavenly roses . . . skies bluer than God.

WALTER BLACKSTOCK

MAY 14, 1942

(Four British sailors, serving aboard the H.M.S. *Bedfordshire,* were killed when their ship was torpedoed by a Nazi U-boat off the North Carolina coast. Their bodies came ashore at the island of Ocracoke. The island residents arranged for services and burial in a special plot. They maintain the graveyard to this day.)

The long lonely finger of sand dunes
Stretches far into the Atlantic
Impervious to mainland changes
Of rising land values and neon signs.
As strong winds churn in their carefree way,
Storms born of the eager conflict between Gulf
And Atlantic portend violent battle.

Mind turns to the Indian past
Turns to the small tribe of Woccos rising
Phantom-like out of the sand and scrubby hills.
To give chase to wild pigs.
Mind turns to the duel of Blackbeard and Maynard
And the headless corpse of the savage pirate
Swimming seven times around the other's sloop
And staining red; and the severed head,
Black beard plaited, beribboned,
Impaled on the bowsprit like a shrike's victim.
Mind turns to the impermanent past
Turns to weathered cottage of shipwreck timbers
Embosomed among loblolly pine; and the stunted oaks,
Bent over like old men in redundant talk,
Resist sand shift and capricious sea wind,
Mind turns to the sun change
Of sleepy bumblebee creeping between zinnia petals
To escape the chill of evening,
And the quiet devout cardinal singing vespers
From its wax myrtle retreat.
Mind turns to the silent time of adoration
Turns to the verdigrised cannon ball
And the silver sand.
The silver sea, calm, gently undules
Like a half-ripe meadow on a soft spring night.

Lieutenant Cunningham turns to the youthful past
Turns to the cottage
And the blackbird suspended on Maytime sky
And the belling of hounds
And the pealing from steeples
And the wind on the heath.

The urgent piping of the bosun call,
Shriller than the liquid notes of the spring peeper,
Teases thought, intruding on home and dream.

Dying a strident death,
The bosun pipe flutes its final
Mournful wail: ominous silence.
Black night cracks a second time
As the persistent sonority of klaxon
Hastens sailors to battle station.
Alerted, blind eyes scan surface quadrants:
Ship-to-horizon: 000 to 090 degrees
For full cycle to begin cyclic scan anew.
Behind dormant yet insatiable pom-poms
Taunt fingers tighten inside trigger guards
Awaiting that dread command before the night sky
Is split by flaming seed like the farmer
In parabolic tracery feeding furrows.
Half-blind eyes search heaven.

Submerged stern drags sinking bow,
And the nameplate . . . H.M.S. *Bedfordshire* . . . vanishes.
The ocean is empty.

Across the ocean worn dreams
And faded memories gown the still countryside
On that precious stone set in the silver sea.

LYN PALADINO

CON MIL FLORES

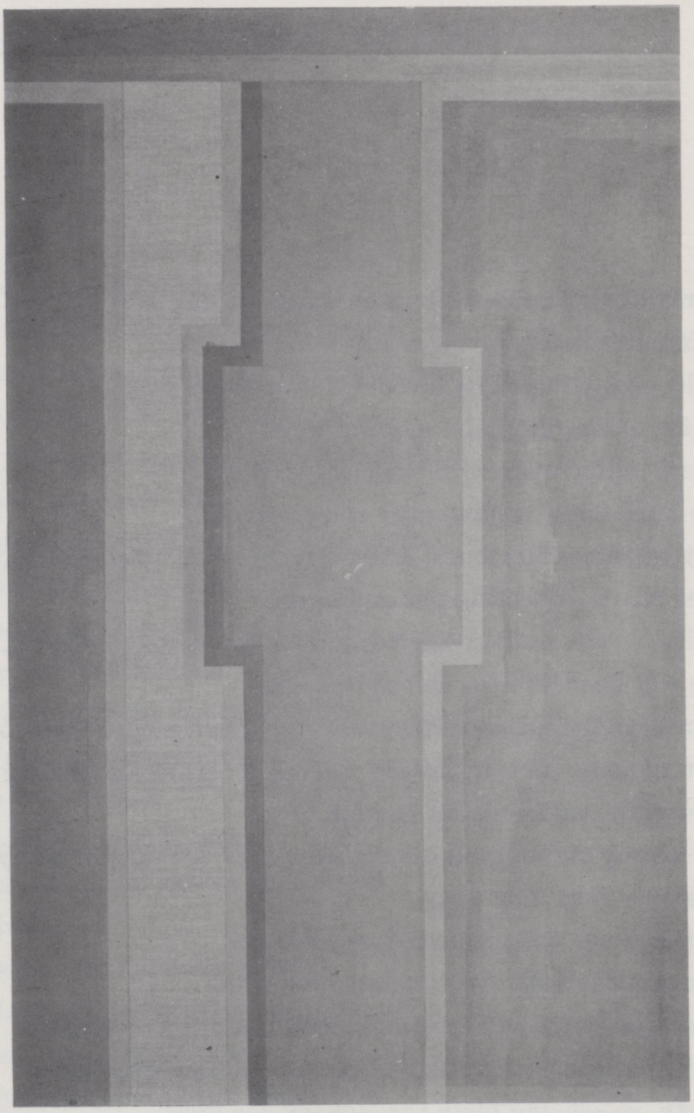
Yes, I have supped,
I drank the wine of your breasts
grown too humanly warm against my lips,
knew the warm delicacy
of your hand resting softly on mine
when mind and logic
were thrust aside in a winter night,
when the being of you and I
made no little difference.
We were as the wind blows together
a little spring—a little winter
joined to warm snow-quilts
we lived under.
Though you have gone
I still find the spring and winter
joined,
a warmth that feels through
a long winter of knowing,
knowing what we had,
what we could never have had,
and sensing some yesterday pain
I dream of yesterdays in today,
say softly with love,
I have loved
with a thousand flowers.

DWIGHT W. PEARCE

SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY

As gray stripes echoed silver on a sudden day
To sing on Easter, birth, re-birth in every way,
So silver gray has burst or bowed over seven years
of cliffs, of sea, seen at a melting time,
of pond knifed over with the cutting skate
when hush hung vaulted over snowy trees,
And that same color burst from stream when steelhead leaped
arched silver—shooting out and back
A knife, a leaf, a silver lightning from the brackish brown,
Were soft hued willows leaned in eddies
and in bays the rain pocked water filed from mouse holed banks.
And that same color in the sky the day a cormorant resting on the rock
rose weakly, battered, but he rose,
wind sifting through his oil-soaked wings, and sloped away
into a silent sky, and gray,
And that same color once before and now
When birth is near, has touched your hair,
Has echoed dress and eyes and cliffs and fish and birds,
And into silence, each time, whispered shimmering news
of birth, re-echoing birth throughout our lives,
And marking love in shimmers of a silver gray.

PETER F. NEUMEYER

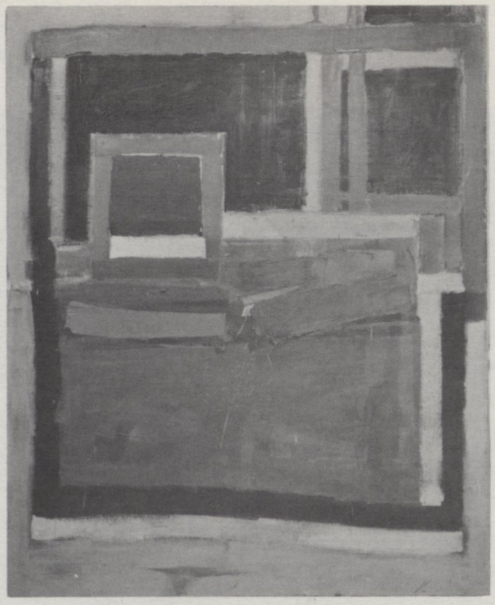


PAINTINGS BY GEORGE BIRELINE

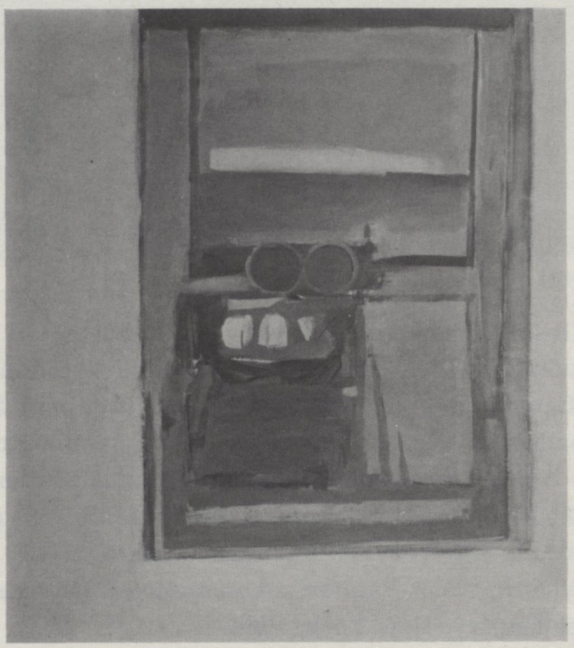
Self-portrait

GEORGE BIRELINE:

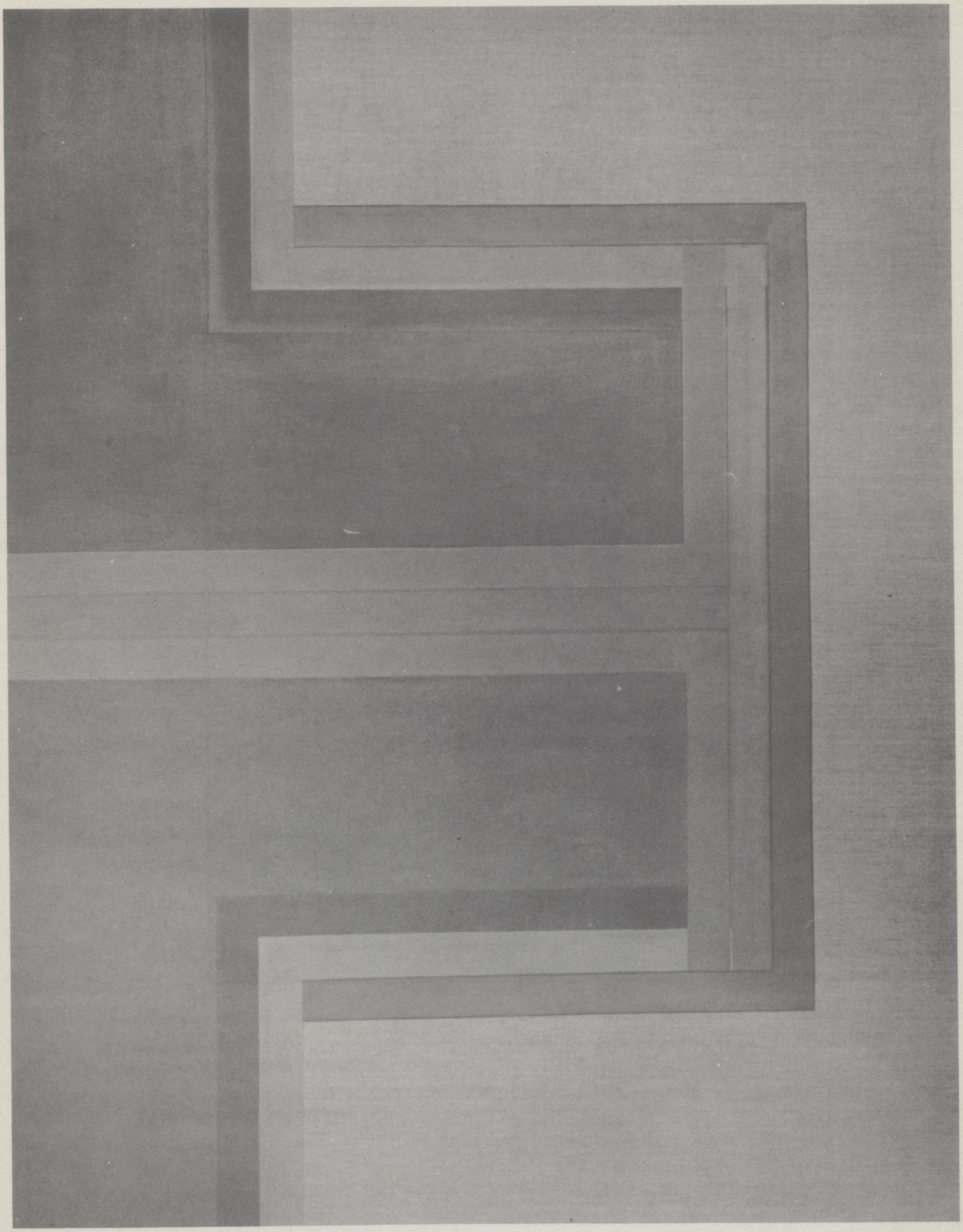
Associate Professor, School of Design, N. C. State; B.F.A., Bradley University; graduate work, University of North Carolina. *Exhibitions and Awards:* Michiana Regional Art Exhibition: first prize in oil painting, 1950; "Old Northwest" Exhibition, 1951; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts 147th Annual Exhibition, 1951; 17th Annual Butler Art Institute Exhibition, 1952; N. C. Artists' Annual Exhibitions, Purchase Prize, 1956; Honorable Mention, 1958; First Purchase Award, 1964; Los Angeles County Museum show, "Post-Painterly Abstraction;" One-man show at the André Emmerich Gallery, New York, 1964.

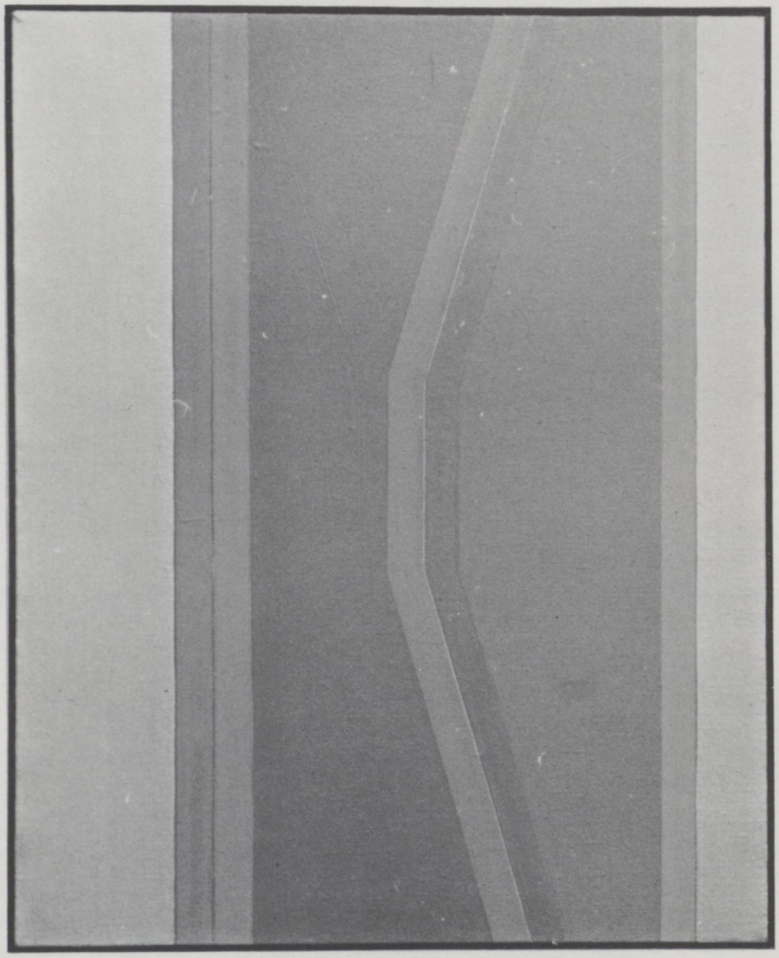


1958



1960





NOTES ON E. E. CUMMINGS

JAMES FORSYTH

In this essay of E. E. Cummings, I have not tried to point out any theme—if there is anything which recurs often enough in his poetry to be called a theme, it is love. All I have attempted to do is illustrate some of the basic devices used in his poetry, show a few of the things which interest me, and sum it up by printing a poem which gives some insight into the feelings of the poet.

A person should remember that the basic purpose of most artistic endeavors is to entertain, and secondly to inform. Art is fun. While it should not be approached only from that angle, it helps to keep it in mind.

Cummings is usually, and justifiably, known as somewhat of a typesetter's terror. He

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All of the poetry used here may be found in:

a. *Poems 1923-1954.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954.

b. *95 Poems.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958.

The volume, poem number, and page references have been indicated below each poem.

The most perceptive critic of Cummings' works that I have read is Norman Friedman. His books and two others have good secondary material. They are:

Baum, S. V. (ed.). *EETI: e e c: E. E. CUMMINGS AND THE CRITICS.* East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1962.

Friedman, Norman. *e.e. cummings: the art of his poetry.* Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1960.

Friedman, Norman. *e.e. cummings: The Growth of a Writer.* Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

Norman, Charles. *The Magic-Maker: E. E. Cummings.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958. A biography which includes criticism of his poetry.

does, however, have a large number of "regular" poems, including some sonnets. Such as:

it may not always be so; and i say
that if your lips, which i have loved, should touch
another's, and your dear strong fingers clutch
his heart, as mine in time not far away;
if on another's face your sweet hair lay
in such a silence as i know, or such
great writhing words as, uttering overmuch,
stand helplessly before the spirit at bay;

if this should be, i say if this should be-
you of my heart, send me a little word;
that i may go unto him, and take his hands,
saying, Accept all happiness from me.
then shall i turn my face, and hear one bird
sing terrible afar in the lost lands.

(a, I:61)

The movement in this poem, from that which is near to something at an imaginary distance, is obvious. The bird, a traditional poetic symbol of joy, becomes a symbol of truth in Cummings' work and is often associated with his lady's eyes. Here it is used in one of his poems written while he was still a student at Harvard.

One of the things most disliked by Cummings is the type of conformity which, as John Stuart Mill so aptly pointed out 100 years ago, tends to become an "unworld" tyranny of the masses, or, in many instances, a tyranny of a minority elected by the masses. To Cummings, problems like Communism are best solved by the individuals without the guidance of the John Birch Society—this is very much in line with the thoughts of William Faulkner. Cummings feels that the mind of collective man has become evil through being dehumanized. Conversely, that which is personal, or individual, is natural and is the humanized good. Since love is basic and good, the idea of that which is humanized shows up in much of his poetry where the speaker and his lady are isolated:

If i have made, my lady, intricate
imperfect various things chiefly which wrong
your eyes (frailer than most deep dreams are frail)
songs less firm than your body's whitest song
upon my mind-if i have failed to snare
the glance too shy-if through my singing slips
the very skillful strangeness of your smile
the keen primeval silence of your hair

-let the world say "his most wise music stole
nothing from death"-
you only will create
(who are so perfectly alive) my shame:
lady through whose profound and fragile lips
the sweet small clumsy feel of April came
into the ragged meadow of my soul.

(a, V:219)

The absence of capital letters is to show emphasis which normal rules of English grammar do not cover. If custom had been followed in the above poem, "i" would have been capitalized, but not "lady," and that would destroy the balance. Incidentally, Cummings' name is actually e. e. cummings because he had it legally put into lower case. That seems to be a bit too much. "April" is capitalized in his poems probably more than any other word. As far as Cummings is concerned, April is the most important time of the year because it signifies new life, such as that created after a hard New England winter. That is well illustrated in this segment:

i say
that even after April
by God there is no excuse for May
(a, XXXIII:189-90)

If the reader is careful to place the emphasis on the capital letters, much misinterpretation will be avoided. One poem, for instance, starts:

may i feel said he

and the last two lines in the final verse are:

you're divine! said he
(you are Mine said she)
(a, 16:288-298)

The last line tells what the poem is about. Sex is used as a vehicle of expression, but could hardly be interpreted as the subject of the poem. Since sex is part of that which is natural, it is good and is treated like all other things which are still humanized. An adolescent attitude in his treatment of sex is found more often in the interpretation than in the poem.

Obviously a large number of Cummings' poems are experiments. It is painfully obvious that a few of them fail, but that is to be expected. The important thing is the ones that he is able to bring off right in discarding old forms and creating new ones. The idea that anything can reach the point of diminishing returns is shown in this section from "POEM, OR BEAUTY HURTS MR. VINAL:"

i would
suggest that certain ideas gestures
rhymes, like Gillette Razor Blades
having been used and reused
to the mystical moment of dullness emphatically are
Not To Be Resharpened
(a, II:167-168)

However, his most noteworthy experiment, the separation of words by other words, is basically nothing new at all. It just has not been used "to the mystical moment of dullness." This splitting of words was used by the Greeks and is known as *tmesis,* which also is hard to pronounce. This can be used to create a picture poem which freezes motion:

```
l(a

le
af
fa

ll

s)
one
l

iness
```

(b, no. 1)

In this the isolation of the letters give the words a feeling of loneliness. The splitting makes the leaf a part of loneliness and allows "one" to stand out by itself and complement the mood. Like paintings, some poems cannot be read aloud.

Cummings takes this as a starting place and often uses space to separate parts of words, creating another effect:

```
mortals)
climbi
     ng i
     nto eachness begi
     n
dizzily
     swingthings
of speeds of
trapeze gush somersaults
open ing
     hes shes
&meet&
          swoop
                fully is are ex
                              quisite theys of re
turn
     a
     n
     d
fall which now drop who all dreamlike
(im
          (a, 48:385)
```

The splitting off of "Climbi," "i," and "begi" emphasizes the "i" of each, or the performer's individuality. Also, the poem becomes a word picture of the performers' actions. This device can be used to give letters two differerent words. Part of one poem reads:

a snowflake twi-
sts
,on
its way to now
-here
(b, no. 4)

The last seven letters can read "now here" or "nowhere," creating two distinctly different moods.

Another structure akin to this, although the words may not always be split, is the use of parentheses to make a poem say more than one thing;

why

do the
fingers

of the lit
tle once beau
tiful la

dy (sitting sew
ing at an o
pen window this
fine morning) fly

instead of dancing
are they possibly
afraid that life is
running away from
them (i wonder) or

isn't she a
ware that life (who
never grows old)
is always beau

tiful and
that nobod
y beauti

ful ev
er hur

ries
(b, no. 52)

Here the parenthetical sections can be read like they were set off by commas, or it can

be the old lady saying something to the poet which changes the meaning of the poem: "sitting sewing at an open window this morning, i wonder who never grows old." The following poem says about the same thing:

old age sticks
up Keep
Off
signs)&

youth yanks them
down(old
age
cries No

Tres)&(pas)
youth laughs
(sing
old age
scolds forbid
den Stop
Must
n't Don't

&) youth goes
right on
gr
owing old
(b, no. 57)

Motion may also be created on paper by breaking up the words:

Among

these
red pieces of
day (against which and
quite silently hills
made of blueandgreen paper

scorchbend ingthem
-selves-U
pcurv E,into:
anguish(clim
b)ing
s-p-i-r-a
l
and, disappear)
Satanic and blase
a black goat lookingly wanders

There is nothing left of the world but
into this noth
ing il treno per
Roma si-nore?
jerk.
ilyr,ushes
(a, II:199-200)

A poem previously given, "mortals)," shows the same thing, but not to such an extent.

The next poem should be seen before any remarks are made:

brIght

bRight s??? big
(soft)

soft near calm
(Bright)
calm st?? holy

(soft briGht deep)
yeS near sta? calm star big yEs
alone
(wHo
Yes
near deep whO big alone soft near
deep calm deep
????Ht?????T)
Who(holy alone)holy(alone holy)alone

(a, 70:326)

The question marks are used for two purposes. First, the question mark is a physical metaphor which resembles a light filament. Second, it emphasizes that the quality of stars can only be gradually realized. The words "bright," "yes," and "who" are capitalized letter-by-letter as the realization becomes complete.

An important item in studying the work of a writer is realizing by whom he is influenced in order to understand the use of certain methods. Shakespeare, in *Macbeth,* uses inversion of nature as symbolism when England is conquered by evil. This is shown in the section where the horses eat their own flesh, an unnatural event which contrasts with the dehumanized Macbeth. Cummings uses inversion of values to contrast good and evil in:

as freedom is a breakfastfood
or truth can live with right and wrong
or molehills are from mountains made
-long enough and just so long
will being pay the rent of seem
and genius please the talentgang
and water most encourage flame

as hatracks into peachtrees grow
or hopes dance best on bald men's hair
and every finger is a toe
and any courage is a fear
-long enough and just so long
will the impure think all things pure
and hornets wail by children stung

or as the seeing are the blind
and robins never welcome spring
nor flatfolk prove their world is round
nor dingsters die at break of dong
and common's rare and millstones float
-long enough and just so long
tomorrow will not be too late

worms are the words but joy's the voice
down shall go which and up come who

breasts will be breasts thighs will be thighs
deeds cannot dream what dreams can do
-time is a tree(this life one leaf)
but love is the sky and i am for you
just so long and long enough

(a, 25:366-367)

In the fourth stanza, where things are natural, the world is good.

Cummings shares similar feelings about April with Chaucer, and here he praises the work of the greater poet:

honour corruption villainy holiness
riding in fragrance of sunlight(side by side
all in a singing wonder of blossoming yes
riding)to him who died that death should be dead

humblest and proudest eagerly wan
(equally all alive in miraculous day)
merrily moving through sweet forgiveness of spring
(over the under the gift of the earth of the sky

knight and ploughman pardoner wife and nun
merchant frere clerk somnour miller and reve
and geoffrey and all) come up from the never of when
come into the now of forever come riding alive

down while crylessly drifting through vast most
nothings's own nothing children go of dust

(a, 63:463)

Cummings' ideas about individuality are well brought out in his poems of praise. Among other people, he praises Picasso, his father Reverend Cummings, Buffalo Bill, Ford Madox Ford, and the peculiar Joe Gould.

Joseph Ferdinand Gould was born in Norwood, Mass., the son of a doctor. He graduated from Harvard *magna cum laude* in 1911, the year Cummings entered. By normal standards, Gould never lived up to what society expected of him.

Gould could usually be found in Greenwich Village where he would give lectures on Cummings and Dos Passos. He wrote *An Oral History of Our Time*—unpublished—which contains 11,000,000 words. The work was seven feet tall, so he boasted that he was the

only person who had written a book taller than himself—5′4″. He was also a poet, of sorts:

In winter I'm a Buddhist,
And in summer I'm a nudist.

He is mentioned in Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and appears in several of Cummings poems:

as joe gould says in

his terrifyingly hu
man man
ner the only reason ever wo
man

should

go to college is so
that she never can(know
wledge is po
wer)say o
if i

'd
OH
n
lygawntueco

llege
(b, no. 28)

Gould, who the Unitarian Cummings identified with a Christlike quality in the following poem, was a beggar who died on August 13, 1957. Several years before Gould died, Cummings saw him walking at night near West Tenth Street and Greenwich Avenue:

no time ago
or else a life
walking in the dark
i met christ

jesus)my heart
flopped over
and lay still
while he passed(as

close as i'm to you
yes closer
made of nothing
except loneliness
(a, 50:455)

In his criticism of the literati, Cummings normally does not use a personal reference. He does, however, often pun the names of famous people. Cummings' humor is shown in his satire of Ernest Hemingway, who had accused Cummings of "copying." Hemingway's *Death In The Afternoon* is satirized by exaggerating the speech characteristic of Hemingway's prose and by making a parody of "cow thou art to bull returnest" from "A Psalm of Life" in:

what does little Ernest croon
in his death at afternoon
(kow dow r 2 bul retoinis
wus do woids uf lil Oinis
(a, 26:294)

Similarly, he makes fun of Louis Untermeyer:

mr u will not be missed
who as an anthologist
sold the many on the few
not excluding mr u
(a, XI:394)

The first book of prose by Cummings is *The Enormous Room,* which is about his experiences in a French prison camp during World War I. He and a friend, William Slater Brown, were imprisoned because of an indiscreet letter Brown wrote and because of their suspicious fraternizing with the French troops. They had gone to France as ambulance drivers, about the same thing that Hemingway did. Many of the reviewers of the book who had remained in the United States during the war said that Cummings had no knowledge of what the war was about. Cummings replied:

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister
isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds)of socks not to
mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers
etcetera wristers etcetera, my
mother hoped that

i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my

self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et

cetera
(dreaming,
et
  cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)
(a, X:197-198)

There is much obscenity in Cummings' satire, but it is rarely in bad taste because it is usually toned down, witty, or expresses just what is needed to be said. There are at least two obvious exceptions which even Norman Friedman finds are "angry without wit." These are "THANKSGIVING (1956)"—which is about the Hungarian crisis (b, no. 39), and "F is for foetus(a"—an attack on FDR (a, 37: 449-450), both poems of artless outrage.

In the spring of 1931, Cummings went to Russia. No one at that time knew much about the place except what was shown in Communist propaganda — plenty of wine and art. He returned disenchanted and some of his friends gave him the nickname "Kumrad," which he used instead of comrade in one of his poems which ends:

every kumrad is a bit
of quite unmitigated hate
(travelling in a futile groove
god knows why)
and so do i
(because they are afraid to love
(a, 30:296)

The above stanza is from a poem published originally in *no thanks* (1935), a book of 71 poems. The book was reviewed in a Communist publication called the *Daily Worker* and that poem was quoted—minus the first stanza and lines 3, 4, and 5 of the stanza above. In the same book there is a sonnet on the previously mentioned Joe Gould and another poem of protest—the first stanza goes:

Jehova buried, Satan dead,
do fearers worship Much and quick:
badness not being felt as bad,
itself thinks goodness what is meek:
obey says toc, submit says tic,
Eternity's a Five Year Plan:
if Joy with Pain shall hang in hock
who dares to call himself a man?

The fourth and last stanza shows the convictions from which the satire arose:

> King Christ, this world is all aleak;
> and lifepreservers there are none:
> and waves which only He may walk
> Who dares to call Himself a man
> (a, 54:314)

Aside from being a good example of how Cummings uses capitalization, it shows the dehumanized mind in its surroundings. To the poet, the only salvation is on an individual level reached through love:

> since feeling is first
> who pays any attention
> to the syntax of things
> will never wholly kiss you;
>
> wholly to be a fool
> while Spring is in the world
>
> my blood approves,
> and kisses are a better fate
> than wisdom
> lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
> -the best gesture of my brain is less than
> your eyelids' flutter which says
>
> we are for each other: then
> laugh, leaning back in my arms
> for life's not a paragraph
>
> And death i think is no parenthesis
> (a, VII:208-209)

A PASSING GRADE FOR BRECHT

A SHORT STORY BY

LYN PALADINO

Pine Bluffs Tech is embosomed on the side of a steep bluff. The surveyors and engineers who laid out the site sixty-four years ago were impeded in their attempt to erect all the buildings on one level: private homes bounded the north-south extremities of the college property and, fifty feet to the west, parallel to the school, ran the railroad tracks. Within these physical boundaries the library, two dormitories, and the phys. ed. building had been constructed. Seventy-eight stairs above the verdant declivity, auspiciously placed on the second level, are five buildings (the level had been carved out from the side of the bluff to accept them); the administration building, Davis, MacGrand, and Steinmetz Halls, and the home ec. building. One hundred eight steps higher, on the third level and, laid out on a niche in the side of the bluff similar to level two, is the football stadium. Daily climbs from level one to level two elicited the usual spate of jokes from students and faculty: "If I get lost, send a St. Bernard"; "Dija ever think what an escalator cud do for the disposition of the faculty?"; "Man, when you graduate from this school you get two degrees . . . one for mountain climbing too!"; "All ya need is that special booster shot of mountain goat blood from the infirmary."

Although each building was rendered in its own unimpressive but inimitable architecture, all are look-alikes because of their common characteristics—unwashed windows and grimy, soot-stained walls. Although the former could be modified by the custodial staff, the latter could be remedied only by monthly sand-blasting, or by rerouting of the Diesel units and permanent closing of the industrial plants in the neighborhood. "Mechanical monsters," as the Diesels were affectionately called by the professors, move through the city of Sylvester in unequalled cacaphony— gutteral incantation of steel wheels, raucous wheeze of strident whistles, indecorous blast of sonorous horns, frenzied clang of urgent bells. In addition,

there was the weary spew of engine soot. After the Diesels passed through Sylvester, the city returned to its usual drowsy state. Not the ubiquitous soot and its inexorable assault, however! Industrial smokestacks regurgitated their wastes into the air, polluting the atmosphere as far as six miles away and peppering everything underneath the vast cloud with black hail.

No wrought iron gates and ornamental iron fences, nor sprinkling fountains and ponds attest to Ivy League tradition and pomp. Even the bell tower on the administration building houses a simulated bell that functions electronically: bell strokes on magnetic tape are emitted twice each hour, ten minutes before the hour and again on the hour.

Pine Bluffs Tech, granting degrees preponderantly in technology, is a four-year college whose pedagogical advance is too often commensurate with the advance of the somnabulist, tottering city of Sylvester. Administrators canvass remote "hollers" (hollows) for additional mediocre students, politicians plead for additional unnecessary taxes. Graduating engineers, surprisingly enough, depart with an engineer education in addition to a degree. Graduates from the departments of phys. ed., business admin., general ed., home ec. and humanities carry off degrees and four memory-filled years of skylarking and extra-curricular activities. That these graduates have not learned to make objective judgments based upon knowledge, to render ordered self-expression, to observe facts with discrimination, to analyze, synthesize and correlate information, to employ critical imagination, to seek out research sources and to think creatively is regarded, if at all, as of no consequence. They are well-rounded graduates from a well-rounded college trained to be well-rounded citizens for a well-rounded democracy. The administration at Pine Bluffs continues to wink and nod in its duties toward the student and the community.

Students classify courses at Pine Bluffs as "snow," "mediocre," and "rock-breaker." Knowledgeable students only, one suspects, would be aware of the classification; yet entering freshmen are prepped, each course minutely identified down to number of lectures, books, and research papers assigned. Similarly, professors are placed in categories that correspond to course classification, designated respectively as "snap," "O.K.," and "tough," or more popularly, "son of a bitch."

Instructor Robert Clyde had been given the "son of a bitch" classification two years earlier, his first year at Pine Bluffs. His colleagues had warned him to go easy on his students that first year, but he had disdained their fanciful suggestions. Having flunked nine students in the American lit. final, he believed his appraisal more than justified because they had been goof-offs all semester and none had earned a grade higher than D minus, either quiz or hour-written exam. Ironically, it was not flunking these students that precipitated the repercussion behind the sacrosanct walls of the academic dean's office.

Sixteen students from the same class went to the final exam carrying a C minus average. These students earned D's for final grades. Howling like ululating wolves denied food privileges at the predator's kill, two young ladies from this group had turned on the tears and "What will I tell my mother?" routine to the conciliatory dean. Mr. Clyde was called into the dean's office after the pair had been mollified and dismissed from the dean's office. Informed of the histronics and the hanky twisting of both ladies, Mr. Clyde had sought to learn from the dean the reason, if any, for a legitimate complaint. Mr. Clyde produced the class register, revealed quiz and hour-written grades, and the final exam grades of both students. "Should I disregard the grades and 'give' them the gentleman's grade of C?" "Oh, no! Never!" the dean responded. "You don't seem to understand," he continued. "Both students were eligible for *"Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities.* Now they are no longer eligible."

Mr. Clyde, wishing to point out the obvious *non sequitur,* instead replied, "So what!" Then, as though the dean were telepathic, he told Mr. Clyde of the B average required of students, and that it must be maintained four years for one's inclusion into the prestigious society. The instructor was grimly determined to listen to the dean's worn arguments of unorthodox methodology, the undermining of student confidence, and the well-rounded student. None were proffered. Mr. Clyde admitted that should the dean be urged to alter the grades, he, Mr. Clyde, would wish him, the dean, to countersign both grade changes. With that one stipulation, Mr. Clyde would be amenable to the dean's chicanery. This last, however, he did not tell the dean. The dean was not immune to that kind of administrative encroachment in a singularly academic province. Mr. Clyde had been warned of some of the dean's past illegalities. From that time on, Mr. Clyde had established his reputation: his unpopularity remained unchanged two years later.

The "snap" instructor who teaches "snow" courses could be expected to rely on the textbook as though it were a crutch, and to be a bore. No lectures, no discussion, no check to learn if texts are read. Only spoonfed readings, devoid of the ancillary dividends to be found in lecture-discussion and the Socratic method. Perfect attendance in his class is tantamount to a grade of C.

The "O.K.," or "great guy," instructor, intruder on student bull sessions, moocher of cigarettes and pipe tobacco, is the jovial, backslapping individual who had lost sight of his ideals and his philosophy of education many years ago. Comfortably tenured and happily settled in his monotonous circumstances, he is quite content to accept fatuous mediocrity and, for the sake of euphemism, call it "average scholarship." Complacent as the cow lying in the shade of a maple thicket, hunger completely sated, and unperturbed by the steady diet of pasture grass, he is unremitting in his pursuit of duty to have students adhere to the same criteria of high standards: five-thousand-word term paper containing five major and five minor footnotes; a corresponding decrease of one whole grade for each one thousand words short of the assigned figure. Plagiarism, unchecked footnotes, mechanics, grammar, unity and coherence, all essential ingredients, are ignored. Five thousand words, that's what counts! Like the fanatic he redoubles his efforts after he forgets his aims. From the undeviating past performances of the "great guy" and the previous experiences of the upper classmen who had sat in his classes, the entering freshmen could adduce the following: same lectures given from yellowed 5 x 8 note cards; same ancient jokes; same tests (frat houses sheltered copies in file cabinets and made copies available to non-Greeks for five dollars each) ; same collateral reading list. The "great guy" never flunks. The average grade, C, is preponderent, a sprinkle of B's and a soupcon of A's, and the remainder D's, make up the tasty recipe. Those who do failing work but attend faithfully are assured a D. Who's going to ruin a good thing because of irregular attendance? In this category the majority of Pine Bluffs Tech instructors are pigeonholed.

The "tough" instructor is not averse to chatting with students in the student union over a cup of coffee. He is polite, mild-mannered, but suspicious of too much exposure among students.

Robert Clyde, on his first day at Pine Bluffs, after he had given his classes a cursory outline of the organization and conduct of his courses, was hesitantly relegated, by his students, to the third grouping. Five minutes after the first hour-written exam two weeks later, he had been labelled "s.o.b.", definitely "s.o.b." From the time he had known that he would make teaching his life work, that it would be a part of him, growing each day in some respects like the organic metaphor, he was determined to remain a scholar capable in assisting students to learn. He was determined to communicate to students and the public mind the true image, at least, of one respective of the inquiring mind; he had resolved to awaken in students the desire to nurture and cultivate excellence. To earn student respect and admiration for the scholar-teacher, he would learn and teach himself to be a paragon worthy of emulation.

Pensive, Robert Clyde moved down the stairs, thoughts turning on the cryptic note in his pocket. The note was a pale green sheet, folded once, from the academic dean's desk pad, bearing the message: "Most urgent. See me after last class today. Dean Lloyd." *Now what does he want? Perhaps student behavior at the last social I chaperoned. Student drinking on campus? Yes, that's possible . . . Yet I saw no one . . . in the men's room? How can one be sure? Still, I signed the chaperone card attesting that there had been no drinking. Yes, that's true . . . But if they drank, they drank in secrecy . . . I signed the card in good faith . . . There's nothing to worry about. Maybe it's something else.* At the bottom of the stairs he turned left, walked toward the dean's office. Robert Clyde was tall, slender, almost too thin to be athletic, but the appearance was deceptive. His propensity for striped ties and natural shoulder suits intensified the slender build. He had lettered in track, baseball and football in college. His hair was muddy yellow, partly curly, and his eyes were green.

He knocked on the dean's office door, waited for the response, walked in. Simultaneously, the dean requested that he take a seat and motioned him to sit in the large leather chair opposite the desk. Robert Clyde sat. He took out a black, long-stemmed pipe, tobacco pouch and a book of matches. A knock. The door opened; in stepped Dennis Kanehl. *So he is 'Most Urgent'. Now I know why I am here.* The dean spoke.

"You know Mr. Clyde, Dennis. Close the door. Take a seat over there." The dean pointed to an unoccupied chair several feet from Mr. Clyde.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

He sat. The dean went through his customary office procedures—pushed the swivel chair away from the desk, leaned back, locked hands behind

head, coughed.

"Now, gentlemen. I'd like to make one point clear: What we say here today must be kept in strict confidence. Not a word to anyone beyond these walls. Understood?"

Mr. Clyde sank back into the deep leather chair, crossed his legs, nodded. He heard Dennis say 'Yes, sir.'

Dean Walter Lloyd, completing his first year as academic dean, was forty-nine years old. He was a portly man who parted his black hair in the middle, giving him the look of a saturnine person and one older than his years. He had taught business administration at Pine Bluffs fourteen years, six of them as chairman of that department. He had acquitted himself at both jobs, teacher-chairman, in the usual desultory manner of one confronted by two jobs who is incapable of doing either job adequately—unprepared to teach, too confused to administrate. Colleagues in the business administration department had discharged his departmental responsibilities and he had accepted the praise and recognition. Faculty who had known, and there were few, winced each time he committed the egregious errors "could of" and "would of."

"I've requested both of you to come to my office because I've heard something that distresses me very much. I'm sure I don't have all the facts. This, I hope, you'll provide."

Mr. Clyde was somewhat appalled. *He calls me into his office, knows only what the student tells him, and expects me to fill in the gaps! Why had he not accorded me the courtesy of a private meeting before the three of us met? Dammit! The blundering, incompetent . . .*

"Frankly sir, I have no idea how much you know. I assume we are here to discuss my flunking Dennis three weeks before the end of the semester. Correct? With your permission, sir, I would like to hear, for the *first* time, what Dennis has already told you," Mr. Clyde said.

"Would you tell Mr. Clyde what you told me, Dennis?" Dean Lloyd asked.

Dennis Kanehl was a Korean veteran who had attended two colleges before entering Pine Bluffs. His accumulative credit hours from these schools, and those he had received for courses taken while in the Army, numbered one hundred fifty-four, thirty-four more than the amount required to graduate. Yet he could not graduate because he had not completed six hours in biology! Older than most students, he was the anachronism on campus: erudite, perspicacious, and at times, showing flashes of critical acumen. He was stocky, a man of great physical bulk, and red-faced.

"Well, sir," Dennis said, looking at Mr. Clyde, "I told Dean Lloyd that our class took the American lit. test Monday last and that you returned the graded test papers this Monday. Then I told him of my stopping at your office during conference hours the following day to check something on my paper. But because you were busy with two other students, you asked me to point out the passage in question and said you would take the paper home for a closer look. The next day, Wednesday, after our class meeting, you requested I stop by your office. I did, and that's when you told me I had failed the course. I went to Dean Lloyd and told him what you told me: that I had failed American lit. for the year and that my presence in class was optional from that time on. I asked the dean 'How could I fail with a C minus on my paper?' and he said that he would find out. He told me to be in his office two o'clock Thursday. And that's it."

"That's the substance of what he said to me, Mr. Clyde," Dean Lloyd said.

Mr. Clyde nodded. He tamped tobacco into pipe bowl, clamped teeth on pipe stem, returned pouch to pocket, lit the pipe. Expelling smoke from around the stem in rapid puffs, he jumped out of the chair, brushing off bits of glowing tobacco that had fallen on his trousers.

"Mr. Clyde, I promised I would get to the bottom of this incident. Now, begin anywhere you wish, but be mindful to show the justification of your decision."

Dammit! Again that condescending attitude that eats away at the heart like a corrosive acid.

"I'm fully aware of the gravity of the situation. Before I can do any explaining, however, I need several pages. Because I did not know the reason for this meeting, you can see that I am unprepared. They're in my office. I'll be only a moment. Excuse me."

He left and returned with a thick folder, Dennis' test paper on top. From the folder he removed one sheet of paper and placed it on the desk. Next to the sheet he placed the test paper. Leaning over the front of the desk and looking on the upside down sheets, he pointed to a specific passage on the test paper.

"Read that segment. Disregard the content of the essay and the emendation. Then read the same segment on the duplicate. Finally, compare them."

Mr. Clyde resumed his seat, glanced at Dennis.

Dennis had moved forward on the chair as though trying to gain favorable purchase for a better glimpse. Eyes scanning first one sheet, then the other, and back to the first, Dean Lloyd looked up, eyebrows arched, doubt or confusion, or both, pervading his face.

"If there is something extraordinary . . . er . . . facet about these sheets, it escapes me completely. They look exactly alike. Why, what should I find?" Dean Lloyd asked.

"Look at the sentences underscored in red on the test paper. Now see if those underscorings appear on the duplicate. Still no difference?" Mr. Clyde prodded.

Mr. Clyde saw the dean's head lift, the face galvanized in amazement.

"Why, the duplicate is free of underlines! But what does this difference show? How is it related?"

"Very simply, it means that the test paper Dennis returned to me on Tuesday had underscorings on it that it did not have Monday, the day before. He underscored those sentences in the hope that I would be moved by his sympathetic plea to reconsider his paper and then change the grade."

"I don't seem to follow the implication," the dean said.

My God, don't tell me he can't see through that dodge! What is it that British historian said? Obtuse enough to be a menace and stupid enough to be innocous!

"It is a smooth piece of subterfuge," Mr. Clyde said impatiently. "Dennis wished me to confess to extreme diligence in reading and in grading his paper. The underscored sentences were then, and are now, quite acceptable to me. Is it not reasonable of him to underscore those precise sentences I had approved? Certainly! Is it not also reasonable of him to assume that I would admit to overzealous examination of his paper and increase the grade? Without doubt! This particular pony is just another of a long list. Luckily it is little used because it is little known. Doubtless the crib would have been successful were I lacking the duplicate."

"Dennis, what do you have to say?" Dean Lloyd asked. Fingers interlaced, hands folded in his lap, Dennis looked up at the dean. His face appeared bellicose, softened. The stillness was broken by the struck match, the gentle burble in the pipe bowl. Dennis unclenched his fingers, lowered his head over his hand, palms up, and like the pose captured in mute marble, exemplified submissiveness, almost gratified relief.

"Well, Dennis?"

"It's all true," he said, in a taut voice.

"Why, Dennis?" interrupted Mr. Clyde. "Why *you* of all persons? There isn't a scintilla of justification for doing what you did. If you were failing, I could understand. But you were not failing. You certainly would have passed the course. You were my best student! Above average!"

"I really don't know, sir."

"Don't know!" Mr. Clyde exploded. "You can offer a better answer than that," he said, in a calmer voice. "Come now, Dennis. You expect us to believe that? You must have had a reason."

"No, sir. No reason. What do you want me to say? I did it because I'd be denied Phi Beta Kappa if I didn't?" Dennis said contemptously. Mr. Clyde eased out of his chair. He stopped halfway, bent over like a skier schussing, dropped into the chair gratefully. He was impelled to go over to Dennis, take him by the shoulders and shake him. Biting hard on the pipe bit, he stayed the urge.

"Dean Lloyd, you see before you a paradox. A veritable paradox. On his test paper you will find intelligent, yes, even penetrating insights in his essay on O'Neill. In addition, you will find detailed references to expressionism in Strindberg, and the intrinsic relationship to the expressionism of Lorca. These men were playwrights and contemporaries of O'Neill, but they were not Americans. These men are not even mentioned in our text. I referred to Strindberg in class, once only. Lorca never. In spite of this he knows as much about these writers as some graduate English majors. Would you say this is compatible with the deed? Again, Dennis. Why did you do it?"

"I think I was testing you."

"Yes."

"Fantastic! Truly amazing!" Then wearily: "But I'm not convinced."

Dennis shrugged.

"I am, however, convinced of one thing: the penalty is not worth the disclosure. I'm curious to know where you learned the dodge. Mind telling me?"

"I read a book about Brecht. He did it at the *Realgymnasium* and got away with it," Dennis answered.

"A book by Gray?"

Dennis nodded.

"Who's Breck?" the dean asked.

"It's Brecht, sir. Bertolt B-R-E-C-H-T. Contemporary German playwright. Anything you'd like to say, Dean?"

Dean Lloyd walked over to Dennis and placed one hand on the back of the chair.

"Please wait in the outer office, Dennis."

Dennis left the room.

"Before we get around to Dennis' failure, do you suppose you could tell me about your system of duplicate copies? I'm curious, too."

"Be happy to. I make Thermo Fax copies of the first hour-written exam of all the students in all my lit. courses. Then, depending on the student's rank in class, that is, failure, average, above average, I make duplicate copies of subsequent exams for each of these students only. For example, only four or five consistent failures, only five or six average students, only one or two above average students have all their tests reproduced. In this way I note progression in the first group, consistency or slight fluctuation in the second, fluctuation or progression in the third. At no time do I make more than fifteen copies, total for a class of twenty-four to twenty-eight students. Students between groupings are checked against that first duplicate. Finally, duplicates are filed according to one of three groupings for each lit. class. That's it."

"Sounds like a lotta extra work to me."

"Not really. The duplicate is especially useful. Before a student comes to me for a conference, if he comes, all I need is several minutes with the duplicate to refresh my memory."

"Ingenious. Now to our friend outside. Won't you reconsider reinstating Dennis in your class? After all, by your own admission, he is a good student. Your best. And too, what he did is not like cheating in the conventional way where secret notes are used," the dean appealed.

"Using less conventional means does not make it any less a deception. It's just like lying—a lie is a lie, small or big. Dennis is in a similar position. If we ignore his deceit, it is tantamount to accepting it, and we would have passive roles in the collusion. No, sir. My decision remains unchanged."

"I guess when you state it that way it does make sense."

"Yes, sir. What we do *now* is not for Dennis the student today but for Dennis the husband, the father, the worker, the citizen tomorrow. We can shape his moral values; we can't supervise them. He selects his own standard of ethical conduct. Before we can help him we must recognize the basic tenet in any system of values—truth—truth between ourselves. Forgive me, sir. I did not mean to pontificate."

"Quite all right, Robert," the dean said.

Robert Clyde wondered if office intimacy prompted the dean to call him 'Robert,' or a breakthrough on the veneer of self-restraint. Never 'Robert' before. Always 'Mr. Clyde' or 'Sir.'

"Shall I call him in?" Dean Lloyd asked.

"Have you decided?"

"Yes."

"Even to what you'll say to him?"

"Yes."

Mr. Clyde did not answer, instead nodded. As Dean Lloyd went to the door, Mr. Clyde knocked the dottle from the pipe into the waste paper basket next to the desk. Dennis entered and Dean Lloyd closed the door behind him. They sat.

"We've decided, Dennis, that Mr. Clyde's decision stands. You are to be given a failure for the course."

Then he launched into elaborate explanation, utilizing at every turn Mr. Clyde's argument verbatim. He droned on, ramifying minuscule ideas and uttering redundancies. Mr. Clyde read obvious tedium on Dennis' face and wished the dean would stop. He did.

"Finally, let me say that you could of been allowed to remain in class if we thought you deserved it. You'll profit from this experience when you take American lit. this summer. I suggest you take it during the summer session. Care to say anything, Dennis?"

Mr. Clyde hoped Dennis would say something, anything, even if only to get it said and off his chest.

"No, sir. Thank you for your time. You too, Mr. Clyde."

"You may leave, Dennis."

Dennis rose, went to the door.

"Just a moment, Dennis," Mr. Clyde said, getting out of the chair. "Dean, I'd like to leave with him. Several things to ask. You know. Other courses, other grades."

"Sure, sure. We're through here. See you tomorrow. Good day."

"Good afternoon, sir," Mr. Clyde said.

Mr. Clyde and Dennis left the dean's office together, passed through the outer office into the quiet corridor. Mr. Clyde was grateful to find the corridor empty of students. Usually in the immediate proximity of the dean's office, in the corridor, students congregated, waiting to see the dean. The familiar knot of students moved one wag to coin a name for them: WALT'S WHINERS. Dennis stood flat-footed, feet spaced wide, arms folded across his chest. He waited for Mr. Clyde to speak.

"What happens now, Dennis? How do you stand in your other courses?"

"Fine, except for Dr. Thorndike's class," Dennis said.

Dr. Thorndike, biology prof, was another "tough" instructor.

"You have a run-in with him?"

Dennis laughed a tight, self-conscious laugh.

"In a way. He threw me out of his class yesterday. Over-cutting." He added defensively, "But I was doing passing work . . . whenever I was attending class. I don't know. I guess it's just that biology doesn't interest me and, as a matter of fact, never had. I rarely took notes, never read assigned chapters, seldom attended lab session. You know the usual bit. It's not Dr. Thorndike's fault; it's the course he teaches. Your course, now, it's different. It appeals to me. Perhaps because I read the literature of all cultures."

"Does the dean know of your expulsion from Dr. Thorndike's class?"

"No, not yet. But he will," Dennis said.

"What'll you do now?"

"Probably go to another school."

"Dennis, I'm sorry about what happ . . ."

"No hard feelings, Mr. Clyde," Dennis interrupted. "You did what you had to do. Besides, I didn't need your class. It was an elective course. I have enough hours in English to satisfy my English major. Biology, that's what killed me!"

"If there is any way I can help you, count on me."

"Thanks, Mr. Clyde. You know, they're right about you."

"Who?"

"The students. You *are* a son of a bitch!" Dennis said. He turned, walked away.

CONTRIBUTORS

Walter Blackstock, Professor of English, Lander College, Greenwood, S. C.

James Forsyth, student

Anne W. Nelson, English teacher, Ralph L. Fike High School, Wilson, N. C.

Peter F. Neumeyer, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Lyn Paladino, English Instructor, Clark College, Atlanta, Georgia

Dwight W. Pearce, student