ALABAMA LITERARY REVIEW

Spring 1987 Volume 1

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First Issue

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"The most important thing is that man continues to create, just as a woman continues to give birth."

—William Faulkner
from Interview with Loïc Bouvard

The first issue of the *Alabama Literary Review* is dedicated to Dr. Ralph Adams, Chancellor of the Troy State University System in its centennial year.

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Like the Rest of Us Jack Kehoe Was a Volunteer

Michael Orlofsky

Like the rest of us, Jack Kehoe was a volunteer. The next time we saw him after his heroics at the big Annunciation fire was in the basement of the station—the Phoenix Club. He had been gone from Ellyngowan for several weeks . . . his neighbor little Muff Lawler had said that the day following the fire Kehoe quit at the rag factory, loaded the car, and while driving off called back that he was going West—maybe Yellowstone.

We were roisterous prior to his appearance because for much of that evening we had been listening to buried explosions and the faint churning of equipment from beneath the floor. One of the collieries, probably Koh-i-noor it was decided, had opened a new gangway not far below the station. Each time we heard an explosion we sent up a cheer with a drink.

"Don't some Phoenix work for Koh-i-noor?" our chief Pat Roarity asked. It was generally agreed that some did. "Well, that must be them firing those shots and trying to break in," Roarity beamed, "because Phoenix will go any distance for a drink!"

"Bravo!" the men of the Phoenix Company shouted, and when we heard rumbling a moment later we cheered the louder.

Caldrons of yellow light atop the gaming tables illumed our forearms, cards, and glasses. As time passed, the layer of cigar and cigarette haze thickened and slowly shifted, altering the shapes and shadows of the room. Our voices settled.

A few of us looked up when he entered; the other volunteers became attentive only after Roarity had spoken. "Hey, ain't anybody up in the station?" he asked those around him. He glanced at the man. "This is a private club, bud. Only Phoenix and their guests. You maybe looking for somebody?"

"Don't you recognize me, Pat?" he said quietly.

"Nah, I don't. What gives, you some kind of wise guy?" He rose from his chair.

"Hold it, Patty," said the bartender Joe Mack motioning. "It's Jack Kehoe."

"Jackie? He ain't got a beard." Roarity peered more closely at the man. "Holyshit—Jackie, what happened?"

"I took a trip out West."

"I mean, you look different—the beard, you lost some weight. . . ."

Kehoe rubbed the side of his face absently. "I guess I forgot my razor."

"Yeah," said little Muff Lawler still under the contagion of Roarity's earlier joking, "somebody must've stole your refrigerator—"

"What's that, Muff?" Kehoe said.

"Don't you keep your razor on top of the refrigerator? When it was stole the razor went with it." Muff laughed and scratched himself with glee. A few volunteers nearest him chuckled affably. But the rest of us throughout the room would not have our anticipation broken by a jest.

"Are you finished, Muff?" Roarity asked.

"It's just a jo—"

"Then shut the frick up." Roarity went around the tables to Kehoe and heartily put an arm on his shoulder. "Don't pay no attention to him. You know how he gets after whiskey."

"Did someone break in the house while I was gone, Pat?"

"Nah, Jackie, nah. It's just one of Muff's fricking jokes—you know."

"Oh . . . thanks, Muff, " Kehoe said leaning past Roarity and looking at the man on the bar stool, "I get it. That's funny."

Muff smiled awkwardly. A moment later he whispered loudly to the volunteer beside him, "You see what happened to Jackie's head?"

Roarity, too, as he walked him to his table noticed the mark across Kehoe's forehead. All volunteers got it at one time or another. The heat from the fires burned our faces so that below the helmet our faces were red, but above the helmet our foreheads looked bleached. The pattern went away in a couple of days, but Kehoe's mark was as white as if he had been firefighting just that afternoon.

After "hiyas" from us at the table, Roarity asked, "How about some crabcakes, Jackie? We were all gonna have some."

"Sure, Pat, sure."

"Hey, Joe Mack," Roarity called, "another platter for Jackie here, and a Kaiser."

Arms on the table and comfortable, Roarity said, "Got to fill you out again. What—no cheeseburgers out there, or do you got to shoot your own buffalo? Where'd you go, Yellowstone?"

"Out West."

We glanced at each other.

The sounds beneath the floor could not be ignored.

"Koh-i-noor's driving that gangway right under the station seems like."

"How close you suppose they'll come?"

"Not too close. Seems close because the way sound travels underground."

Kehoe interposed. "They're closer than you think."

"Nah," Roarity said, "what do you know about mines, Jackie? Sound travels, believe me."

"I've been to Koh-i-noor."

"Don't tell me, you never been near a—"

"I've been to Koh-i-noor," Kehoe repeated.

"Whatever you say." Roarity scoffed behind him, but then glanced at the volunteer next to him.

The sounds from the gangway were louder than ever. Having encountered more difficult rock, the whirling of the drills slowed to moaning. The voices of the miners were urgent, yet inarticulate. Finally, there was a long, plaintive call, then silence, then a blast.

"Do you hear?" Kehoe asked us. He looked at Roarity. Then, "It's your father, Pat."

"What're you driving at?"

"And, Muff," Kehoe continued, rising, "your uncle, the one bashed in the head with a rock . . . do you hear him?"

"Yeah, Jackie, it's okay. I hear him. My mother's brother . . . killed in a rock slide in the flower of his manhood, leaving a wife, two kids, and a coupla girlfriends."

"Yes, indeed," Kehoe answered. He began walking among the tables of volunteers and pointed indiscriminately at members asking them did they hear those people who were once known to them. Did they hear them? "Who when each breathed on this earth was as good and bad a man as any of us here," he kept repeating.

Not a volunteer moved. The noises underground had ceased as well. Abruptly, there was a squeaking and tinny bang of the kitchen swinging doors as Joe Mack passed around the bar with Kehoe's platter and bottle of beer.

Breathing heavily, Kehoe was again at his place beside Roarity, and he sat back in his chair and we saw he was frightened. "Dear Lord, Pat," he whispered, "I don't know what's happening to me."

Joe Mack set down the meal, and because he had been busy in the kitchen while Kehoe chastised the volunteers, he was unmoved. Offhandedly he asked, "Heard you was at Yellowstone. What route you take?"

Years later, we imagined Kehoe had sat up in his cote of warm blankets at midnight and roused himself to the sirens, listening a few moments to ascertain the number of blasts—four, the pause, then two—and knowing like us it was the Annunciation burning.

Our preoccupation that night had been to stop the fire's spreading into the row houses beside the church. Yet, old, frail Father McDermott went from volunteer to volunteer beseeching each to save the altar stone, or the tabernacle, or the Book of the Mass. Finally, Roarity had grabbed the pastor and told him to quiet down and quit exciting the old ladies—told him it was smoke and that he better call and explain things to his insurance agent and the bishop.

It had been about then that Kehoe left his position on the main hose, shielded his eyes with his arm, and plunged into the flames. He had acted so quickly that no one thought to stop him. "Ah, kripes a'mighty," Roarity had said in dismay and turned to accuse the pastor, but already the old man had fallen to his knees and was sobbing into his hands.

After several minutes, it was apparent that Kehoe was in the building too long. The blaze had become so hot that the volunteers on the lead nozzles had to be wetted down from behind by relief hoses.

Part of the roof collapsed. Watching the tremendous orange upsurge of the embers, Muff had remarked, almost reverentially, "I wonder how much of them cinders is Kehoe?"

But then there *was* Kehoe. We saw him through a blown-out sacristy window as he passed in front of a jumble of crisscrossed beams. He kicked open a side door so that it bent back on its hinges, and he walked from the swirling flames with an armload—the sunburst monstrance, the big red Book of the Mass, the white altar stone, a chalice, and several long, limp altar candles.

A cheer went up among the volunteers.

Roarity hurried him away. "We thought you was dead for sure," he had exclaimed over the roar of the fire.

"I held my brains in my hands," Kehoe had stared.

"Yeah, yeah, all right you're dead . . . better go to the ambulance and have then check you over."

Kehoe had nodded, but first he went to the pastor and put the consecrated objects beside him. The pastor looked at him as if he

had been waiting all his life for such an occasion. "And to think I baptized you," he had said as he clutched the hem of Kehoe's coat and kissed it. Kehoe placed his gloved hand on the priest's head.

"But I saw it," Jimmy McKenna had insisted later. "I saw the roof fall around him. Didn't you see it, too, Snaps? You were right next to me."

"I dunno, Jimmy. I must've been looking the other way—at the steeple or something."

"I know what I saw."

"Maybe it was just the smoke," Snaps proffered. "You know how the smoke does things—shadows, shapes like."

"Nah. Didn't none of you other guys see how the roof came down around him—like horseshoes or them ring-toss games at the bazaar?"

A group of us had been mulling in a loose circle with coffee, and we drank it as if we were chewing before letting it go down. Not a man corroborated McKenna, none denied him, either. And we were all trying to recall what we thought we had seen.

Meanwhile, McKenna in his knee boots had stomped over to the ambulance where Kehoe still was taking oxygen. He leveled his charge—"You ain't a killed man, Kehoe," he had said, "I saw how the roof fell."

"Jimmy . . . the pain was like nothing I've ever felt. My brains poured out of my broken head like water."

"That roof didn't fall *on* you, man, it fell *around* you. Your brains didn't gush out."

"I'm sorry, Jimmy . . . I'm sorry. But I'm a killed man." Kehoe got to his feet and returned to work collecting equipment.

"And another thing," McKenna had called after him, "you owe me a ten-spot from nine ball at the Majestic—"

Late one afternoon about a week after the incident at the Phoenix Club, McKenna and his fiancee Katie Boyle drove to an old reservoir on the mountain above Ellyngowan. They had a couple of quarts of Kaiser with them, but they had not been parked long when Katie noticed a man come out one of the forest paths and walk down to the water. A collection of dogs was with him—they sniffed at boulders and trees, feinted and dodged in play, some kept heads high for stray odors, and one leaned up on the man for a rubbing between the ears.

Katie took even closer notice because that dog was her family's. She told McKenna to look.

"But Bandit don't like *no*body," he said while raising himself from the seat. "Hey, that's Jack Kehoe. They was wondering what

happened to him after last Saturday. If I was there I would've called his bluff."

Kehoe directed the dogs near the water where he rested against a boulder. They grouped in front of him, sitting on their haunches. Kehoe began talking. They watched him eagerly, as though he were making peculiar noises or perhaps had a bag of treats hidden behind his back.

Red-haired Katie was not interested anymore in McKenna's advances. Tucking her plaid shirt into her jeans, she got out of the car and began walking toward Kehoe. As she drew closer, many of the dogs looked familiar—she realized they were her neighborhood's dogs: the Donnellys' Heidi, the Sterners' Banjo, the Orlofskys' Ramsey, the Arants' Chocolate, the Lescavages' Airliner. And others, and all of them together and spellbound by Kehoe.

Katie paused behind a tree not far from Kehoe and listened. One or two of the dogs cocked its ears and looked at her curiously but returned its attention to Kehoe when he began to take off his clothes.

McKenna got out of the car then and strode over to Katie. By the time he reached her, Kehoe was stepping into the water. His skin was so sheer that when he turned to reassure the dogs, he seemed to display his deep heart and the red and purple pulsings throughout his chest. Cupping his hand, he poured water along each limb. He waded farther into the water and dove, breaking the surface into blue-green shards. Soon in the deepest pools, his body was like heat lightning—roiling, illuminating, the clouds of silt.

Kehoe remained under a long time. The dogs waited anxiously at the water's edge, bending low to sniff it, or raising their heads high to catch anything on the wind.

All at once, they bounded off—noses, tongues, doglegs, and tails—to the other side of the reservoir where Kehoe had risen. The water calmed, and his forehead glimmered narrowly down the surface.

He waved and called "Hal-loo," and Katie on tiptoes waved back.

"Come on," McKenna said, "I don't want to talk to this guy."

They walked to the car without speaking. Partway down the mountain, Katie spoke up decisively as if it were the product of long reflection: "I think he's an angel."

"Nah," McKenna said, "he's just lucky." Annoyed, Katie seemed almost inspecting him. He added quickly, "What was it he was saying to them hounds anyway?"

"Oh, he talked about the blue of the sky, and how fine a thing

dirt is . . . then he started talking to each of them, telling them how beautiful they were."

In the woods, huckleberry pickers and mushroomers began seeing Kehoe while they were bent over low-hangers or squatted among spongies. Kehoe pushed through the underbush looking lost and distraught. Yet he would not accept help.

Then one morning high above Ellyngowan, in the warmer sunshine and the nearer clouds of the Annunciation Cemetery, Kehoe approached Tommy Duffy. Tommy was waist-deep in a new grave and digging when Kehoe spoke to him.

"Friend, I notice the caretaker's cottage seems unoccupied up above."

Tommy clutched the shovel to himself like a weapon. "Don't hurt me I'm just a crazy man!"

Kehoe promised he would not.

"My brother Johnny told me just to ignore you spooks when you start talking. You're just figs."

"But I'm real. Here, touch my hand." Kehoe knelt and stretched his arm toward Tommy. The gravedigger cried out once in dry terror in spite of himself . . . but he seemed compelled, so he touched Kehoe and eased.

"You looking for work?" Tommy asked. His expression was wide-eyed by nature as though all the world were a constant wonder. "I'm just doing this part time 'til a spot opens up on the farm at—" he whispered, *"Danville."*

"It's as if I've been led here," Kehoe said looking at the graves.

Tommy grinned. "Hey, now I know you—you're Jackie Kehoe, the guy who thinks he's—" he whispered again, *"Jesus.* Johnny told me about you. He's at the Phoenix."

"All I know is I've been through fire."

"Yeah," Tommy said, still grinning, "yeah, you're the guy Johnny's been telling me about. The mark across your head and all." Tommy was delighting in coincidence. "You just talk to Father McDermott. He's set you up. You just talk to him. I got to get back to work—expecting a funeral at ten." Tommy cut into the earth, shaking his head and chuckling to himself, "Wait 'til I tell Johnny."

Kehoe became caretaker and lived in the low, rock cottage. It was barely larger than a one-room shed—in one corner was a coal stove, table, chair, and shelves, in the other corner a cot and above it a few pegs in the stuccoed wall. Kehoe brought nothing with him. The previous caretaker, old man Yost, had died and all his things remained: pots, spoons, blankets, shirts and pants . . . a galvanized

bathtub. Outside, there was a water spigot on a rising lead pipe a few steps from the front door, and behind the cottage was a lean-to for tools.

One of Kehoe's first jobs was to drive bolts and pins into the rock portals on either side of the road entering the cemetery. The following day he was seen hauling a heavy, rusted chain out of a closed-down colliery. At sunset, the newly painted chain glistened across the entrance to the cemetery, and later that night several carfuls of teenagers honked and cursed that they could no longer drink beer on the highest part of the mountain and listen to the radio station from Wilkes-Barre.

"They were as worthy as you," Kehoe shouted back, "as worthy as any of you."

Kehoe, with Tommy as an occasional helpmate, cut grass and dug graves as was expected. Yet, throughout the summer Kehoe expanded his own chores. He righted the stones that had been knocked over by vandals. He trimmed back the decades-untrimmed hedges and discovered forgotten graves. He weeded, fertilized, watered, burned, thatched, and seeded the entire grounds. A hundred different things. And he whitewashed his cottage.

After work, Kehoe would pick coal among the culm banks to save for winter. On foggy mornings, passersby on the township road heard the retort of his cracking then his shaking the coal through a box-screen to fill his bucket with chestnut for the stove.

When not in the low places looking for coal, Kehoe was in the hills foraging for mushrooms and berries. Sometimes in the evenings, the last person to leave the cemetery would see him on a stool outside the cottage with a needle making long strings of spongies that he later would take inside to hang behind the stove. He searched out walnut trees and brought back baskets of nuts; there were times when his hands were black for days because he had been separating the dark husks from the seeds.

Once in a while, Father McDermott delivered to Kehoe a chicken or box of canned goods from the food drives among the parochial students. Whenever he came with food, the priest told Kehoe, " 'Take no thought for your life . . . behold the fowls of the air.' " And with much of his administrative duties curtailed while the new Annunciation was being built, Father McDermott spent more time visiting the sick, blessing homes, or simply talking with his parishoners on the street. Often, the topic of Kehoe came up and his transformation of the cemetery. The old women with whom he talked, those brides yielding to eternity each time they closed their eyes, were the most appreciative of the improvements in their final

resting place. When they could get a lift up to the cemetery with a son-in-law or nephew they began bringing Kehoe all sorts of victuals: ears of sweet corn, potatoes, onions, apples, all manner of squashes, tomatoes ripened on window sills, home-made horseradish, great knots of string beans, dried fish, chow-chow, Jerusalem artichokes, pickled herring, corned beef and cabbage, boiled tongue, pickled eggs in gallon jars, pig's-feet jelly, small barrels of sauerkraut from the Ringtown Valley with a rock to hold down tight the wooden lid, sausages that would keep—pepperoni and salami, braised sweetbreads, stuffed goose neck, cakes, pies, poppy-seed bread, and enough other eatables to load Kehoe's larder shelves to groaning. And from Mrs. Mulhearn, a case of Jameson's Irish Whiskey.

Kehoe thanked each of them with his hand across his heart. From many of the old women the sentiment was the same: "When I'm in the ground Mr. Kehoe, will you remember me?"

Among themselves, the women claimed that they never thought they would live to see the day, that it was like in the ancient stories from their girlhoods. "What ancient stories?" some of the volunteers later would ask their grandmothers having overheard passing near the telephone. The old women would respond, "Why, of saints walking the earth!"

One early evening in winter, skaters coming home from the mountain lakes stopped outside the cemetery fence and watched Kehoe through one of the windows of his cottage. He stood with his arms across his chest staring fixedly at something across the room, perhaps the coals in the stove grate, perhaps at something simply in his mind of greater distance. The skaters would say that the intensity of the man's gaze was such that his old head injury glowed. Snow rasped through the trees.

And late that winter, Katie and McKenna buried their stillborn child beside the grave of Katie's grandmother. There were only a few people at the service. Kehoe and Tommy remained off to the side. The old saying seemed true of Katie, that a woman in childbirth was more in the next world than in this one. Thin and ashen, she had forced herself out of the sickbed to attend. And McKenna, he seemed short-tempered.

Kehoe wanted to cover the child himself. Amid the thinning, granular ground snow, he patted the last of the yellow clay of the tiny mound in place with his hands.

That night the skaters walked home knowing it had been the last good ice of the season. They collected outside the cemetery fence and watched Kehoe. He paced back and forth across the cottage

thrashing his arms, and several times hit himself in the head knocking himself sideways. Then the quiet of the cemetery was hallowed through by the coarse noise of Kehoe's mourning.

Katie often visited the grave. She said some prayers, then sat back on her heels just looking at the little patch of lighter green grass. On a cloudy afternoon, Kehoe was on his knees pulling dandelions from the plot when Katie stopped by. Kehoe hurried to get up, but Katie told him, no, wait . . . would he say the prayers with her?

"Certainly, certainly," Kehoe said.

They spoke aloud together, and when they finished Katie turned to him. "Bring him back, Jack Kehoe . . . bring him back."

Kehoe wiped her face with his fingers. "Now, no more of that . . ." and he made up an excuse about the tears falling and just causing more dandelions.

She sniffed, nodded, and was silent for a time. "He would've been so beautiful," she murmured.

"There'll be others. Just imagine, whenever you recognize that your sons and daughters were guided from harm you can tell them it was the work of their eldest brother."

She was able to smile at that. Then she said, "You know that the baby came only seven months after Jimmy and me were married. I just can't help thinking it's my fault."

"No-noo-noo," Kehoe replied. "How could you think that of yourself? You gave your baby the greatest gift, the greatest gift." Kehoe scanned the clouds. "Do you smell the rain coming up from down the valley?" he said. "Let's wait it out with a little of Mrs. Mulhearn's whiskey. And I'll feel better knowing you feel better."

Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons, Katie came up from Ellyngowan to help Kehoe and Tommy in the cemetery. Kehoe saved things for her to do. And he went into the woods and dug up saplings of maple or spruce or bushes of mountain laurel, and placed them outside the lean-to in burlap. Katie would plant them where she wanted . . . Kehoe let her do that. In time, red-haired Katie looked as if she had found a sort of peace.

Kehoe had been caretaker for nearly a year, and it was his first Memorial Day. It seemed there were as many of the living strolling among the graves as there were the dead under. It had been customary for the Ellyngowan collieries to shut down for the day because production had slowed anyway due to the season. For the townspeople, it was the first warm-weather holiday of the year and they tended to enjoy it. The holiday had evolved over the years—

from flowers the women began bringing food, the men beer. Music followed, then dancing, occasional brawls, and of course, drunkards passing out over the graves of their forefathers, even the graves of strangers.

Many people passed through Kehoe's open door telling him how much they liked his work, and he stayed in his cottage most of the day speaking with them until Katie asked him to come join the gathering of Phoenix volunteers and their families over the plot of Mr. Uren, who was the founder of the Phoenix Volunteer Fire Company.

"You've done a fine job, Jackie," many of us said as he approached. "It won't be such a burden dyin' knowing that this wonderful place will hold our bones 'til kingdom come."

Kehoe looked down the rolling slope of white and grey headstones to the edge of the mountain and beyond and precipitously far below to the hazy Ellyngowan Valley. And beyond to the farther black ridges of coal region hills.

"The pleasure has been all mine," he said.

A glass of beer was placed in his hand and he downed it in three swallows that prompted a hurrah from the volunteers.

"Oh, Jackie," said Roarity, "we sorely have missed your company." We all agreed.

Yet from the rear of the crowd came a sound. The volunteers parted and at the end of the trough sat McKenna on the tombstone of Mr. Uren.

"What's that you say, Jimmy?" Roarity called back jovially, "with all the commotion up here he didn't hear you."

"I said Jack Kehoe is a sonofabitch."

Someone said, "He can't mean that?"

Then others:

"Too much drink in him."

"Ain't he afraid of being struck down by lightning?"

"His father was a mean one, too."

"Jack-ie Ke-hoe," McKenna continued while rising to his feet, "the *saint*, the very *imitation* of Christ, Himself." If McKenna had been drinking it was not showing. "I accuse you to your face of hypocrisy." He turned to make his case to the volunteers. "Don't all look so shocked," he said, "as if you didn't know Katie comes up here while I'm at work—planting berry bushes! God knows what they do together in that shack."

Grimly, Kehoe replied, "Jimmy McKenna, I can't deny that I loved Katie in her need."

"There," McKenna said, his bottom lip quivering, his eyes shining, "the truth be known."

"Yet at this moment," Kehoe said, "I love you more because of your ignorance."

Jimmy, how dare you—how dare you," Katie said from the edge of the crowd. "We never did nothing but talk—"

McKenna went to her fast, grabbed her by the collar of her shirt and shook her once, violently, before he was pulled back by some volunteers.

"That ain't the point," he said beginning to break down, "that ain't the point . . . can't you see he's just like me. Just a man. Oh, Katie, Katie. . . ." He quieted, and our sympathy for him was never greater, but suddenly his anger was renewed. "Kehoe—Kehoe!" he said hoarsely turning to him, "winner's mark!"

Roarity stepped between the men. "Best man wins, and that's the end of it. There'll be no more trouble after it's over. Is that understood?"

Both men nodded. "Well, then," Roarity continued, "Jimmy, what's your mark?"

"I'll cut off a piece of his ear."

Kehoe chose the traditional mark of someone insulted.

"I'll break the teeth from his mouth."

In short order, Kehoe, McKenna, and the volunteers reassembled over the plot of Tommy "Tornado" Gwyther, who once went eight rounds with heavyweight champ John L. Sullivan in a non-title bout in Scranton. As McKenna pulled the shirt over his head the muscles in his wide back splayed. Kehoe undressed pensively, as though trying to remember something with each loosened button. We waited to see his deep heart. But it was no surprise after all that following three seasons of digging graves his skin had thickened and the muscles in his arms had thrived.

All affirmed it would be a fair fight.

The two men grappled some time for a hold, then locked, falling to the ground. They rolled about, jabbing at each other, but when they slipped from each other's grasp jumping to their feet, we saw that McKenna had bloodied Kehoe first. His moustache oozed crimson from a blow to the nose; however, McKenna, too, had been wounded—a serrated oval gleamed on the top of his shoulder, the imprint of Kehoe's teeth. They scraped at each other for another ten minutes before Roarity called time.

McKenna slugged down a quart of beer while Snaps fanned him. Muff toweled the blood from Kehoe's whiskers while Tommy massaged his arms. We noted that Kehoe's scar had whitened. Both men had welts under their eyes. Kehoe gargled a mouthful of beer, spat it out, and the fight continued.

So, the pattern was set—times of violence, times of respite.

Each man's body was mottling yellow and purple, their toeholds had gouged out chunks of sod, and when McKenna made a flying tackle at Kehoe and both slammed into it, "Tornado" Gwyther's tombstone thudded over.

By dusk, many volunteers already had gone home in groups talking among themselves:

"Why would Kehoe let it go on that long?"

"Maybe McKenna was in the right?"

"Yeah, do you think so?"

"I don't know what to think—I just don't know."

Those of us remaining thought the contest at last would be over as McKenna held Kehoe in a seemingly inescapable one-arm strangle. Kehoe's face was burgundy. His tongue lolled. Nearby, Snaps whetted a knife on a gravestone. But with the last of his consciousness, Kehoe lifted his arm over his head and poked a thumb into McKenna's eye. Yowling, he released Kehoe and fell to his knees. He felt of the eye to make sure it was still in his head, but before he could lunge again in attack, Kehoe swung his leg high and caught McKenna in the side of the skull with his brogan. McKenna straightened and timbered, his head at a peculiar, doting angle to the grassy earth, and his eyes wide open and awe-struck with the sunburst vision in his head.

Huffing, and his scar cadaver white, Kehoe took up McKenna by the hair and dragged him to the base of Gwyther's upturned stone. The sound of the teeth breaking reminded us of the times we broke ice in our own mouths. Still holding him by the hair, Kehoe shook at the chiclet-sized pieces from McKenna's mouth then knelt beside the man pulling him partway over his shoulder, and rose with him and staggered toward the cottage. He upbraided those volunteers wanting to help him.

After he passed, Snaps asked, "Why'd he do it? Why'd he have to do Jimmy that damage?"

"Because," Roarity said, "that's the rules."

Kehoe stopped only for the woman.

"I'm sorry, Katie. You and Jimmy will be all right now. You don't need the cemetery. Your journey doesn't end here, it begins."

He walked a few steps with the groggy McKenna, paused, and turned to Katie again. "Will you remember me?"

She was confused, but she said, "Why . . . sure, Jackie."

Kehoe seemed satisfied.

Little was seen of Kehoe after the fight until a 95-degree day in July when Ellyngowan experienced the most spectacular fire in its history. Wiring shorted out near the hops elevator of the Kaiser

Brewery, and what had begun as a nuisance blaze ignited grain dust that blew off the top of the brewery.

For the first time since the Annunciation fire, Kehoe manned equipment beside the volunteers from his company.

When he had arrived at the fire site he sought McKenna. "Thank goodness you're safe," Kehoe said. "There's death here."

"Don't worry about me," McKenna said, his new teeth whiter and straighter than the originals. "There's some workers trapped inside."

Kehoe's breathing was coming fast, and there was a kind of wreckage in his face. "I know," he said.

A moment later, one of the workers sprinted through the long, flapping flames. His shirt was on fire—with blasts from our hoses we leveled him. Muff went to help, but the man yelled something and pointed to the place he had exited. Muff kept running and disappeared into the flames.

"Are you my buddy in this, Jimmy?" Kehoe said.

"Like I keep telling Katie, you ain't nothing special—but I admit you're lucky."

"I never asked for what happened. What would you've done if you were me?" He pressed McKenna. "What would you've done?"

They strapped on breathing gear behind the engines, then arm in arm and slow wandered into the flames. Roarity caught sight of them just as they went in. He yelled, "Who said they could do that? Now that's three dead firemen—*three dead firemen*!" In front of the Phoenix pumper, he trudged in his buckles and boots back and forth a few minutes waiting for his men to emerge before he bullhorned that positively no one was to go near the building.

But even as he spoke, McKenna with Muff over his shoulder walked clear of the flames. In his path came Kehoe with a worker. They deposited their loads into a rushing group of volunteers, and again, arm in arm went into the building.

It took them longer to exit on the second trip. They let the injured fall and slipped back into the brewery before we could seize them.

They escaped a third time with two more workers. But as McKenna swung down his burden and was off balance, Kehoe shoved him over. By that time, we had edged close to the building and grabbed McKenna while he struggled to his feet under the breathing equipment. Snaps took hold of Kehoe, but Kehoe swung a roundhouse and slammed him in the head. Snaps fell right down on his pants.

We were in the blinding cascade from the hoses, but we saw Kehoe go back inside, and saw him battering into the flames, but

the flames seeming impenetrable. He turned wanting to leave the inferno finally, yet he stopped. Kehoe looked at us then. It was the suffering of Golgotha in that face or of the battlefield or of anywhere there is sacrifice. He closed his eyes and again battered into the flames. And he passed through.

It was that quick—Kehoe was with us, then he was gone.

McKenna would tell us that there had been one more worker slouched in a corner of the basement.

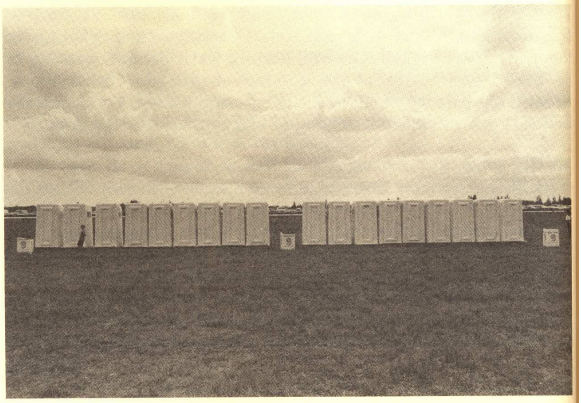
Seconds after Kehoe had reentered the building, a huge *yesss* of a detonation flattened us and caused three walls of the brewery to collapse. There were numerous smaller explosions that forced everyone to retreat behind the engines.

The night of the fire, three of us stood watch around the smoldering hulk of the brewery making sure it would not rekindle. Unable to sleep, Katie was with us having brought coffee in a box.

We talked about Kehoe.

And later, the last standing wall and I-beams of the building fell in on themselves and sent up a column of embers. It rose, and billowed yet higher, so that the outer edges of the mass swelled downward, then pulled up again. The body of embers was caught on the wind and circled the Ellyngowan Valley in a wide arc, its great orange tail whisking over roof tops, and in its wake sending out ululation from the neighborhoods of dogs.

They followed their quarry across the valley and up the mountain—singing after it in ecstasy, long-tongued and laughing. They bounded through birches, over ravines, around dens of boulders, assembling at last at Kehoe's cottage—and cried above them. We had pursued it as well leaving Katie behind, wanting to be the first to witness the coming of the new millennium. Breathlessly, we watched the hovering orange body. Yet as quickly as it took life, it expired, settling as ash on the fur of the dogs.□



Orlando Menes

Terrorists

Roald Hoffmann

In the dark that is the bed,
in the dark, that is the sole
room in this life, we seem

to be taming a cat. The woman
with me is wife, or mother,
or both, and we are intent

on this impossible task of
training an animal we can't
see. We do hear it, its pacing,

always out of reach, and when
it jumps (this we have learned
to fear most, the silent space

of its jump) it lands claws out,
with the smooth unthinking cat
cut of claw into skin and flesh.

The sheets are twisted, they will
be bloody in the morning. Lately
it seems to be timing its jumps.

The woman and I are not sure
who in this night of training,
will be taught to kill whom.

The Man for Whom Everything Came Easy

Roald Hoffmann

came from an immigrant family,
and didn't own a book
until he was 16
So his first desires were simple:
Fournier playing the Bach cello sonatas, an illuminated globe.
Since he did well in school,
and this was America,
it was easy.
He worked hard,
did interesting research
and in time he could buy
a Nikon with two telephoto lenses
and a second recording of the Bach sonatas
(he had made a mistake about Fournier).
He was a little unhappy
that when they needed a new second car
his wife said that his joking suggestion of a Porsche
just didn't make sense.
Invitations to speak came from all over the world.
What he wanted most (but this he was afraid to say)
was that his children read good books,
and not waste their time on hard rock.
This was more difficult to arrange,
because you couldn't pay your children
to do what they didn't like to do. But in time
they grew up, picked up Tolstoy
and even, once in a while,
put on the cello sonatas on the record player.
The man who seemed to do everything well
actually began to like rock,
at least to dance to it
(he still complained that he couldn't hear the lyrics).
Running six miles each day,
he had less trouble than his wife in keeping his weight down.
He began to fly first class,
and sat in on a class on Kierkegaard.
The man who had everything
now told his new intellectual friends:
What I would really like is to have my soul
as it is not.

Love Letters

Elise Sanguinetti

Miss Gaston bought the gun on Tuesday. Later, she was to establish it was Tuesday because that was the day the sixth elderly woman in their South Alabama town was raped and murdered.

The murders had terrorized the small town and most of the southeast, too, as day after day, it seemed, the press detailed the grisly stories.

"Just like you and me," said Mrs. Trumbull, the white housekeeper, as Miss Gaston attempted to read the newspaper. Mrs. Trumbull, large and red-faced, always talked at breakfast when Miss Gaston tried to read. She also talked as if the entire world were deaf. She stood at the kitchen door, looking into the breakfast room, another habit Miss Gaston found disturbing. When she wasn't talking she stared at each mouthful Miss Gaston tried to consume.

"Them was society. Not trash. Look in there," she said pointing to Miss Gaston's newspaper, which obviously she had already read, "says in there, says there was a struggle. Police found a dark hair underneath the woman's fingernail."

Miss Gaston looked up at her then, transmitting a hollow knowledge. But it was Mrs. Trumbull who spoke the word.

"Nigger," she said, and in silence Miss Gaston's thoughts turned inward. Miss Gaston's imaginative mind had more than once reenacted the murders. With herself as victim. But the true timbre of horror was impossible to bring to herself. She could see herself awakening in bed with a flashlight blinding her sight and then the shadowy face coming closer, closer. Hands. Her throat closed with terror. A knife. Blackness. She could never see further. The scene always left her in such a stress that she tried to vacate it by quoting Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

Poetry sometimes helped, but when Mrs. Trumbull mentioned "a struggle" nothing helped and she saw the elderly school teacher

in her pink nightgown, bobbed grey hair, bolting from her bed, struggling with her attacker, knocking over chairs, mirrors and finally the gurgling from her throat as the attacker forced her to the bed again.

"I'm going to get a gun." she said.

Mrs. Trumbull stared at her open-mouthed.

"Yes." She placed her coffee cup down with authority. She was thinking of her mother. Her mother had bought a gun after her father died. She hadn't minded using it either. Mainly, she shot squirrels with it. When the squirrels began ruining her cutting garden she shot them. "The Southern Hedda Gabler" they had called her mother.

Miss Gaston had been terrified of the gun. She didn't even like to look at it.

"Don't be silly," her mother said. "A woman has to protect herself. If someone came in this house I wouldn't hesitate one minute killing him."

"Yes, I'm going to buy a gun," she said again, and her voice sounded exactly like her mother's. Since her mother's death Miss Gaston had often seen herself as her mother, as if the two had switched roles: she dead, her mother alive.

"A gun is for one thang only," said Mrs. Trumbull.

"Don't be silly. A woman has to protect herself."

"Not if she's got two men in here to protect her."

Miss Gaston said Mrs. Trumbull knew as well as she that her nephew Alden was rarely at home before twelve. He and his wife Olive had taken to going to Birmingham almost every weekend and even during the week nowadays. Alden and his beautiful spoiled bride had become popular there.

"And the Governor wouldn't hear an atom bomb go off if it were right here in this own house." Miss Gaston was speaking of her brother-in-law, a former governor of Alabama.

Mrs. Trumbull thought the Governor's near-deafness enormously funny. She fell against the refrigerator laughing. "If that aint the. . . ." She was wheezing. "Atom bum! He sure can't hear nothin." But suddenly her reddened face went blank and it hung naked like a cow's as if some stunning fact had found its way into her brain.

"How come some twenty-year-old would want some eighty-year-old woman? How come?"

Miss Gaston looked away. Mrs. Trumbull's oftentimes earthiness, naive as it may be, never failed to jar her. "Where is Robert?" she asked and then turned her gaze to find Mrs. Trumbull still pondering on her heels.

Robert was the black yardman who sometimes drove the Governor and occasionally her. Robert could take her into town to make her purchase.

The Governor was napping. He wouldn't need the car until four.

"You'll have to see the po-lice," shouted Mrs. Trumbull. "They don't give just anybody a gun. They'll ast you thangs. Private thangs." It was a dare. The police force, as most official positions in the town, was almost totally black, a fact Mrs. Trumbull saw only as evil. "What all goes on down there the Lord only knows," she said morning after morning.

She turned from the breakfast room. "Changin them letters for a gun," she muttered softly. But Miss Gaston heard her. She knew what she was referring to. Just the other day she overheard her talking to the black cook:

"She sometimes moves her lips when she isn't even saying anythang. And she totes old letters round with her all the time. Thinks nobody don't see em. Old Lady Gaston done gone daft, if you asks me."

"Is?" was all the cook had to say.

"Yes ma'am. Keeps em letters in the bed, too. Covers em up with the sheet if somebody just happens in the room. Wonder what all's in them letters?"

Miss Gaston had known for years Mrs. Trumbull did not care for her. The feeling was mutual. But she hadn't known the woman's suspicions about the letters. She was unaware Mrs. Trumbull even knew about them. She had felt she had been discreet.

The letters were from Albert Mackenzie, love letters which she had saved all these years. Forty or more years by now. In a sense the letters marked the end of her life. At least she saw it that way. Nothing since then (the brief affair at college) had occurred to give life to the routine of her days. She read the letters at least once every month, reliving those times, rejoicing in them. They were her savior here in her dead sister's old house.

"Bran," her dying sister had said to her. "Make sure the Governor gets his bran." And so she had. That was twenty-five years ago, and she had been in the house ever since, seeing to this and that, planning meals, tending the garden.

Love, in every form, had left her life. She had only the letters. And they brought back more than love. They also brought back youth and what she was like in that far gone time. Full of poetry and sadness and joy, her days were April days, each one. But after Albert left for the army the joy left, too. Bit by bit. Day by day. She never had another beau. "Too intellectual," her mother had said.

Albert had admired that about her. At least he wrote that he did.

But now was now. She left Mrs. Trumbull muttering and went in search of Robert.

Robert put on his baseball cap (an unadorned chauffeur's cap) and Miss Gaston arranged herself in the back of the black Ford. The Governor bought only Fords, simple ones. It was good politics, of course, even though he had retired from political office years ago. But his reasoning aloud was he didn't want anything "ostentatious." He had learned that from big Eugenia, of course. His daughter was "little Eugenia," though in reality just the opposite was true. His wife was petite and frail. The daughter was a carbon copy of himself.

"To the police station, Robert," directed Miss Gaston.

Robert, an aging, well-mannered man with lifelong aspirations toward the clergy, never asked questions. But Miss Gaston could see the back of his collar rising on his neck. An explanation appeared to be in order.

"I want to buy a gun," she said. And Robert, the bill of his cap practically covering his eyes, turned flat around to face Miss Gaston. His head was cocked to one side as if he were examining Miss Gaston's face, searching it for some dire sign of trouble, perhaps a small stroke, mental confusion.

"A woman has to protect herself," was all she said.

Robert turned then, pushed the cap upward, and started the automobile. "Thas right," he said snappily.

Robert parked across the street from the city hall, a low slung yellow brick building, a former W.P.A. project. As soon as the car came to a halt it became instantly clear that Robert was particularly revered in the area. Uniformed policemen on motorcycles waved, saluted. Onlookers grinned.

"Hey theah, Checkerboard. Whatcha doin, man?" A middle-aged black man with two gilt front teeth grinned. Robert responded to the greeting with a low chortle "heh, heh, heh." Clearly Robert was beloved.

> For it was passing fair to be a king
> And ride in triumph through Persepolis

Miss Gaston quoted to herself as she descended from the car.

She walked as tall as she could across the street, and she noticed her presence had caused a change in scene. There were no more grins, no more affectionate greetings, no salutes. Only eyes, shifty but reading, solemn. As she approached the door she said "how d

you do" to two men, one with a toothpick in his mouth, leaning against the building near the door. No one offered to open the door. The man with the toothpick removed it as if in preparation for speech.

Outside the Chief of Police's office she could hear raucous laughter. "Tawk bout money, man . . ." and laughter again.

She knocked.

"Yeh?"

The door slowly opened. It was pushed by a man sitting on a high stool near the door. The whites of his eyes questioned as if some miraculous presence had made its way into their jocularity.

There were three men in the small water-stained office. The chief, resplendent in grey gear and hardware, was seated behind a worn desk with his feet up. The man on the stool rose, looked at Miss Gaston with half-closed lids and departed. The other, still grinning, dropped ashes from his cigar into his cupped hand and then scratching his head with his second finger began to frown.

"Chief Washington?" asked Miss Gaston, regarding the man behind the desk.

The man lifted his feet off the desk. "Y'all go on now," he said to the others. The buttons on his uniform were brass and they shone green from the phosphorescent lights above, one bulb of which was obviously defective because it kept going off and on like a wink from on high.

An empty chair was placed before the desk. Miss Gaston sat in it, waiting for the other men to depart. The room smelled of stale sweat and snuff and old tobaccos. She thought she detected the odor of leaking gas, and she spied the heater in the corner of the room. Its flame was yellow and blue and sputtered.

"Yes'm," said Chief Washington. "Now what kin I do for yew?" His voice was gentle, kind and completely different from what she had heard behind the door before she knocked. He had a round face with a snappy mustache and dark solemn eyes.

"I am here to ask permission to purchase a gun."

"Is?" He brushed his hand beneath his nose and sniffed. He was looking at something in the far corner of the room. Miss Gaston turned to see what had caught his attention. There was nothing.

"Yes, we live in the country, you see, and there is so much happening these days."

The man nodded in solemnity, still staring at the corner.

"Do I fill out something?"

The man straightened in his chair and looked at her for the first time. "That isn't to say to be exactly mandatory. But they's thangs I'd have to axed you. Just for instance," and he leaned forward, "is yew meaning to cah'y this on your pusson?"

"On me?"

"Yes ma'am. These is thangs we gotta know."

Miss Gaston looked away. "Well, of course, if I went out for a walk. On the place, you know. I think I would probably take the pistol with me." She looked back at him and he looked at the corner again. "You see, all I want is a very small pistol, one I could carry in my purse or—in a pocket."

"Gun's a powful thang. You wouldn't want to go shootin somethin you had no binness shootin. These is thangs we have to be under*stood* about. They mandatory."

Miss Gaston said she understood, but since her nephew was away so much of the time and the Governor had become hard of hearing she felt she and the housekeeper on the place needed some protection should, Lord forbid, such a necessity arise.

At the mention of "the Governor" the man's expression widened.

"You talkin bout the Governor?" His voice rose.

"Yes. He's my brother-in-law. We live in the same house."

The man was grinning. "Lawd help us. I knowed the Governor all my life, drove for him. Drove him when he was up in Mongumry. Lady, you can have anythang you wants. Anybody's a relative the Governor sure gotta be a friend of Chief *Po*lice Washington. Sure."

It was a triumph. Miss Gaston was also smiling. This was a friendly place, a nice place, almost pleasant. Mrs. Trumbull had no idea what she was talking about. "Well then," she said.

The Chief was scribbling on a piece of paper. "Now, you just take this here with you and—" he looked up at her. "Pick you out a nice gun, heah."

Miss Gaston received the paper. "Well thank you. Thank you very much."

"Any time. Tell the Governor you seen me, heah. Tell him I *still* got the silver dollar he give me. Wouldn't take nothin for it."

Miss Gaston said she would surely tell him about the silver dollar. She shook hands with him. They were friends. She wasn't like some people she knew. They would never have shaken hands with a black man. She was far and above such nonsense. There was not a prejudiced bone in her body.

They walked out into the hall together. From the rear of the building where the jail was located came the melodious voice of an inmate:

"Fuck you, Washington! You got shit all over the walls in here!"

The two, the chief and Miss Gaston, stared dumbly at each other.

"Drunk," said the Chief. "You get all kinds." He turned as if

addressing the voice. The back of his head was rounded and somehow touching.

Across the street she spied Robert. He was talking to a motorcycle policeman. The policeman's hat was resting on the back of his head. "Heh, heh, heh," she could hear Robert's appreciative laugh all the way across the street.

"Well, good-day, Chief Washington," said Miss Gaston. The drunk had begun to holler again.

"Good-day," said the Chief, averting his eyes. Robert knew all about guns, he said. He would teach her how to shoot.

In preparation Miss Gaston bought a target with a bull's face square in the middle. The salesman at the pawn shop, where guns were also for sale, had taught her how to load and unload the small .22.

Robert had told her to buy a "Sarday night special." But the clerk at the pawn shop thought the small .22 would be more to her liking.

"That's a *mean* gun," he explained with pride.

Thus equipped Robert and Mrs Gaston returned to the country.

She hadn't been home half an hour before her nephew Alden approached her. It was only two in the afternoon and Alden was never at home in the afternoon.

"Floss," he called to Miss Gaston from the back door of the house. She was sitting outside enjoying the February sun. She would have to tell him "Floss" was not her name. She did not like to be called that. Florence. She had always been called "Florence."

She said nothing. She was determined to get along with Alden and his pretty pouty wife Olive. The future ever loomed. Just who would be living in this house should something untoward happen to the Governor? Would there be two here? Or three? Of late Olive had taken an inordinate interest in the house. No longer was there talk of building a house of their own.

Miss Gaston saw in her sensory way that Olive considered her extra. She had seen that ever since Alden brought her home as a bride.

"Now, what is this I hear about a gun?" Alden's blue eyes were redder-rimmed than ever. And, yes, he was losing more and more hair. This was much more obvious in the sunlight. By candlelight at dinner it wasn't so noticeable. Nor was his weak mouth. Alden had the Governor's mouth.

She smiled at him almost coquettishly. "Now who's been telling you things, Alden?"

"Well, Olive, really. She's worried you might harm yourself."

Of course Mrs. Trumbull was the true culprit. She saw the woman sassing up to Olive, gleefully spitting out her gossip. It was as if the two had formed a conspiracy. She saw them making plans, plotting to have her evicted from the house. In a kind way, of course. The happiest day of their lives would be the day she entered the Greenleaf Nursing Home.

She saw herself in a small cubby hold of a room, nothing there but a bed, a chair, a table. And, of course, the letters. She was too intelligent, too whole to be put away like that.

Alden was her answer. Alden did have a sweet side. She played up to that, complimenting him on this and that, the way he looked, a special point he had made in a political discussion. And Olive knew it. Whenever Alden paid the slightest attention to her, Olive's leg would begin to swing up and down and her mouth pout. Olive, with all her prettiness, had the most revealing face Miss Gaston had ever seen. Her emotions were as public as a child's.

"Robert is going to teach me," she said to Alden.

"But you might hurt yourself or—somebody else. A gun is a very, very serious thing."

"Alden, you are such a sweet boy. You've always been. To think you would worry so much about me that you'd actually come home. At two in the afternoon."

Alden was as vulnerable to flattery as the Governor. His eyes crinkled into a smile. He put his arm around her. "Floss, you're quite a woman."

"My mother was excellent with a pistol," she said. "Do you know what started her? I mean got her interested in pistols? It wasn't just Father's death."

Alden said he did not know and yawned into the sun. He had a black tooth far back on his left jaw.

"Hedda Gabler. She played Hedda Gabler at the Dock Street Theatre in Charleston when she was a young woman. The reviews were excellent. I think she rather thought of herself as Hedda. People never forgot her performance. She was very beautiful, your grandmother. Even more beautiful than your mother, if such a thing could be possible."

Alden's face softened. He enjoyed talking about his mother, and he enjoyed even more the fact she was beautiful, something he rather seemed to transfer to himself.

"No, don't you worry, Alden. I'm a practical person. I wouldn't think of using a weapon unless it was absolutely necessary, and I certainly don't plan on that. At least, I hope not."

He gave her another little hug, as if he were hugging the past. "Just be careful, hon."

Hon. Just like his father. No matter what Alden did, the cracker in him would always out. Dress them up, dress them down, nothing ever really changed. How grateful she was for her own heritage. Not a bad seed in the lot, as far as she knew. She sighed with the sweet sadness of it all and went to join Robert at target practice.

"*Bools*eye!" shouted Robert. "You gettin it, Miz Florence. Ats the ticket. You gettin it!"

How heady it all was. This discovery of a latent talent was fine, indeed. She liked the feel of the steady instrument in her hand, and she was a good shot. Standing there, pointing the gun, she was indeed her mother. She was Hedda. Impetuous, beautiful, witty, high strung, high willed.

"Ats it!"

Robert was a skilled teacher. Also an appreciative one. Whenever she hit near the target, joys of appreciation came forth from his throat: "Heh, heh, heh." Miss Gaston found herself wanting to please her teacher.

"Ats it! Atta way! Attaboy, Miz Gaston: Ats it: BOOLSEYE!"

Miss Gaston began to treat what was happening to her as a little joke:

"I can remember what happened a hundred years ago, but I can't remember what happened yesterday," she told Mrs. Trumbull more than once. Lately, Mrs. Trumbull had been oddly silent when she made the remark.

What prompted her to think of this now was the box of letters from Albert. She could not find them. She had looked everywhere—in her trunk, in the attic, the top of her closet, underneath the bed. They were nowhere. She had planned to read them tonight. But where had she put them?

She decided to go down and ask Mrs. Trumbull if she had seen them. After all she was so curious. Also, just by asking, she would inform the woman she had overheard her talking to the cook.

She slowly descended the stairs in hopes of hearing more from Mrs. Trumbull. But instead she could hear laughter in the Governor's office—loud guffaws from the Governor and Olive and Alden. They were having a family time, a cheerful time. It was nice to be a family when all was going well. She wondered if she should join them. She paused at the office door.

"My god," said Olive, "I'd never have believed it."

"I never knew the old girl had it in her," said Alden.

Miss Gaston removed her hand from the brass knob. There was

no room in that merry collusion for her. She would be an intruder. She listened further, and her body stiffened.

"Listen to this here," said the Governor. "This is somethin else:

" . . . No, I haven't forgotten a moment of our time together, not one. In a sense the only good thing about our separation (if anything is good) is to see if my feeling for you was merely infatuation or a fleeting thing—I find that this has not been true at all . . ."

"Hot damn!" said the Governor. "That's somethin. Listen to this here:

"My thoughts and dreams are only of you, coming at the oddest times. Always you. My love at times becomes heavy and oppressive and at times soars carefree and effortless. Is it no wonder I think of you—night and day? Twenty-four hours at a stretch. If only . . ."

"Aunt Florence's been keeping things from everybody."

"the memory of the campus and rain (that rain in which we first recognized what had affected us—in which we tasted the first symptoms of love) . . .

"Luv," said the Governor. "Hah. Hah. Hah. Ah, luv.

" . . . how gaunt and towering the wooden skislide appears on a moonlight night—how the boards up there creak and whisper in the night wind, how they whisper and repeat what they have heard whispered to them.

"Memories of the hours we spent in the valley. Down there in the quiet and stillness that only a grove of pines can seem to create—down there where the snow gathers white and deep in the winter . . .

"Remember the music hall where we found each other, and a small Episcopal Church, a lighter and a deserted pub . . ."

"I think it's sad," said Olive.

Miss Gaston entered the room. The Governor was seated behind his desk and the faded letter dripped from his hand like blood. His weak mouth tried to smile.

She saw the letters in the familiar hat box. They rested there tainted. He had found the precious letters in the storage room. She remembered now.

"I'm sorry, Florence," said the Governor. "I thought these were something of Eugenia's. I'd never—"

She looked at the three of them, Olive and Alden looking down at their laps, and the Governor folding a letter, placing it back in the envelope, foolishly handing it to her.

She stared at his fat balding face. Then she tried to speak. Nothing would come. She took the letter from his hand and kneeling placed it back in the box. She picked up the box and saying nothing left the room. The pain was so deep in her she could not cry. She ascended the stairs with her arms wrapped around the box.

She would never be the same again. She placed her hands on each side of her face. She had to cry. She could not. The very thought of the Governor's pudgy fingers touching her sacred letters caused her to turn about in the room with rage. She thought of the sixth elderly woman in town who had been raped and she knew then something of the woman's violation.

The gun was heavy in her smock pocket. She placed the box of letters on her bed and descended the stairs once again.

The three of them were still there. She looked into each face, the rage in her veiling the faces. Only the Governor was smiling.

She aimed the gun at him, not seeing his face now. Then arms about her. Alden. And a strident pain in her right foot. She looked down and her foot was covered in blood.□

Charles Orlofsky

Getaway

Paul Grant

for Pinetop Smith,
1904–1929

Mr piano man he playing
dirty with tham tricks
night leaves for you only
& after a crowded day
your river alone still
laughing over the bottom
of a burned field
honeysuckle taking over
every fence you'd built

& Mr guitar man
storyteller
This creekbank moved
here from the South 20
years ago already furnished
with deadwood & speckled
leaves brittle with lies
are history bright
with what music kept
its warm heart ever
from learning to pump
cold blood
wishing down his pet country roads
sleeping in the snow with old
& older wood taken with pictures
all guilty of love

Mr piano man in the dark
listening to his hands
wanting words to hang in air
while the shack burns down
around him & his downtown friends
eating oysters for some
reason that left the state
& won't be home for Christmas

Ya see I don't mind playing
anytime that ya'll
can get me drunk
but Mr Pinetop is
sober now . . .

The Black Fugatos

Eve Shelnutt

> The last leaf that is going to fall
> has fallen.
> —Wallace Stevens

Oh Pauline, desire reeling her in. She says to the two girls, "I'm going to Asheville, overnight," thinking, Maybe a *bit* longer. Any snatched time barely enough, her body only partially the silver of scales flipping through water, mouth fly-hooked and airless, and, once-caught, caught. So her teeth itch, too, and her toes splay as if in hot dust, and she puts one hand on the dry hollow between her ribs.

"Sure thing," James would say, sliding over—booth, bed, car or wherever she found him, even on a used car lot selling spinners to uplift the public eye, one of his arms raised while he demonstrated the spinner's sparkling effect in wind. Under that armload of reflected light, she could slip.

"So!" she says brightly, knowing the hue of her voice is wrong when desire is lavender, mauve. Pauline trusts her daughters know not a thing.

"To see Poppa?" asks Josie, her name for him making him ordinary, a man in overalls or a baseball cap turned backwards. Josie's right hand, fingers laced around a silver spoon, stops over her oatmeal bowl. Claire kicks her under the table. What *else* would she go for?

"Bring me something?"—Josie twirling one braid now, looking at Pauline with those eyes so open and clear they would if she were older stop a streetful—cars, donkeys, stormtroopers.

"*I* wouldn't *have* anything," says Claire, to which Pauline nods, patience of someone already halfway to where she is going, reaching out distracted to pat Claire's hand snapping back into its fist. "Well we know *that*, Honey."

"Any-hooooo," says Pauline after a pause, "that's where I'm going. You two'll go to Miss Keane's."

"Oh God," says Claire.

"And you can practice piano there."

"See?" says Josie, looking at Claire or, now, at the back of her head and to the sound she knows is coming, the screen door slamming.

Now they'll have to get Claire from the back yard, car running, its back door hanging open, Pauline tapping on the horn, and Josie saying, "*Make* her come." Then Pauline will have to wrestle, stuff her in the back seat, Pauline's pink blouse sticking to her back in the heat, then Pauline slamming her own door. "Whew!" Pauline will say, as if she's pushed something as indifferent as a wagon up a hill. It will be just *un-godly*—Pauline's word as the trees' pollen floats up behind them, but the word coming out softly as if to herself.

And what will Mrs. Brown think of the scene, her fingers snaking at the shade?

Who cares? "A bracelet with a charm on it?" asks Josie. "Like a, like a tiny bicycle?"

So Pauline nods: *Maybe,* not looking at Josie but over her head because Pauline envisions that he's got her thrown on top of him this time, making her wait, barely wait, with his knowledge of the increments her body takes around him. The tufts of the chenille bedspread make stars on her knees while she laps against him. My God, my God, who *is* he? What species?

Claire knows all this: Pauline asks, Why, otherwise, would she slam the door? Or, if she doesn't, does Claire imagine the sensation of an ocean when a wave hits the torso? When that's not right, oh no, though suddenly the taste of salt films Pauline's tongue.

If we were *dumber,* Pauline thinks, how easy. . . .

"*This* time," Pauline tells Josie, "you'll *walk* to Miss Keane's, together. But not before 6:00 this evening. I'm not paying for her before dark."

And Josie thinks, Oh! This novelty, knowing immediately that she will roller skate, leaving Claire to pant behind her, Claire's gold head a wedge when she whirls on the skates once or twice.

How far to Miss Keane's! Past the patch of violets first, then past the Negro girl's house with her twins, then the house of the two old ladies where they must never go, and never know why not—one of Pauline's secrets. And way past the Baptist church where Claire uses the piano. On and on it stretches, defined both by sidewalk *and* all the houses of Belton, Josie suddenly imagining herself lifted up—presentiment, is it?—as if to see the span from above, skates dangling heavy as her arms flap.

Years from now Josie will straddle a man she loves, older than herself, locked in himself, because of time, she will think. He had lived as a child on an Ohio farm with his father, then in town with his grandmother. Looking down on him, she will, if only for seconds, remember how Belton looked in her mind's eye from above on that day she sat with Pauline, think she knows just where sat his

grandmother's house, the one with the porch reaching around both sides, how he was half-grown then, waiting on a hall bench.

He sees her smile, maybe knows the power of memory which makes the two of them seem to meet, that lie of the ferreting mind while their bodies rock. So he smiles, thinking: Close enough, this'll do, while Josie's halt in memory and this simultaneous smile insures that he lodges always somewhere in her, love taking root.

"Bye, bye, bye," calls Josie, running to the edge of their half of the yard, not one step over into the street, toes hanging off the curbing and curled over it as Pauline's Nash turns the corner. And in the silence the Negro woman begins to sweep her yard, the two oaks rustle.

Pauline, set free, begins to hum to herself, which also she does when he's done what he wants and the hollow of her ribs seems full. Otherwise, why drive so far?

In the house Josie hears the clock tick: here/then, now/then, once/twice, again/again. The bushes scrape the screens; Mrs. Brown's phone rings. Josie sits on the couch. Later she sits with her skates on, their weight pulling her feet down. Momma's clock, she thinks. It was once *her* mother's, and someone else's before that. They have all these things which belong to people who died. The violin under the sofa, the box of music Pauline might play again one day, the Blue Willow china, some chipped, are theirs now because Pauline takes care of it all each time they move. She asks herself, Where is Asheville?

Then she skates through the dining room where Pauline's twin bed almost touches Claire's chair, and into the kitchen. She makes a bologna sandwich, not looking out the kitchen window when she puts the knife in the sink.

Once Claire had a birthday party in the dining room, Pauline taking up her bed and leaving it propped against the back porch rail. Only last December, and the sheet became stiff while the three girls sat with Claire around the table. Claire: the stranger. Then Pauline put everything back as it had been.

Josie closes her eyes, yells, "You better come in, you better"—*Pauline's* voice, but two pouches like time caught in two sacks of breath puff out Josie's cheeks.

So they get to Miss Keane's at 1:00, Claire having trailed behind saying too loudly such things as, "Here I am, a forward having to jump all the time and she won't get me a bra," and, "If he comes back, I'll kill him," (He's coming back, Josie says to herself) and, "*You* had to stand in the street yelling 'Police, fire, help, murder,' you idiot," which makes Josie shiver, redden, skate faster.

Pauline, then, when he was visiting: huffing in the dark: "Faster, faster, faster" while the wall shook, and she screamed out once, so high; Josie lifting the bedroom screen, tumbling out, tearing her nightgown to get help. Then Pauline coming out onto the stoop, stooping as if calling a cat—"Come here, Honey, come here," the blue satin housecoat parted at her knees, Josie saying, "What, what?"

When Claire, all along, knew what.

Josie, skating, remembers that once he brought a bag of toys. On the back porch in a dishpan the Dipsy Deep-Sea Diver bobbed up and down in water.

"And now this," Claire calls.

"Hi, Lucy," says Claire when Miss Keane opens the door in her navy blue dress-collar white, apron white. Miss Keane looks down at the watch pinned to her dress. Claire goes to the sun room, bangs open the piano lid, and begins to play "The Moonlight Sonata."

"*Miss Keane*," says Miss Keane to Josie while she rolls her eyes toward Claire's curved back and Josie hangs her head, this way of saying *Sorry*—Pauline would approve.

"And we're early," says Josie, "because. . . ."

But there *was* no reason unless Miss Keane had been, only once!, in a smaller house with Pauline, hearing how she walks as if tramping through mud uphill, arms swinging, swish, as if a baby were strapped to her back. Even walking down a street her arms swung out and hit you. She could lift anything. And her height, and the chin jutting out. But no fat, when there was so much to do, even resting, the sigh coming out as if resting were a job. "Let me rest, Honey," until anyone could feel her work at it. Mouth going slack, blue eyes shutting—too blue!—and the voice shut off like a faucet.

Only when she rested, feet up on the sofa, could you see, years later when the black of her hair had seeped to the ends, that she was losing the white hair. So thin you could blow through it.

And now, when her hair was still black she never rested with her head down, feet up. She put her head against the back of the sofa and stuck her feet straight out, suspended. Big feet, with bunions, and narrow but for the jut-out the bunions made. Toe nails painted red.

Only Claire kept her nails short. Even years later, when Claire grew fat, she kept her nails short and spotless. She used a white pencil into middle age. Claire: growing fat as if to let no time in, of music or the men to come with time.

"Well nevermind," says Miss Keane. "What you can't help, you can't help."

"We could *help* it," yells Claire over her music, "we just *didn't* help it."

"So be it."

And Josie follows her into the kitchen, the long room with wood cabinets holding light filtered by the trees growing against the panes. On open shelves along a wall sat gallon jars of white paste the children used on weekdays when Miss Keane ran her kindergarten. The room smells of paste.

"I was having my tea," says Miss Keane, nodding toward a cup on the low table," and I was to take my nap. I expect you'll want tea," a statement, making Josie nod.

"But *she* won't have any, thank you." She spreads her hands in her lap where a napkin would be. "And I can draw or read. But I forgot my books. While you sleep, I mean."

"Nap," says Miss Keane. She nods her head toward the sun room. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, she *never*. . . ."

"No, I expect not." She hands Josie a cup so thin it could break if you touched your teeth to the rim. Ridiculous!, Pauline says in her ear, wherever Pauline is now. Where there isn't a cat—Josie watching Miss Keane's cat roll on her back on the windowsill. "Look!"

"You know *her*. How many times have you been here?" Then: "Does she ever stop?"

"Her?" Josie looks around the doorframe, Claire the same, almost like a cat, her back curved over, yellowed by her long hair, and her curved fingers held out. "No, we don't *think* so, me and Momma. We think. . . ."

And what did they think, Pauline only watching Claire walk away each morning to the church, Claire carrying her red satchel hanging from one hand by the frayed strap. Pauline would look up from her book and watch until Claire turned the corner. But that was in summer. During the months of school, they saw her at dark.

"She's good," says Josie. "Miss Conklin told Momma she's good."

"Good?" Miss Keane stirs her tea around and around. "Good? Well, *good*, yes. But. . . ."

Josie waits, to be polite, then tells her about the bracelet she'll get. She watches the cat sleep on the sill, and almost falls asleep with her chin in one hand while Claire plays.

This music: she never gets to hear it unless Pauline takes out the violin, saying, "Let's see, let's see." And too soon: her eyes narrow, when the blue turns gray. She puts up the violin. Time bunched in her fingers where the tremolo should be.

Should I, Josie will ask him in the future, having slid off to lie beside him, take *up* the violin?, voice wistful of its own accord, so it almost whispers, neither of them knowing why. He will look into her eyes. Anyone, then, could have sensed his effort, a grace come so far to surface.

"Could *I* sleep," asks Miss Keane. She answers herself by taking Josie's hand and leading her out to the garden, telling her with patience the names of the herbs and what they heal. "Anything," says Miss Keane. "You were drinking herb tea and you didn't know it. But it's important. More people should study it. We *allow* herbs, the Christian Scientists."

She has Josie taste the mint. Josie keeps her hand in the pockets of her dress, which are as deep as her arms reach, and she holds them straight so that when she opens her mouth it's as if only her mouth were capable of moving, like a person on a sick bed or a beach, heated until he can't move.

"She has no discipline," says Miss Keane, stopping on the flagstone path. "You can hear it. Not the notes. Oh, no, they're perfect. We know about things like this since we're trained to it. But inside her. The rest notes don't rest. That's the only way to put it." And she laughs. "Well enough of that." She touches the top of Josie's head, Josie thinking: Pauline wouldn't like that, her hand on my head. Miss Keane presses down. "She won't make it, you know. But there's more to life than one thing, isn't there?" And her hand lifts.

Lucy Keane's hair was white, full, braided, with the braids coiled into a bun. She wore black shoes with laces; ankles thin, almost blue.

After they eat, Claire taking a place at the end of the table opposite Miss Keane, Claire looks up at the clock hung above the windows and she says, "Now, precisely, is when we were *supposed* to come over."

"Ah so," says Miss Keane, also turning to look at the clock.

"And this way, you'll get more money," says Claire, making Josie say, "Claire!" because they could talk about money *in* the house, and never outside it—how Pauline was raising her girls.

"It's all right," says Miss Keane. "Go put on your nightgowns, both of you."

"They're wet," says Claire. "She was in such a hurry to go make love they're wet, in the basket in the back of the car," Claire looking straight over the plates to Miss Keane.

"You hush up," says Josie, because now, she thought, I know.

And Miss Keane slaps both hands on the table, pushing herself back. "Enough!"

So they leave Claire playing the piano and drive to get the nightgowns, not the *wet* ones, says Josie to herself, touching her chest where what she knows now settles. And Josie soon telling Miss Keane that she's parking *her* car in the spot where *he* washes his car when he comes, "sometimes a Cadillac, with the lady on the hood made out of silver, sometimes some other car, like a Packard or a DeSoto." For a brief time, as they get out, Josie imagines herself as Pauline. Shutting the car door, she says, "With him, you just can't tell."

"Indeed," says Miss Keane.

And, inside the house, Miss Keane stands still at the doorway. She walks to the center of the living room. Josie hears her sniff. "Just as I imagined," says Miss Keane.

"Imagined what?"

"And she sleeps in here?" asks Miss Keane, standing now in the dining room. Josie goes to stand with her back against the dresser where the strap of Pauline's pink bra dangles. She looks up at Miss Keane.

Miss Keane slaps her hands together. "Go find them, right now."

At the door as they are about to leave, with their nightgowns bunched in her hands, Josie says, "We should leave a note."

"Whatever for?"

Josie listens to the clock, to Miss Keane's feet shifting on her black shoes in the doorway, a dog barking far away.

"It won't last," says Miss Keane. "You can smell it. Well, how could it?"

Near sleep, alone in the room because Claire made a pallet on the sun room floor, Josie says to herself that *someone* would have read the note.

How could Josie leave him, when he was old enough for wisdom and could tell her why? "*I* don't know," he will say, sitting up stiffly in all his nakedness and holding her hands in his. "*You* tell my why. If you can *tell* me. . . ."

But every word Josie thinks of won't do, will never do. So, like that, it was done with.

In her garden, while Claire played the piano and they wait for Pauline, Miss Keane sits Josie on the stone bench and tells her, "I watch, you know. We're trained to it, as I mentioned. So let me tell you: you'll need to hold on when it falls apart. *They* won't. Your family, so to speak, I'm talking about now."

Josie nods, Miss Keane takes Josie's face in her hands to still it. "*You* get yourself very, *very* quiet. None of this pounding away, you understand. It's—this quiet—like standing back, something like deacons do in church before they pass the collection plate, you remember? So don't *you* cry and carry on when the time comes. And I'll give you some mint to take to your mother, how's that?"

And now, Love (equi-distant), Watcher, Tarrier at Old Houses, By-Ways, the Body's Iridescent What-Nots, here is how it happens:

Pauline drives up and toots her horn—won't come in!—so that Josie runs out and sees her puffed face, eyes almost glued shut, and her voice one second before whimpering. Takes the envelope Pauline gives her, with just enough money and not one cent over, so it's short by hours, and runs it back to Miss Keane, Claire saying she'll *walk*.

And Pauline in the car thinking: Surprise lying like shells everywhere or stubs of roots cropping up as you walk along. Which is only the beginning of suffering, the heart getting itself in gear for the real, non-indifferent push up a hill.

Pauline, afterwards, moves them herself to a whole, not by God a half, house, which she kept so clean everything had a place: Pauline's feet at one end of the sofa, head at the other, everything in between forgotten, like bread on a grocery list. Oh it was orderly! The name *James* never once passed her mouth, not then, in the new house.

But that was later, Josie now peering over the back seat, asking, "What, what?" Thinking, Is this *it*? Miss Keane's hand burning her head.

And, standing like a deacon behind a pew, Josie misses it all but for what her ears pick up: lovely months of wailing (Pauline) and fury (Claire) and his name dropping like a coin in any plate. *James long gone with his trousers on.* A round, only Josie's part missing because she would not loosen up.

They hate her. How *do* you close something down? *They* knew.

Loss, which taught her, late, to love chaos above all: When Claire was thin with music, when Pauline swung herself all over, when he asked, "*You* tell me why," when anything might have happened in the last green time.□

Orlando Menes

Today in the April Yard

Larry McLeod

My father slowly descends the steps
And enters the green light of the April yard
Something whispers through me
His steps upon the grass
What he sees
A bird darting away, red blackberries along the fence
The new apples, the bright stream
His thoughts
Perhaps nothing
Things like my breath
I can not hold

He stands for a moment
In the shadow of a tree
I seem to enter a dark
But it is only the shadow

Light and dark
Shadow, the shade of something
Some other day
I'm thinking
Perhaps the darting bird is not time
Just an underfeather
Lost somewhere
Soft and quiet

I guess it is the way the light strikes us here and now
That makes the shadows seem so dark
That makes us think so much of time
A day like today
Old men want more
Then just not dying

Where the light touches
Everything is tearing out
There is no holding back
My father steps from the shadow,
And for today
We exist as the light
Exists, etching
Leaves and birds, water, berries
And shadows.

Et tu Edna?

Phillip Parotti

The condition had lingered for more than an hour. Indeed, Edna was certain that she had been reincarnated from the remains of a Viennese dung beetle. —Laugh if you must, but remember, I know Edna, and you do not.

"But Edna," I protested, "Sartre is dead. The Beat Generation has passed into history. The idea is so . . . so *déclassé.*"

Edna merely pointed to her eyebrows. Admittedly, they are as coal black as a stoker's hands—thick, protruding.

"Coincidental superficialities," I wrote, with a commanding stroke of my pen.

"*Oh, really!*" Edna snapped. "*Well, thank you very much!*"

I had hurt her feelings, you see. I had not intended to, but one's creations are so very, very sensitive.

"Look," I said, "I'm sorry. That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all."

"*Now* who's wriggling on the wall?" Edna laughed.

She had escaped me again, and I seemed powerless to return her to form. "Edna," I pleaded, "*please.* With mankind, forms, measured forms, are everything."

"How very Melville of you," said Edna, arching one thick eyebrow, "but *no.* There will be no divine judgements of Ananias passed on me, Mr. Vere, without some very clear attention to the fair facts."

What those might have been—what they might be—I have no way of knowing. In time, perhaps, Edna may reveal them to me, but for the moment, I have reached an impasse. How I am to move beyond it remains one of the many unknowns against which I continue to find myself pitted. Perhaps, I should explain.

My intention had been to seat Edna and her friend, Recene, before a smart luncheon at the Ritz-Carlton—a small lobster salad, I think, accompanied by a single, chilled glass of white wine.

Recene, you see, had roomed with Edna at Smith. During their junior year, each young woman had fallen in love with the same young man—a Yale senior who intended to settle in the City and sell bonds. Subsequently, and quite by chance, each woman had discovered the other's feelings, rejected the young man for the sake of friendship, and resolved never to let anything again come between them. Following graduation and of necessity, each went her own way, but bound by mutual sacrifice, their friendship remained a source of strength to be renewed, quarterly, over lunch in Manhattan. Recently, Recene—now married—had conducted a minor infidelity, so in keeping with the custom of established form, she called the Ritz for reservations, arranging to meet Edna in the lobby at 11:45 a.m. "Dear," said Recene, "I need to share a little confidence."

That had been my starting point. I had worked well through the morning, breaking twice for coffee and once to let the cat out, and in so far as I was concerned, development was smooth. I had brought them both into the Ritz by that time, Edna from Franklin Lakes, Recene from Southampton; I had seated them after greetings, and I had placed menus in their hands. Edna was about to say, "Isn't spring lovely this year." Indeed, I had already put pen to paper, completing both the quotation marks and the capital *I*, but she never gave me a chance to complete the *sn't*. Instead, Edna arched one of those beetle brows, ignored Recene, who remained silent beside her, and threw me a sudden, deeply penetrating glance.

"It won't work," she said flatly.

"Pardon?" I said.

"It won't work," Edna said. "I've been watching you: you haven't the right stuff."

"Is this some sort of word game?" I wanted to know.

Edna ignored my remark. "Clearly," she said, "you stand no chance of publishing this in *The New Yorker*. Let me tell you something, *Herr* Vere—if you intend to write about New York, you must know something about it. To the best of my knowledge, you have never so much as seen Manhattan."

"Once," I protested, "I drove by it on my way to West Point."

"That, most certainly, does not count," Edna snapped.

She had a point. My sole exposure to New York had been through film. Still, I had no intention of giving in to her on this subject or any other. "In works of the imagination," I said tartly, "much, I think, may be left to the author's creativity."

Edna laughed. "Does that explain why you have so miscast your characters?"

"What are you talking about?" I demanded.

"Recene," said Edna. "In fact, *Herr* Vere, her name is Hilda. It has always been so. I have known her for a long time, *Herr* Vere, a very long time, indeed: we were school girls together in Vienna."

"I do not believe," I said, "that you have the slightest idea of what you are talking about." And with renewed concentration, I attempted to bring Edna back under control.

"Hilda was a Grebner," Edna said, eluding my efforts. "In 1963, she married Ernst Koen; *Herr* Koen manages a Swiss banking office in Bonn, and Hilda is devoted to him. She would rather die than commit 'an infidelity,' as you so disgracefully put it. Look at her face, *Herr* Vere. Can you see a trace of guile there, anywhere?"

I examined Recene's face intently. Adultery had been painted all over it with professional makeup brushes.

"I was not aware," I said, "that Recene had appeared on the pages of *Vogue.* When *did* she cease to be a mannequin?"

"You are, certainly," said Edna, "one of the dullest men with whom I have ever had the misfortune to work. Thank God that Franz was not so dense."

"Franz?" I said.

"Kafka. My being lent Franz his inspiration."

"You must be mad," I hastened to say.

"Where the sun and moon do not reach," Edna said, "there is marvelous scenery indeed!"

"Zen?" I protested. "Edna, you have leapt from Kafka to zen, and there is no earthly connection whatsoever!"

"Franz would have understood perfectly," said Edna, her dark eyes shining, "the precise point of connection which you have failed utterly to grasp."

I had had enough. I took a deep breath and marshalled my strength. "I am sorry," I said, "but this will have to stop now, absolutely. You are thirty-five, Edna; you are chic without being inordinately beautiful. You are moderately well educated. You have heard of Kafka, but you have never read him, and you know nothing at all about zen. At this moment, you are in the dining room of the Ritz-Carlton, and you are about to agree with Recene on a choice of lobster salad for lunch. Neither of you has ever been anywhere near Vienna. Your waiter, Carlo, has appeared beside your table; he is already congratulating himself on the size of the tip he believes that you are going to leave him. He is waiting expectantly, Edna. *Now,* give him your order and *proceed.*" And I lifted my pen to await the event.

"*Nockerlin,*" said Edna, speaking with a flawless Viennese

accent, *"Schweinbraten mit sauerkraut und apfel, apfel kuchen mit guss, und moselle."*

Carlo smiled, made quick scratches on his pad, clicked his heels smartly, and disappeared across the room.

"I will not permit it, Edna," I said. "First, you have ordered enough for a family of five. Think of the expense. Think of the waste! If you would only stop to consider . . ."

"There will be no waste," Edna said emphatically. "Since the war, we Viennese indulge no waste. Hilda's family—Ernst and their three grown sons—will join us presently. Considering the size of the party, luncheon will be rather light."

"You are in New York, with Recene," I said flatly, "not Vienna."

"I am in Vienna, with Hilda," Edna said adamantly, "not New York. Really, *Herr* Vere, your persistent notion that you are in control, here, is becoming *most* annoying."

"Edna," I said, "I love you, but this cannot go on. You must forget Vienna. You *must* begin thinking, concentrating on lobster salad at the Ritz-Carlton. Recene will become agitated if she has to wait much longer; her little confidence will lose its poignancy. You must remember, Edna, that I am the author; as author, I control both characterization and setting. There is simply no way around that: you exist—if you exist at all—at my pleasure."

With that declaration, Edna seemed genuinely amused. "If I exist at all," she said, lighting a cigarette, "I exist on my own terms. Remember, *Herr* Vere, I first came to you out of the silences, springing fully formed from the forehead of my former incarnation."

"Oh," I said skeptically, "and what was that?" I received, of course, exactly what I deserved, making me instantly sorry that I had formulated the question.

"A Viennese dung beetle," said Edna, "as I attempted to explain to you earlier."

"That's absurd," I said, more than mildly put out.

"The absurd is much in vogue," Edna laughed. "But the truth is really quite mundane. In 1915, a small boy named Samsa journeyed from Vienna to Prague. In the right breast pocket of his coat, in a tiny painted box, my egg had been fixed by my mother's secretions. Not long after crossing the border, I was born—a dung beetle. Later, in my maturity, Samsa painted the name Gregor across my back in order to identify me as his pet. Subsequently, during high summer, Samsa left my box and me on the seat of a tram. *Herr* Kafka, of course, discovered me there, removed me to his rooms, liberated me, gave me the freedom to inspire him, and look what I

accomplished on his behalf. In the natural course of things, I died of winter in 1916 only to find myself reincarnated—in human form, in Vienna—at the beginning of the Russian occupation. Believe me, *Herr* Vere, I have experienced quite enough in the way of artificial constraints, first in Samsa's painted box and, then, in postwar Vienna. What is wanted, *Herr* Vere, is a cup of Viennese chocolate and the freedom to develop according to one's own needs and desires. If you cannot offer a character that much at least, please turn your attentions elsewhere."

"So," I said, not without hope, "you imply, then, that I *am* in control."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Edna, removing a fleck of tobacco from the tip of her tongue. "What I imply, *Herr* Vere, is that your continued intransigence, your unyielding insistence on character and content, is decidedly *arrière-guard*, a not so subtle hinderance that borders clearly on Philistinism and a demented authorial chauvinism. You fly in the face of progress, *Herr* Vere; you are a party to the pre-structuralist heresy. Give it up, *Herr* Vere: embrace form. Let fictions *be*. I hunger for your affection, but I cannot return it unless you give me the freedom to do so. Give me that freedom, *Herr* Vere; let me lead you inevitably toward the *Prix Goncourt*."

Edna had made an impassioned plea, a more impassioned plea than I had thought her capable of making, and I would be remiss to deny the fact. I had tried to put her into character, and in the end, I found myself forced to admit that I had failed. Bitter, exhausted, frustrated beyond acceptable limits, I gave her her head.

"Carlo," Edna said instantly, "cold lobster salad for two, and a bottle of Puligny-Montrachet. Alright with you Recene?"

"Yes," said Recene, freshening her makeup with the help of a silver compact.

"Alright with you, *Herr* Vere," said Edna, turning briefly in my direction, "the Puligny-Montrachet, I mean?"

"Yes, " I said, "whatever you think."□

Charles Orlofsky

Ice Storm

Lynne Butler

Day 1 All night sleet rattles on the roof
and all morning the steady tattoo keeps up,
a Chinese water torture for winter.
The radio announcer warns to stay in,
take cover, travel at risk of your life.
We are prisoners just beginning to dream of escape.

Day 2 The school down the road has collapsed,
the ice turning its roof to a failed souffle,
a cake fallen under the weight of its own icing.
Across the lake the marina is sinking,
swamped by the uncommon ballast of this storm.
The boats float on in uninformed optimism.

Day 3 Cabin fever drives us out,
regular Nanooks braving the midnight ice,
crunching through the luminous woods,
sprinting into the open field,
the dog at our heels growling delight
to be wild and free
skittering in the moonlight.

Day 4 A cardinal knows something
I don't. He's changed his tune,
is whistling overtures.
Spring waits in the wings
while I, the aging ingenue,
wonder how long this can go on.

Following Frost's "Directive": The Poem as Obstacle Course

Ramona Kelley Stamm

In a *New York Times* interview with Milton Bracker, Robert Frost declares: "Every poem is a voyage of discovery. I go in to see if I can get out" (" 'Quietly Overwhelming' " 15). Certainly, getting out of "Directive" becomes a "voyage of discovery"—a voyage, quest, or verbal obstacle course of syntax and paradoxical statement. And to compound matters, "Directive" presents difficulties for the reader not only syntactically but thematically as well.

The poem begins with the description of a time "made simple by the loss / Of detail.[1] The first line, "Back out of all this now too much for us," contains a strong echo of Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us," suggesting the Romantic desire for an escape to a more primitive, simpler time. Peculiarly, the time mentioned in "Directive" is not "simple" because it is a *simple time*, not elemental in the sense of having occurred before the trappings of civilization, but elemental because it has *lost* details due to the elements: fire ("burned"), water ("dissolved"), and air ("broken off"). Time in "Directive" is less pre-Fall and more post-Apocalypse; it is a time "like graveyard marble sculpture" (4), the narrator explains, thus dispelling any foolish notions about circumventing death. The reader soon learns that this time contains a "house that is no more a house," a "farm that is no more a farm," and a "town that is no more a town" (5–7). House, farm, and town possibly stand for family, work, and society—the lost details. Lost, too, is the reader; for in addition to the verbal stumbling blocks, impediments exist in the rhythm as well. Although the first seven lines share a ten-count measure, the scansion is different in each line—tricky footing indeed. Throughout the different stages of "Directive," the rhythms continue to vary subtly, and this irregular scansion contributes greatly to the feeling of poem as verbal

endeavor. The highly irregular and halting rhythm of lines one through seven is duplicated in the irregular syntax of this first sentence. The sentence's core is *a house there is*, but after four lines of qualifiers, the puzzled reader still asks, *where*? The initial "Back . . . / Back . . ." seems an attempt to summon the physical presences of the house, farm, and town, but once the images are formed, Frost systematically dispells them with three paradoxical phrases: "a house that is no more a house," a "farm that is no more a farm," and a "town that is no more a town" (5–7).

The voice in this first section of the poem (1–9) is that of a kind of seer-narrator, and he announces the availability of a guide "Who only has at heart your getting lost." In lines ten and eleven, the voice changes (in mid-sentence) from that of the enigmatic narrator to that of the reassuring, though garrulous, guide. The diction shifts from the solemn and unsettling mention of "getting lost" to the casual, gossipy talk of "knees the former town / Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered." The guide takes great care to enumerate the perils to be found along the route, only to minimize them with folksy chatter.

The reader-traveler now encounters a long section (8–33) where the theme of poem as verbal obstacle course becomes even more pronounced. All of this folksiness smacks of nervous tension and only causes the reader to tread more carefully. From the very start of the journey, the reader is prepared for pitfalls upon learning that the road seems "as if it should have been a quarry" (10). Furthermore, this road has "knees" that the town was "keeping covered." Covering knees is a matter of decorum—form, but the town did not have *real* form, only "pretense." To keep the traveler on track and in line, there are compass directions, "lines ruled southeast-northwest" (15). These lines are the "chisel work" of an "enormous Glacier." The term "chisel work" not only reinforces the idea of *real* craft or form, as opposed to the *pretense* of the town, but when the traveler remembers that the directive lines are the result of the Glacier "That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole," that "chisel work" can possibly be seen as the work of Frost himself, a poet more than a little concerned with form and one who enjoys interspersing references to his name (e.g., "Glacier" and "coolness") in his work. Nor are the perils of this journey confined solely to the road's surface, for the guide mentions "the serial ordeal / Of being watched . . . by eye pairs" (20–22). He may be facetiously referring to the scrutiny of Frost's critics. As Richard Poirier explains: "From the late twenties until his death in 1963, Frost regarded himself as the necessary enemy of two forces in American cultural life . . . the political left and the modernist literary elite" (226). In

addition, Elizabeth Sergeant quotes Frost as telling her about "Directive":

> This is the poem that converted the other group. The one these fellows have taken to build my reputation on. The boys [followers of T. S. Eliot] call it great. They have re-established me. This is great and most of the rest, trivia. (394)

Such ambiguous references to Frost's literary career continue as the greatly onomatopoetic phrase, "sends light rustle rushes to their leaves" (24), describes the young woods' excitement at seeing the traveler. "Charge that to upstart inexperience" (25) the traveler is told. Twenty years ago they were not there; and now, "They think too much of having shaded out / A few old pecker-fretted apple trees" (27–28). In this instance, Frost's reference seems at once both sexual and literary if one remembers that 37 years earlier the narrator of "Mending Wall" spoke of himself as being "apple orchard" (47). Also interesting is Frost's choice of the plural possessive, *woods'*, where the singular, *wood's*, would work as well. In this instance, as in subsequent ones, the poem's semantic path frequently veers toward the allegorical. In any event, the traveler is exhorted not to mind "them," but to make "up a cheering song of how / Someone's road home from work this once was, / Who may be just ahead of you on foot" (29–31). The "who," one suspects, is Frost; "on foot," the metrical foot, among others. These discomforting features of the roadway, while enhancing the sense of place and immediacy, similarly enhance the sense of perplexity for the reader. They waylay the reader into false leads, dead ends, and mental detours. They trip him up and hinder his movement through the poem.

In line 36, the voice once again changes; this time the change is from guide to priest. Thus far, the poem has resembled the quest pattern of departure and confrontation of dangers; now, the archetypal process of withdrawal from the world takes place. No longer is the voice casually chatty; the tone is now that of a priest instructing an initiate in the meaning of the sacred mysteries. Just as the first vocal transition occurred in mid-sentence, so, too, does this one. A perceptible change in diction becomes evident between the priest's voice, filled with Biblical overtones, commanding, "if you're lost enought to find yourself" (36), and the more casual tone of the guide's voice following the enjambment," . . . yourself / By now, pull in your ladder road behind you / And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me" (36–38). By placing the vocal transition in mid-sentence and mixing the diction between formal and informal, Frost

skillfully adds to the confusion of the reader who is experiencing the poem as verbal endeavor.[2] The rites continue as the reader-initiate is first ushered past the ruins of innocence, "the children's house of make-believe" (41), and then past the endeavors of real life, the house with its cellar hole "closing like a dent in dough" (47).

At long last, the initiate is told his "destination" and "destiny": "A brook . . . / Cold as a spring as yet so near its source" (50–52). Helen Bacon sees these lines and the earlier ones that mention the "two village cultures" as references to the cults of Apollo and Dionysus and the Spring of the Muses (645). Surely this is straining too far to reach the muse, for the muse is much closer. This brook, as does "Hyla Brook," represents Frost's personal muse. Frost himself comments to his friend, Theodore Morrison: "People miss the key to the poem: the key lines, if you want to know, are 'cold as a spring as yet so near its source, / Too lofty and original to rage.' But the key word in the whole poem is source—whatever source it is" (Morrison 79). If Frost is the "lofty and original" source, then "the valley streams that when aroused / . . . leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn" (53–54) are probably his contemporaries.[3]

Another reminder of the quest-like nature of this poem, a "broken drinking goblet like the Grail" (57), is hidden at the waterside. The goblet is "Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it, / So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't" (58–59). Frost often refers to Saint Mark's comments about speaking in parables.[4] In an interview on "Meet the Press," he makes a connection between parables, metaphors, and his poetic craft: "These things are said in parables (that is, poetry, figures of speech) so the wrong people cannot understand them, and so get saved."[5] The goblet becomes, then, as S.P.C. Duvall notes, a "metaphor for poetry, or more narrowly, a metaphor for metaphor: the form and container of the perennial and limitless source" (487). But if we can identify Frost as the source ("cold as a spring"), then the traditional climax of the journey becomes merely another instance of the reader's encountering a verbal barrier. In "Directive," rather than showing the reader the way, Frost has his way with him.

The poem ends in great solemnity with a combination benediction-invitation: "Here are your waters and your watering place. / Drink and be whole again beyond confusion" (61–62). The jarring juxtaposition of the staid, "drink and be whole again," against the absurd, "watering place," destroys the sense of exclusiveness that "CLOSED to all but me" earlier suggests. If the "watering place" is near, can be herd be far behind? These final lines are very likely a reference to the gospel of John,[6] and readers familiar with Frost will also recognize a reference to his famous

remark that "a poem is a momentary stay against confusion" ("The Figure a Poem Makes" vi). Has the reader come all this way for a "momentary" wholeness? Richard Poirier sees Frost's trait of explicating himself, his turning in on his own work, as an "example of the self-conscious and self-cuddling mode" (100). Frost does indeed turn back into his own work; his poems are filled with images of starting out and turning back; and frequently, he makes oblique references to his own name and to his poetics. Poirier is correct, of course, to see this as a fault in "Directive," and he notes that the poem is much overrated (99–100). Even Marie Borroff, who sees "Directive" as "powerful and viable," admits that it is "flawed in part by the arch-avuncular pose of the elderly Frost . . ." (53).

Certain of Frost's comments about his work suggest that he is aware of these traits in his poems and does not consider them faults but virtues to be cultivated. As he tells us, he is ever on his guard against the type of reader "who stands at the end of a poem ready . . . to drag you off your balance over the last punctuation mark into more than you meant to say . . . such presumption needs to be twinkled at and baffled" (qtd. in Perkins 249). In the case of "Directive," Frost has quite possibly been setting a trap for critics eager to see the Spring of the Muse, Apollo, and Dionysus in "the height / Of country" (33–34) and for graduate students eager to see critics in the "eye pairs" (22). Philip L. Gerber views this constant "twinkling" as Frost's refusal to come down on any one side of an issue. He sees the poet starting out in quest of the transcendent only to halt and turn back (Gerber 67). Likewise, it seems that in "Directive," Frost and the reader halt and falter somewhere *this* side of confusion.

If covering the terrain of the poem is rough going syntactically, it is just as difficult to maneuver thematically. One wonders just how much of Duvall's "perennial and limitless source" (487) a "broken goblet" can hold. David Perkins speaks of this thematic evasion in terms of Frost's irony; and in all fairness, he notes that Frost preferred to call it balance (249). However, Frost achieves his "balance" at the reader's expense. Hopes are raised with the mention of the "height of the adventure" (33) and the "height / Of country" (33–34) only to have them dashed following the medial caesura with "Both of them are lost" (35). And his two parenthetical asides, "(We know the valley streams that when aroused / Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)" (53–54) and "(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)" (60), are literally inside jokes.

Frost blends facetious asides, abrupt changes in diction, halting syntax, and self-explication with elements from American

folklore, fairy tale, and from chivalric and Christian traditions and forges a stylistic and thematic whole that is highly ironic. In "Directive," the irony resembles Plato's conception of it in the *Republic* where it has the meaning of "a glib and underhanded way of taking people in" (Cuddon 335). Each time the poet seems to be encouraging, urging the reader on toward the fulfillment of the quest, he then sticks out his foot (metrical or otherwise) and trips the reader up. So the reader cautiously picks his way through the verbal minefield of "Make yourself up a cheering song of how / Someone's road home from work this once was" (29–30) only to have "Who may be just ahead of you" (31) explode in his face. The ambiguous advice, "if you're lost enough to find yourself / By now, pull in your ladder road behind you" (36–37), (safe at last, the reader thinks) is contrasted with the restrictive, "And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me" (38) (oh, no, alone with him). Encouraged to be comfortable and to "make yourself at home," the reader finds only uneasy discomfort in "the only field / Now left's no bigger than a harness gall" (39–40). For where the reader expects something cozy like *nutshell*, Frost presents the image of raw pain. The "shattered dishes" (42), the admonishment to "weep" (44), and the gaping ruins of the house, "a belilaced cellar hole" (46), possessing a life of its own, "slowly closing like a dent in dough" (47)—a staff-of-life image to be sure, but hardly in palatable form—all of these can be viewed as examples of Frost's skillfully ironic treatment of the rites of initiation. If the reader has been on a quest, it has been a mock-quest. The trip and the joke have been at his expense.

In the same interview where Frost speaks of a poem as a "voyage of discovery," he says: "The glory of any particular poem is once you've tasted that arrival at the end" (" 'Quietly Overwhelming' " 15). If this is so, then as the roadweary reader of "Directive" completes the verbal obstacle course, arrives at the end, and prepares to fill the goblet (albeit "broken") from the brook and to "drink and be whole again" (albeit momentarily), he would be well advised to pause, remember the source of that water, and brace for the bitter, chilling taste of irony.

Despite the hints and promises of knowledge in the poem's beginning, "Directive's" path yields nothing. Despite the cryptic references to hidden insights, the poem blisters the reader's attempts to understand the point of the journey. For the journey, in the final analysis, amounts to nothing more than a verbal scavenger hunt; the reader is left with an assortment of images that never pull together. "Directive" is a text which refuses to give up its meaning. Each reader is forced to make his own meaning, his own sense from the syntactical map that Frost presents. It is a little wonder then

that such diverse critical opinions of "Directive" exist. Borroff and Bacon see the poem as an example of Frost at his best, his most enlightening. Poirier and Gerber, on the other hand, insist that it leads nowhere, that the directions are garbled because of Frost's refusal to finally *say*. "Directive" does not direct; it may go so far as to misdirect. Certainly it confuses. And whether the poem's verbal obstacles are a result of Frost's "twinkling" at or sporting with his reader, or whether they are a result of his own lack of direction, his lack of philosophical certainty is of little consolation. Completing the obstacle course that is "Directive" does not result in gained insights but rather in a sense of relief that the verbal endeavor is finally over.

Notes

[1] All quotations from Frost's poetry are from the *Complete Poems of Robert Frost.*

[2] Bieganowski's observation that the different personas are the thin disguises of the poet going through the terrain of language (43–44) induced me to map the terrain from the reader's eyes.

[3] See Poirier's discussion of the juvenile nastiness that characterized Frost's attitude toward Pound and Eliot (228–29).

[4] Frost apparently has in mind the scripture from Mark 4:11–12: "And he said unto them, 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables.' " (I quote from the King James Version for this and subsequent Biblical references.)

[5] The "Meet the Press" panel consisted of Laurence Spivack, Inez Rob, Clifton Fadiman, David Brinkley, and Ned Brooks. A transcript of NBC's 23 Dec. 1956 broadcast appeared 30 Dec. 1956 in the *Boston Sunday Globe* and is reprinted in Lathem.

[6] John 4:13–14 is Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

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The Enabling Structure: *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative*

Alan T. Belsches

Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative. By Michael Kreyling. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987. 197 pp. $20.00.

In recent years a variety of critical studies of Southern literature have looked specifically at the first half of the twentieth century, that period known today as the Southern Renaissance. Michael Kreyling counters this trend by tracing the development of the narrative hero from its inception by George Tucker and William Gilmore Simms to its use by contemporary writers like Walker Percy.

While most early critics of the Southern novel saw it as derivative from Scott and Cooper, Kreyling relies heavily on the theories of Theodore Ziolkowski and Edward Said to show the figure of the hero as the "enabling structure" of antebellum Southern narrative, "the linchpin of a powerful social, historical, and psychological myth, which supports the unanalyzed structures of individual and group awareness and behavior" (11). From its beginnings in such works as George Tucker's *The Valley of Shenandoah; or, Memories of the Graysons* (1824), Beverley Tucker's *The Partisan Leader* (1836), and William Alexander Caruthers' *Cavaliers of Virginia; or, The Recluse of Jamestown* (1834), the narrative hero embodies specific characteristics. His physical silhouette can be recognized instantly as that of a gentleman "by a waiting people" (14). He can face successfully the twin challenges of defeating a villain on the field of action and of finding and wedding his female cognate, often a cousin or distant relative of similar genetic and cultural heritage. And through this marriage he can perpetuate "the hero's blessed kind in the face of history, the ultimate foe of the hero and his people" (20).

Kreyling describes the heroes of William Gilmore Simms as primary examples with these traits. Simms "strove to solidify the

representations and, in the process, to create an identity between Southern writers and the hero" (32). In his full descriptions of Southern life and setting, Simms established the heroic narrative form as the culture's official narrative form. In a careful comparison of Cooper heroes and Simms heroes, Kreyling shows how Cooper's Natty Bumpo is a loner, unsocial, a man without a people. In contrast, Simms's heroes are able to "forge a corporate 'we' through love or mutual identification" (34). The Southern hero in Simms is interested in establishing a civilization that can survive the ordeal of history.

After the Civil War, the American reading public was offered a choice from two leading national heroes to be the embodiment of the American hero, Ulysses S. Grant or Robert E. Lee. Kreyling shows how on a national scale Henry Adams's *Democracy* and Henry James's *The Bostonians* describe these two alternatives. Adams's Southern hero becomes the "Genteel Tradition's ideal of postbellum national identity: the rebel purged of his slaveholding arrogance, restored to his pastoral honor, and ready to donate the latter to a northern (national) character too deeply immured in materialistic concerns" (62). James's Southerner dons a chivalric mask in order to manipulate. W. J. Cash in *The Mind of the South* was later to describe this kind of Southerner as full of "pride, individualism, and a tendency to violence in the solution of problems and the fulfilling of desires" (68). Kreyling shows how James has used the myth of the hero but turns him into a cavalier who hides behind the cloak of gentlemanliness in order to gain power.

In the twentieth century Ellen Glasgow attempts to dismantle the traditions of the Southern heroic narrative in order to attack the prevailing chauvinism of her editors. By examining her six novels that provide a social history of Virginia from 1850 to 1914, Kreyling shows how the primary female character gains dominance over the male. By the end of each novel the hero has forfeited his social and secular power and is "reduced to the dependent status of a child" (88).

Southern writers during the Depression of the 1930s return to the heroic images of earlier literature to give their readers hope. Because main characters like Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths or Steinbeck's Joad family can face economic hardships successfully but remain bewildered victims of the modern world, these heroes offered little comfort or direction to Southerners. Douglas Southall Freeman in his biography sees Robert E. Lee as a "Moses who could lead them out of the bondage of economic failure" (106). Allen Tate sought similar solace in his biographies of Stonewall Jackson and

Jefferson Davis, but unlike Freeman, Tate could never bring himself to complete his biography of Lee. Although he wanted to, Tate could never make Lee the savior of the nation. His *The Fathers* explores fictionally this modern man's dilemma of being cut off from the past and tradition.

Kreyling's chapter on Faulkner comprises the major weakness of the book. He attempts to link Faulkner's early concepts of the Southern hero to the fin-de-siècle concept of Pierrot, the mild, innocent, white-faced clown who can only stare blankly at the folly of the world around him. Kreyling sees such Faulkner characters as young Bayard Sartoris, Quentin Compson, Gail Hightower, and Isaac McCaslin as embodiments of this figure. Although Kreyling focuses well on Faulkner's early poetry and play *The Marionettes* to develop his ideas, they are not convincing.

The strongest chapter of the work is Kreyling's discussion of William Alexander Percy and Walker Percy. Here he shows how William Alexander Percy sought the characteristics of the Southern narrative hero at a time when it was impossible for his generation to equal the heroic ideal embodied by his parents' generation. Percy saw the faults of his own time but always remained blinded to those of the preceding generation. Walker Percy, on the other hand, sees the faults of both generations, explores them, and through the character of Will Barrett in *The Last Gentleman* and *The Second Coming* offers a plan for action, a plan whereby the hero can return to the paradigm within the " 'classical-Christian ground of Western civilization' " (174–75) while knowing its strengths and weaknesses.

In a work which covers a limited number of representative authors well, the usual criticism suggests how authors who have been omitted do not fit into the paradigm. As much as possible Kreyling attempts to answer even this. His final chapter suggests how his ideas could be applied to such varied authors as Robert Penn Warren, Reynolds Price, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. This reviewer still wishes Kreyling would have looked more deeply into such writers as Eudora Welty or Anne Tyler, but perhaps how the Southern female writer uses this paradigm can be for another book. *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative* is a welcome addition to the Southern Literary Studies series edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and provides an intelligent paradigm for discussing the continuity that still remains in the Southern novel.

A Novelist Arriving: *Leaving Locke Horn*

John Canfield

Leaving Locke Horn. By Dorothy Casey. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1986. 286 pp. $15.95 (cloth).

Dorothy Casey's *Leaving Locke Horn* is a good first novel. That qualifier, "first novel," may sound condescending to some, but that's not my intention. With Dorothy Casey, Algonquin Books has made another interesting find. The Chapel Hill, North Carolina, press, which was formed a few years ago, has specialized in "discovering" new writers. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., one of the founders and a professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has access to a ready store of talent. And that's how he found Casey: she was a student of Rubin's at UNC (she presently lives in Chatham County, N.C.). Several years ago, Rubin launched the career of another Chapel Hill writer, Jill McCorkle, by simultaneously publishing *July 7th* and *The Cheerleader*, her first two novels. But Algonquin Press doesn't want to be known as strictly a "regional" or "southern" press; the publication of *Leaving Locke Horn* helps achieve that goal.

Dorothy Casey grew up in Mexico, Maine, a mill town, and sets the novel in the Maine mill town of Locke Horn. A community of hard-working, mostly Catholic mill workers, Locke Horn doesn't seem at all southern. But then that uniquely southern sense of place doesn't really dominate this novel; rather, Casey emphasizes character. Annie Dillard says Casey's characters "remind me of D.H. Lawrence's: ordinary people, rendered in depth and with tenderness. Their moving story is unforgettable."

Casey opens the novel by introducing the reader to the Benson family. They spend their summers away from Locke Horn: "For the seventh summer in a row the Bensons left Locke Horn for Handsman's Cove on Piscataquis Pond." The family members try to forget their oppressive work environment: "Though only fifteen miles (and a comfortable commuting distance for Mr. and Mrs. Benson) from Locke Horn, the Piscataquis seemed immeasurably distant from the papermill town." We meet the family members

and soon focus attention on the Bensons' two daughters, Sheila and Ruth. Sheila, the older of the two, takes a summer job in New York City as a nanny. She longs to grow up, to discover the world beyond the provincial mill town. The narrator tells us that working as a nanny ". . . was the latest thing for high school girls, and Sheila was always up on the latest thing for high school girls, and Sheila was always up on the latest thing."

As the Bensons put Sheila on the plane for New York, our attention focuses on Ruth, a conscientious, sensitive 10th-grader who revels in their summer vacations: "Ruth stuck her head out the window, pushing her face into the moving air, trying to inhale the summer's essence, trying to clear from her lungs the mill and the Johnson's wax smell of St. Etienne's School." When the Hungerford family arrives to camp in a vacant field, we meet Ruth's partners for this year of discovery, Evelyn and Forrest Hungerford. The family creates a ruckus by daring to camp in the field where the symbolic "Virgin Mary" pine tree stands. Ruth named the tree thus because "the resemblance, in miniature, to the granite and ceramic grotto beside St. Etienne's convent was uncanny." She questions the camp's owner about his decision to allow them to stay there. She asks him if he wants "Mrs. Hungerford pouring her bacon grease around the base of the Virgin Mary."

The Hungerfords are a large, working-class family with two seemingly out-of-place children, the artistic Forrest and Evelyn. Forrest is "famous" around Locke Horn for having been accepted to a New York City art school, while his sister, whose artistic endeavors have been stymied, acts as her brother's motivator. Ruth, of course, falls in love with Forrest, and the trio spend their summer exploring the cove as well as themselves. Evelyn, the oldest, says she is nearly ready to "blow this small-time popcorn stand," blaming it for her artistic stagnation: "My trouble is . . . I can't stand the sights around me, but I don't know what anything else looks like." Forrest busies himself painting and saving money for his art school, while Ruth gets to know about love, art, and life.

Of course, the summer comes to an end, and the characters must go back to the drudgery of mill-town life. Sheila comes back from New York, more worldly, but also pregnant; Evelyn starts work as a waitress, still anticipating her escape; Ruth and Forrest continue their "mating ritual." There's a rather predictable accident at the mill, allowing Forrest to leave town and Sheila to resolve her pregnancy; and at the novel's end Evelyn visits New York to "open her eyes to the world."

The novels' characters are interesting, but at the end one is not quite sure what to make of them. That is, no one character really

holds the reader's interest enough to dominate, thus weakening the characters. Each of the major characters resolves his or her struggle, but the result is simply not that compelling. This is a shame, because Casey shows a real empathy for her well-rounded creations. Perhaps the fault lies with the plot: it fizzles a bit at the end.

Casey attempts a great deal in this novel—perhaps too much. Her symbolism sometimes gets out of control and leaves the reader feeling overwhelmed. For example, the "Virgin Mary" tree breaks in a lightning storm at about the same time that Sheila is off in New York getting pregnant; and a huge roller at the mill flattens a character in an accident just as Ruth and Forrest are visiting the Catholic church on Christmas Eve.

I point out these flaws because Casey's qualities of thought and writing do show flashes of real potential. She has the eye to describe "bicycles strapped on the roof with their wheels spinning and throwing off silver light," and the ear to compose a line such as "spilled spices commingled in the bottom of a cardboard carton."

Locke Horn's mill activity can lead to a kind of dull resignation, but Casey's prose lifts the reader out of a quagmire of futility. Her characters, especially Forrest and Ruth, beam with hope. The novelist's sensitive voice rings true in this descriptionn of a trip the couple takes to northern Maine:

> They left the valley, splayed open by the Androscoggin, and drove into the hills. Hundreds of streams and brooks cut like hot steel wire through the land, feeding the river below, slicing the hills with knife-edged gullies just wide enough for a man to slip into and hide. Spruce and hemlock sprouted out of solid rock—as if rock were a decent medium to sustain life—and rose straight up, parallel with the faces of the hills they were born of. It had snowed a great deal. . . . The farther north they drove, the less cleared the roads, until they were driving on hard-packed snow which crunched under the truck's studded tires. The sun was hot through the windshield. Ruth opened her window an inch and icy air pasted a straight patch of cold along her face, drawing out an occasional tear and pulling it from eye to ear.

Dorothy Casey can write with feeling and empathy, and she has no dearth of ideas. With these two assets she has the potential to go far as a novelist. Certainly Algonquin was right to give her a start. She's reportedly working on a second novel; it should be one to look for.

Alabama Literary Review
National Young Writers' Contest

The purpose of the Dorothy K. Adams Awards is to encourage and reward creative writing at the secondary level. The winners for 1987 are:

POETRY: Warren St. John
FICTION: James David Rose
Jana Adams

De Amicitia

Warren St. John

Prelude

How confident we were in the bleak Decembers,
No serpents to avoid,
Only peace in the village kingdom . . .

Contacts with Laocoon

Sappho sings so sweetly, in the hour before noon,
And only hours later, at three or four,
    You spoke the prophecy:
    "Equo ne credite!" you said,
To separate the night and day,
and blend the whites and reds in Sinon's eyes.
O, how I grieve for you,
    My fallen friend, taken by
    fang and constriction
O, the spikes in my heart are driven deeper by
    the memory of your words; "Equo ne credite."
Three and four times I tried to place your limp
    body on the pyre.
O, Laocoon, my dear friend, forgive me,
I could not burn you.

The Game of Osiris

Osiris, they said you "never quite had it together,"
    and how they were mistaken.
When I hid from you at Karnak and Dier-el-Bahri, you
    laughed with me.
(Isis was younger then, so too was my Lesbia.)
The sun shined when you smiled, and it rained in the
    desert dust when you frowned—like when I hid
    in the tomb.
"Anubis will never forgive you," you said,
    but then worked it all out.
I remember the seven months you were gone, how
    barren it became,
Long days in the courtyard with Horus in hats,
Crocodile, Ibis, and jackal:
Bonds with you, hard as Giza Stone.

To Know the Poet

I seek to know you, my friend Catullus.
O what fevers you endured, O in what stirring waters
    did you remain afloat!
Catullus, my martyr friend, your songs pain me.
Odi et Amo; my tears for you are of sympathy and
    reverence, of resentment, and jealousy.
O, my friend, what pains would I persevere to write
    like you!
Give me your Clodia, here sparrow,
    give me your brother's tomb,
    give me fruitless travels abroad,
    but, dear friend, give me your quill

The Dance about The Omphalos

Young maidens giggle, and skip to the fa la la
    tra la la of my lyre.
Here, where the eagles met,
    I dwell under the Parnassan night.
Of the maidens, there was one whom I told;
So silly
To eat laurel leaves.
Think you're a Sybyline singer?
Well, I'm not ready
to drink from
the stream
and write what
I know.

The Odyssey of Frank and Vern

or

Deseree LeBoe and Trolley Car Retribution

James David Rose

"Vern! When you comin out them bushes?"

"Soon as I find me my nickel. I done drop it here somewheres."

Vern lumbered out of the brush to face his companion. His steps were broad and firm, with rhythm and purpose. The tops of his scuffed leather shoes shone wearily in the early morning dawn as he paced along the tracks. Vern quickened his step causing his bulk to shift from side to side and the pots in his backpack to rattle.

"Frank! I found it. Wait up a minute!" Frank slowed down and turned back to face Vern. Three days of unshaven beard cut a dark path across his chin like a clown's painted smile. Frank wore a dirty brown fedora. The crease ws puffed out, the brim bent and limp. Like Frank and Vern, it had seen better days. But it had a happy look, a satisfied look, worn like its owner but content. Frank stopped, inspected a button, and squinted into the sun as he watched Vern come up to stand beside him.

"Ain't got time fo you to lose your money. Got to get goin if we gonna get to Henry by noon. Hurry on up, Vern." Frank turned around again and started to march down the tracks. Vern was beside him now, puffing slightly. Too much exercise for one morning. Vern wore a derby atop his bald head. There was a large white scuff across it on one side and a hole in the top, a reminder of trolley cars back in Chicago. Vern put a big hand on Frank's shoulder. It was the hand of a piano player; but he had let his fingernails grow some, and his hands had hit harder things than keys. When Frank did not respond, Vern tapped him.

"Frank, who's this lady friend of yours in Henry? Why we goin?"

"Miss Tate's been a friend of my family for a long time. She done write me an say she gonna give us some work to do on account

of the deepressin of the economy, or somin like that. Real nice lady. Gots pretty eyes. Eyes so blue they shock you sober out a three day drunk. Guess most of her's pretty. I ain't seen her in a long time though. She could be ugly now, but she still be the same nice person. Dat who she is." Frank put a hand in his pocket where he felt the folded letter. He ran a thumb through the folds and sighed deeply, thinking of the last time he had seen her—white summer dress with a delicate scent of rosewater. She had been a rose then.

"Oh, no," worried Vern. "I done know that noise. You thinkin marriage on this Miss Tate, ain't you? Ain't you? Womens only gives us mens trouble. She might be nice, but love gonna mess you up." Vern shook his head sadly and scratched the back of his neck.

"I hears you, Vern. My ears hear you and say 'I know,' but my heart say 'Settle down with this nice lady.' Who I spose to listen to. What you know about women anyway? All you done is play piano for them Chicago gangsters and slap up meat hammers. I been knowin Miss Tate for long enough to git married."

"How come you knows her so well and you still calls her 'Miss Tate'? Ain't she got a first name?"

"Miss Felicity Kendell-Tate her name." After Frank said the name with a careful grace and respect, Vern pronounced it slowly, letting each syllable roll off the end of his tongue.

"You sho gonna marry a woman with a mouthful of name," said Vern.

"I knows it."

Vern and Frank walked on a little faster. The sun was rising higher, and the town of Henry was still some fifteen miles away. They entered a wooded area where the tracks buried deeply into the forest. The sun pushed down through the leaves, dripping splotches of light all over the ground. Vern lifted the derby from his head and wiped his cuff over and around his head. He stopped and pulled a drawstring bag from his vest pocket. Squinting at Frank just ahead, Vern began to walk again, rolling a cigarette. Vern came up beside Frank and threw the small bag at him. He threw it back at Vern and stopped.

"Vern, now how am I spose to get married if you keep pushin these bad habits on me. No woman gonna marry me with a smoke between my lips." Frank shook his head and began walking again.

"So you is gonna marry Miss Felicity Kendell-Tate!" Vern sounded like a detective uncovering the identity of a murderer. "You is! I done knowed it. First them sorry dog eyes and then that sigh. I seen it nuff times before. She done smitten you."

"Smitten me? What that spose to mean? Smitten?" Frank stopped again.

"Heard it in some song I done played at the Hotel Carmichael in Chicago. Pretty song. Do you wife got a piano?"

"My wife! I not even married the woman yet. She might've even forgot about us by now. Took nearly four months to find us in Louisville. I don't know bout no piano, though. I sure hope she do have one. Been a long time since I heard you tickle them ivories." Frank smiled in memory. His mind flashed briefly back to the Hotel Carmichael where he first saw Vern in a tux behind a black Steinway.

"Oh, Frank, you member that lady who used to sing back there. She had the prettiest white teeth and the blackest hair. So black it shined. Her skin was like coffee. Oh, she was a one."

"I hears you talkin, Vern. Never seen a prettier woman. How come you never put a ring on her? Make a great team, the two of you would. You and Deseree LeBoe." Frank put Deseree into the picture sitting on top of the black piano. She was wearing a cream-colored dress slit up one side. "Lot of leg on that woman," Frank thought.

"Heh! Nope. She was already married. Her name weren't Deseree, though."

"It weren't?" Frank asked very perplexed.

"Deseree was only a stage name. Her real name were Wanda Elson." Vern kicked a small stone. It spurred noisily off the rail and into the green, landing somewhere in the shadows.

"Wanda? She ain't look like no Wanda." Frank wiped the name of Deseree from the plate at the bottom of his memory picture and thought in Wanda. It didn't fit anyway he looked. A woman as lovely as Deseree was never, never a Wanda. "To me she always Deseree LeBoe, I tell you now. Deseree with the long legs. Pretty toes too. Not a whole lot of women with pretty toes. Whatever happened to her? You heard anything about her after she left the Hotel Carmichael?"

"Bout four months after she quit, someone tole me she haul off and marry one of them white gangsters. Magine that! Miss Skin-Like-Coffee marry some white man. Never saw her after she left, though. Might all be pure bull. Didn't even get invited to the wedding. She sit on my piano for two years, and she not even invited me to the wedding."

"Women," Frank said with disgust.

"Whoa! Listen to your mouth. You say 'women' like you spittin bad milk out, and you yourself gonna haul off and marry one by the time we get to Henry."

"I ain't said I goin marry the woman!" Frank stopped dead and planted a foot in the gravel between the ties. A bead of sweat popped

onto his forehead and the crow's feet around his eyes deepened. "I said I was thinking of it. You gots to get it straight what people says is what they says. Not what you think they done said. Now let's get goin." Frank quivered for a second and then stormed off down the tracks. The forest opened up a few yards ahead. Vern just stood there with his head down, looking at the quartz flecks in the gravel. He looked up, licked his teeth, hissed slowly, and jammed his hands deep into his pockets. The pots rattled in his pack as he shifted from side to side walking the tracks, listening to the scrunch of the gravel beneath his shoes. Frank broke into the sunlight just as Vern caught up with him. The sun was a good deal higher and a good deal hotter. The burning ties stretched toward a distant horizon. The ties went on into forever, but the travelers didn't have to get to forever, only to Henry, and they wouldn't make it there by noon.

Vern shuddered as he realized there was a hole in his pocket. He had lost his nickel again. Best not to mention it. Vern coughed.

"Frank," Vern said low and calm, "it's gettin hot and we're both tired and been walking together a little too long, maybe. But you're my friend and I didn't mean no harm."

"I's sorry too. I didn't mean to yell like that. It is a little hot. We ain't never goin to get to Henry by lunch time. We might need that nickel of yours to help buy some lunch." Vern's heart sank.

"Frank." Frank turned to look at Vern who had turned out his pocket with the hole in it. Frank began to laugh a little. Then Vern began to laugh a little too.

They walked through Gleason and read a little news and stared through the window of a restaurant watching the white-coated waiters twist among the diners. Then they walked out of Gleason, hungry, but a little better for the wear. Then it began to rain.

The drops pipped down slowly at first, refreshing in the summer warmth, hissing on the heated rails. The sun was still shining, and only a few clouds were dark. But soon a thunderhead rolled up, as if sensing that two people would be out in the open to drown in the misery of a storm. The rain began to slice down in a fury; wind whipped around them threatening to steal their hats. Both Vern and Frank held onto their hats like children refusing to give up their teddy bears to maturity. Vern's pots rattled in the sack, and Frank's shoes opened up to the rushing torrent of water guzzling between the tracks. The sound of thunder rushed down upon them making the two travelers jump. The thunderhead grinned icily down at them. Vern shouted through the deluge:

"Frank, we gots to find a place to get out of this rain!"

"Yeah!" Frank looked around and saw nothing. He knew that for eight more miles there would be nothing, only a storm. "There

ain't nothin ahead for bout eight more miles. We can go back to Gleason," Frank said, not meaning it.

"We could, but I don't want to. By the time we git there, sits out the storm, and walk this far again, we'd be in Henry. No use. Let's keep goin. I needed a bath anyway." Vern splashed on ahead. Frank followed, thinking that he needed a bath too, especially to see Miss Tate. He thought of Miss Tate and her house. He imagined doilies and vases, pretty lace curtains and velvet couches, which Miss Tate lounged comfortably on one with a rose between her teeth. Frank had seen that in a movie. He had liked that. Frank saw himself sitting at a table set with real china covered in blue floral designs just like in the Sears catalogue. An indoor toilet, yes, and a big parlor (with a piano for Vern). The wedding cake would have three tiers and little marzipan people on the top, while two doves fluttered in a white cage nearby. Yes.

"You thinkin bout that wedding. I knows it. Your eyes got that puppy dog look in 'em. I hope you have lots to eat there cause I am hungry."

"Vern, the weddin won't be for a few days, and I am sure you would've eaten by then. So hush your stomach and let's hurry on up." Frank walked on, turning on the picture again. Photographs on the walls, wallpaper with little flowers, newspaper every morning. Yes. Very nice. Miss Tate sitting on the bed covered in satin sheets (pink); Miss Tate wearing revealing night attire (pink), little bedroom slippers (pink) with puffy balls on the top (pink), skin like coffee, long legs, and pretty toes.

Frank blinked himself back to reality when the piercing whistle of a train split the air. The train approached with a fury sounding like a herd of iron bulls. The huge lamp on the front burst around them and threw their shadows far ahead. The rhythmic punch of the wheels bore down upon them as they scrambled to get off the tracks. The air, hot from the steam engine, ripped past them, pulling at their clothes while the tracks clattered under the weight of the monstrous cars. It was frightening, like a dragon from the past belching acrid plumes of smoke and roaring in a cacophonous thunder. The freight left Frank and Vern in the calm of the rain.

"Vern, I was sittin here thinkin bout the weddin and all, and you know what?"

"What?"

"Miss Felicity Kendell-Tate done started lookin like Deseree LeBoe."

"Uh-hum," Vern replied flatly.

"What that spose to mean?"

"It mean what it say. I knows what I knows and I knows you

ain't the type to marry. Not to marry no woman with a name like Felicity Kendell-Tate." Vern made the hyphen almost audible. Frank stopped, clenched his elbow with his right hand and massaged a screaming muscle. Vern plodded on ahead through the slackening rain. Vern waited for Frank to catch up. They walked in silence until they saw a sign that read, "HENRY: 1 MILE."

"One mile left."

"Uh-hum," Vern said again flatly, a little worried this time.

"You been very quiet, Vern. What you been thinkin bout?"

"You member that paper we read in Gleason? It said some man in Union City hiring piano players for his hotel. I figure if I walk you to Henry, I can make it back in two days if I hop the next freight train."

"What you sayin?"

"I ain't gonna stay in Henry with you. I's sad to leave you, but you gonna marry up and leave me out in the cold. Don't say you ain't, cause you is. I know them dog eyes and that heavy breathin. You is smitten by a lady you knowed twenty-five years ago who you think look like Deseree LeBoe. She ain't gonna be no Deseree LeBoe, and I think you knows it too. I's sorry, but I can't stay around and watch you live a life that's wrong for you. Frank, I is gonna ask you once to come with me to Union City and see bout gettin jobs at this hotel. I goin to ask you once, and then I gonna leave. Frank, come with me to Union City."

Frank's face darkened, his eyes brimming with anger. He plunged his hands deep into his pockets and turned toward Henry with clear resignation. Vern watched him and sighed. Frank stopped and felt the letter in his pocket, soggy and pulpy. He brought it out into the now drizzle of rain. The ink was washed away, smeared and confused. It ripped easily in his hands. Frank slowly flicked off the wet paper and turned back to Vern. Vern looked at him from below the visor of the derby. Frank stared at the hole in the crown and remembered the street car. Number seven it was, driven by Riley Cooper who had a dimple in his chin and a waxed mustache. Riley Cooper had run down that derby like a bull. Given the chance, Riley would have strapped the derby to the front of his trolley in mute vanity. Frank's own beloved fedora had just narrowly escaped that fate as well.

Frank took off his fedora and slapped a crease into the top with the edge of his hand. He put it back on his head and followed Vern down the tracks to Union City. The sun shone past the emptied clouds, dragging their shadows back toward Henry. Soon the shadows were gone too.■

The Game

Jana Adams

Just as she had done ten years ago, the laughing children shrieked and chased one another round and round in circles increasing in distance but finally growing smaller and smaller, until an invisible barrier was broken and they all collapsed against one another, panting and happy. There are no winners or losers in this game, she thought as she stood watching, just equal participants. Pressing against her from all sides were the sights, sounds, and smells of people preparing for a good time. Finally, she too relaxed and allowed the pleasant feeling to wash over her. She turned her face up to the warm sun, thinking how lucky it was to have predicted good weather for the upcoming big event: the parade and much-anticipated Golden Leaf Celebration.

The autumn festival never changes, she thought. The same booths are always in the same places, the sickly-sweet cotton candy always smells the same, the thick smoke from the barbecue always clouds the air and stings the eyes, the parade marches exactly the same distance year after year. In fact, this year will be just like last year and the year before, except . . . startled, she looked around at the familiar scene that immediately became unfamiliar and different.

Yes, things have changed. Alec is gone. Alec, teasing practical joker, winner of all games, protector, brother, best friend. Alec, forever seeking adventure, had run away from home, not because of any family argument or the usual reasons for leaving, but, as he always said, " . . . just because." She was jealous, angry, admiring, and hurt, and still unused to the emptiness and aloneness. He's been gone, what, almost a month now? And still, she thought a little ashamedly, I still find myself talking to him.

. . . she didn't notice the first tap on her shoulder, but the second more painful one caused her to turn quickly, an irritated look on her face. Annoyance quickly gave way to disbelief and

surprise as she found herself staring at the face she had memorized, willing her mind to remember every expression.

Alec! I can't believe it's you! Where did you. . . . No, he said, no, no questions. That'll spoil the game. But . . . she stopped, exasperated. Already he was teasing. Here, for you, and suddenly from behind his back he pulled balloons. Three of them, pink, purple, and yellow, with silky blue streamers that were lifeless until the breeze blew. She accepted this peace offering and his invitation to explore the festival.

The afternoon passed as the sun began to dim and melt pink and blue and gold across the sky, charring the distant trees as it went down reluctantly and unwillingly. A stealthy chill had crept into the breeze, and suddenly she felt it and shivered. But the chill was forgotten as Alec, feeling pleased with himself, said something funny and began to laugh. She joined him. Laughing and laughing. . . .

She sat up in bed, the early morning quietness startled by her laughter. Just a dream, she thought, and you did it, she accused the masculine grinning face on her desk. That was mean, Alec, unfair! Outside was dull and drizzly, most unpromising for a festive day. She stared unseeingly out the cool window, and unhappily shrugged the remaining traces of the dream from her mind. After going through the motions and routine of showering and dressing, she went out into a day as bleak as her mood.

The Golden Leaf Celebration passed in a blur. The morning sky, without a hint of sunshine, had turned spiteful by noon and drenching rains began and continued steadily for the remainder of the afternoon. The fair grounds were dismal, the people moody and short tempered. Cotton candy quickly became a beaded sticky mess in the dampness. Crowded people huddled under booths and tents and glared out at the dark sky. "First time it's rained in years on this day. . . ." Mutterings spread throughout the crowds, and by early evening the booths were deserted. She was relieved to return home and to fall into a deep and dreamless sleep. No Alec.

The next day was restless, with an uneasy wind outside, one minute holding back and waiting, then bursting through the bedraggled leaves. She felt the same way. During a sudden rush of anxious energy she busily cleaned her room, but suddenly found herself too tired to continue. Stop and start, off and on, the day seemed a mixture of frantic activity or weary listlessness. Unable to look at the worried frown creasing her mother's forehead, and tiring of her mother's complaints of "moodiness" and, "What am I going to do with that girl?" she found her feet moving toward the door.

Kick a rock, walk three steps, kick a rock, walk three steps, she slowly made her way down the muddy road. The slender stick she scratched along the road made a pattern in the muddy layer. She concentrated on this pattern rather than allowing the thoughts about Alec tumbling in her mind to slow down, to become comprehensive, and to become worrisome. Is he cold, lonely, afraid . . . no, she stopped herself, I cannot worry. This is probably another one of his games, a trick. He will be back. In fact, she brightened at the thought, he's probably on his way home now, sorry he missed the festival, sorry he. . . .

Abruptly she stopped, and stared. Tangled in a tree, colors vivid against the pale sky, were three balloons, pink, purple, and yellow, with blue streamers silky and flowing in the wind. The wind stopped and the streamers and balloons fell limply against the imprisoning branches. She turned and walked slowly toward home.■

Contributors

LYNNE BUTLER is a native Kansan who now lives in Florence, Alabama. She studied at Wichita State University and the University of Arkansas, has been the director of a humane society and a Poet-in-the-Schools, and now teaches writing at the University of North Alabama. **PAUL GRANT** is a native of Louisiana who currently lives in Maryland. He is active in the publishing of broadsides of poetry with graphics and fine typography. He has published in *CAROLINA QUARTERLY* and is upcoming in *NEW LAUREL REVIEW*. **ROALD HOFFMANN**, a theoretical chemist at Cornell University, has published several hundred scientific articles and a few poems. His first collection of poems, *THE METAMICT STATE*, will be published by the University of Central Florida Press in 1987. **PHILLIP PAROTTI**, who teaches English at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, has published fiction in a variety of little magazines. His first book, *THE GREEK GENERALS TALK: MEMOIRS OF THE TROJAN WAR*, has just been published by the University of Illinois Press as a part of its Short Fiction Series. **JAMES DAVID ROSE** is a student at Memorial Day School in Savannah, Georgia. A native of Anniston, Alabama, **ELISE SANGUINETTI** is the author of four published novels and numerous short stories. She is currently at work on a fifth novel. **EVE SHELNUTT**'s collections of stories *THE LOVE CHILD* and *THE FORMAL VOICE* were published by Black Sparrow Press, which will publish a third collection, *THE MUSICIAN*, in March. *AIR AND SALT*, her first poetry collection, was published by Carnegie Mellon Press, which will publish a second, *RECITAL IN A PRIVATE HOME*, in 1987. She teaches in the MFA Program at The University of Pittsburgh. **RAMONA KELLEY STAMM** is currently a second-year doctoral student at the Pennsylvania State University. She has previously published on Joyce Cary and has presented conference papers on Harold Frederic and Sir Phillip Sidney. **CHARLES ORLOFSKY** is a freelance artist who lives in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. **LARRY McLEOD** is a graduate of Troy State University and lives near Goshen, Alabama. **ORLANDO MENES** lives in Oviedo, Florida. **ALAN T. BELSCHES** is the chairman of the English and Humanities Division at Troy State University in Dothan. **JOHN CANFIELD** teaches English at the Air Force Academy. He has published articles in *SOUTHERN REVIEW* and *SOUTHERN QUAR-*

TERLY. **WARREN ST. JOHN** is a senior at The Altamont School in Birmingham, Alabama. **JANA ADAMS** is a student at Lakeview Academy in Commerce, Georgia. **MIKE ORLOFSKY** is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop. He has several story publications to his credit, notably in *PULPSMITH.* He is a writer for the *Pottsville Republican,* in Pottsville, Pennsylvania.

JANA ADAMS
ALAN T. BELSCHES
LYNNE BUTLER
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EVE SHELNUTT
RAMONA KELLEY STAMM

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