

ROMANCE OF THE DINER

D. I. Grossvogel

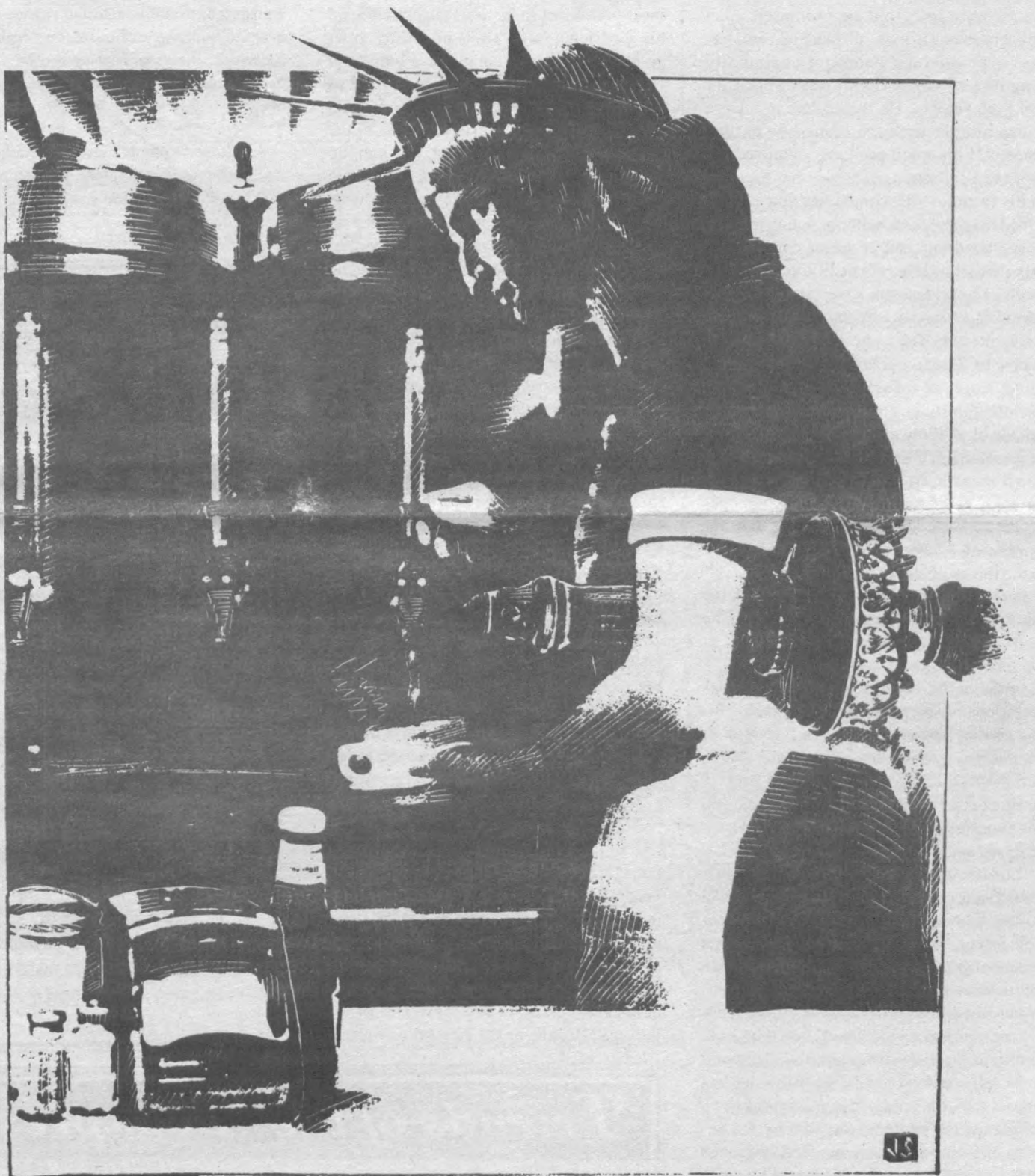
Brash and suggestive, neon streaks the dark with promise, hinting at what the illicit night allows. It is a language shunned by the more refined: the calling card of an elegant restaurant will not be neon.

But neon is the call of the diner—neon against the darkening sky lying across an expanse of flat land, alongside a road, on the fringes of the city. Because the diner, though it also lives during the daylight hours, is a creation of the night, the open road and the city that cast it out. A hundred years ago, when C. H. Palmer began manufacturing wagons whose small kitchen could dispense food through a window to those outside when the weather was fair, or allow patrons to eat inside when the weather was bad, the wagons were called night cafes or, through a revealing oxymoron, night lunch wagons; from the moment of its inception, the diner was born for the night.

The *New York Times Magazine* once noted “its cheery light shining like a hospitable deed in a chilly world” (February 7, 1926): it was a small gathering place for those whose work day was done or revelers whose night was starting. For a nickel, it offered its patrons hot dogs, when they were still called Hot Frankforts; a ham or sardine sandwich that never cost more than a dime; coffee and tonic at five cents each. As Gutman and Kaufman observed in *American Diner* (1979) the food, as spare as its surroundings, was little more than an affordable pretext for those “with an hour to spend in eating and chatting.”

Horse drawn and compact, Palmer’s wagons roamed the streets. But when the enforcement of city ordinances prevented these places of the night from staying open past ten in the morning, owners in search of additional business moored them permanently to likely sites alongside the roads they had traveled, and the never-closing diner was born.

Throwing roots allowed the diner to grow, as an institution and in actual size. In the twenties, companies like O’Mahony and Tierney Son were already manufacturing a diner a day, and the diner that could advertise itself as the world’s largest was always right around the corner. Counters extended as they never had, flanked by long rows of swivel stools. Stainless steel gleamed from the backbars, the coffee urns, the napkin dispensers, the salt and pepper shakers. Eventually, Formica replaced wood as it depersonalized it, while the outer shell of the



Jack Sherman

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From Everyman to Everyone

THE SPORTSWRITER

Richard Ford
Vintage
375 pages, \$12

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Richard Ford
Knopf
451 pages, \$24

John Michaud

In the opening passage of *The Sportswriter*, Frank Bascombe, the narrator, makes the following claim: "I believe I have done these two things. Faced down regret. Avoided ruin. And I am still here to tell about it." This is, I think, something all of us would like to be able to say. It sounds true and hard-earned, and it is one of several such statements early on in *The Sportswriter* that make Bascombe, at least initially, a very appealing character.

Bascombe likes to think of himself as an ordinary man. He lives in Haddam, New Jersey, a prosperous bedroom community roughly halfway between New York City and Philadelphia. He lives alone in a large house bought with the money he earned when a Hollywood producer acquired the rights to a collection of short stories he wrote in his twenties. Bascombe has since abandoned his career as a writer of fiction in favor of sportswriting, and he seems content with this decision. His recent divorce and the death of his eldest son have sent him into a period of solipsistic dreaminess, but otherwise, he appears to be happy. Over the course of *The Sportswriter*, Bascombe suffers a series of refusals and rebuffs from friends, family and strangers (including a suicide of a fellow divorcee and the breakup of an affair) that drive him toward an emotional breakdown. By the end of the novel, we are past the rhetoric of Bascombe's opening self-description, and we realize that, far from being a happy suburbanite, he is really in the throes of a severe mid-life crisis.

In the last paragraph, he reckons with the notion that the best years of his life may be over:

...you want this time, to make it last, this glistering one moment, this cool air, this new living, so that you can preserve a feeling of it, inasmuch as when it comes again it may just be too late. You may just be too old. And, in truth, of course, this may be the last time you will ever feel this way again.

This seemed to me, at the time I read it, a clear closure, a final look at a character, and I wondered, as I sat down to read *Independence Day*, what Ford had in store for his protagonist now; whether there was enough left to write about in Frank Bascombe's life.

Independence Day is slower off the mark than its predecessor. We learn that Bascombe has retired from sportswriting and now sells real estate. In addition, he has moved out of his old house and has taken up residence in the home vacated by his ex-wife. She, in turn, has remarried and taken their two children to Connecticut to live with her new husband. In these opening passages, Ford establishes a backdrop of unease to Bascombe's life. It is 1988. The Reagan presidency is coming to an end; real estate prices are falling; crime is on the rise (a fellow realtor has been murdered, and Bascombe himself has been recently mugged); and, to top it off, his own adolescent son Paul is in trouble with the law for attempting to shoplift condoms from a drugstore. We are given the sense that Bascombe is much more aware of the world around him now. The "dreaminess" he suffered from in *The Sportswriter* has been replaced by "The Existence Period," a post-mid-life crisis way of being that features "persistence...common sense, resilience, good cheer...and leaving out physical isolation and emotional disengagement." As a result, this novel has

an amplitude lacking in its predecessor, a greater sense of teeming life, a more outward cast to Bascombe's brimming thoughts.

The narrative of *Independence Day* is simple and divides into three major strands which may be loosely titled, Son, Work, and Women. The first of these concerns the Fourth of July weekend trip Bascombe takes with his delinquent son, a trip that features pilgrimages to the Basketball and Baseball Halls of Fame where he hopes they will find a way to reconcile their differences. The second describes Bascombe's attempts to sell a house to the Markhams, a "stolid, unpromising, unlikely" couple who have refused everything he has shown them for months. Bascombe has reached the point of exasperation with them and is hoping that a new listing will finally satisfy their exacting demands. The third strand deals with the ebb and flow of Bascombe's relations with the two women most prominent in his life: his ex-wife and his girlfriend Sally. He is unwilling to let go of the former and commit to a long-term relationship with the latter. All three of these narrative strings are tied up without producing the kind of crisis we saw in the first book. Bascombe and his son do achieve a working reconciliation even though their time together is cut short by an accident. The ornery Markhams do take up residence in one of Bascombe's properties, even if only on a temporary basis. And Bascombe, finally, is able to accept the closure of his divorce and is delivered to a promising situation with Sally. These solutions may not be the best he could have hoped for — none of them is permanent — but, by the standards of "The Existence Period," they'll do. As the book comes to its close, we are not left with the feeling we had in the final pages of *The Sportswriter* that Bascombe has reached the end of his tether. Rather than fearing he "may just be too old," he looks forward to the coming years and already has a name for them: "The Permanent Period," which he forecasts as

[a] long stretching-out time...when whatever I do or say, who I marry, how my kids turn out becomes what the world — if it makes note at all — knows of me...before whatever there is that's wild and unassuageable rises and cheerlessly hauls me off to oblivion.

But, in fact, the development and resolution of plot is not where the chief satisfactions of *Independence Day* are to be found. Ford's best skills have little to do with a traditional beginning-middle-end story structure. The plot serves mainly as a frame that allows him to render what he calls "the normal, applauseless life of us all," the coincidences, revelations and mysteries of our incidental dailyness. The quotidian, in

Ford's hands, is made magical, the ordinary, vibrant. In the course of the book, he is able to sketch out a dizzying host of minor characters, from Mr. Tanks, a black Mayflower moving man Bascombe meets in a motel parking lot, to Carter Knott, an old friend and millionaire who makes a brief appearance at the end of the novel, to Irv Ornstein, Bascombe's Jewish half-brother who turns up unexpectedly in Cooperstown to help him out of a jam. Ford also takes pains to evoke for the reader all of the places Bascombe travels through. Take, for example, this description of the town of Deep River, Connecticut:

Deep River...is the epitome of dozing, summery, southern New England ambivalence. A little green-shuttered sidewalk-swept burg where just-us-regular-folks live in stolid acceptance of watered-down Congregationalist and Roman Catholic moderation; whereas down by the river there's the usual enclave of self-contented, pseudo-reclusive richies who've erected humongous houses on bracken and basswood chases bordering the water, their backs resolutely turned to how the other half lives.

All those hyphens modify the adjectives describing the ambivalent, moderate town, making the description itself moderate and ambivalent.

Consider also this passage from a paragraph describing a holiday weekend on the Jersey shore: "Here is the human hum, in the barely moving air and surf-sigh, the low scrim of radio notes and the water subsiding over words spoken in whispers." We can hear the hiss of the waves in the assonance and half-rhyme of this sentence. There is also the strange word "scrim" dropped in mid-way, reminding us that though Ford's voice is colloquial and often slangy, it is not simple. The book is full of odd words, high and low diction juxtaposed, philosophical discussion and plain direct speech, all carefully placed in well-cadenced sentences, none of it out of place and none of it ever dull.

Ford's broad cast of characters and complex voice allow him to give us the convincing sense of an entire nation at work and play, a whole population caught in acts of celebration, despair, hate and love, regret and desire. There is a girth to *Independence Day* that was only hinted at in *The Sportswriter*. Ford has broadened his subject from Frank Bascombe to Frank Bascombe's world. He has gone from writing about an everyman to writing about everyone. And if this results in a less specific focus, it also results in a greater range of rewards for the reader.

John Michaud is a freelance writer living in Ithaca.

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Satanic Mills

**REBELS AGAINST THE FUTURE: THE LUD-
DITES AND THEIR WAR ON THE INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION — LESSONS FOR THE COMPUT-
ER AGE**

Kirkpatrick Sale
Addison-Wesley
320 pages, \$24

Edward T. Chase

Kirkpatrick Sale's densely rich new book really consists of two books: the first, a detailed, indeed almost monthly, narrative of the original Luddite movement from 1811 through 1813; the second, a dismaying account of the now-burgeoning "second industrial revolution" (his term for a computerized world of joblessness and environmental degradation) driven by blind market forces operating under the rubric of progress and the dynamic of greed.

Yes, we already have a veritable library of works by neo-Luddites, as Sale calls them, decrying the effects of technological change. But the rigor of Sale's historical research on the actual Luddite incidents of "warfare" is exceptional. And Sale's forthrightness about the negative social consequences of technology rivals the pessimism of Lewis Mumford, Jacques Ellul, or Jeremy Rifkin. If ever there was a modern-day "catastrophist," viewing the future as hopeless, it is Sale.

Sale's book appears at the very moment when debate is intensifying over whether or not the recent achievements of environmentalists merit praise or only camouflage a developing disaster, and whether the Republican Congressional leadership will prevail in suspending environmental regulations in deference to exploitive business interests.

What Sale recounts in the first half of his book are the contemporary press accounts and government reports of the notorious Luddite attacks on textile "factories." He quotes effectively, too, from Lord Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Carlyle and includes this apt passage by Charlotte Brontë from *Shirley*:

Certain inventions in machinery were introduced into the staple manufactures of the north, which, greatly reducing the number of hands necessary to be employed, threw thousands out of work, and left them without legitimate means of sustaining life. A bad harvest supervened. Distress reached its climax. Endurance, over-goaded, stretched the hand of fraternity to sedition; the throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern countries...

As to the sufferers, whose sole inheritance was labour, and who had lost that inheritance — who could not get work, and consequently could not get wages, and consequently could not get bread — they were left to suffer on, perhaps inevitably left; it would not do to stop the progress of invention, to damage science by discouraging its improvements; the war would not be terminated, efficient relief could not be raised; there was no help for them, so the unemployed underwent their destiny — ate the bread, and drank the waters of affliction.

Sale's fundamental animus is against *laissez faire* economics and industrialism per se. He focuses on the Luddites, the rebelling textile workers thrown out of work by machines, as exemplifying the worst plight of the victims of the first Industrial Revolution. As the 19th century dawned, England had no expedients for ameliorating the consequences of slave labor wages and hours, joblessness, starvations and such rampant infectious diseases as scarlet fever, smallpox, typhus. He writes:

In Manchester 57% died before the age of five; in Preston (another factory town) 49% before five, and 28% between five and 40; in Leeds, 53% before five and 25% between five and 40. Life expectancy at birth in 1842 averaged about 40 years for all of England and Wales, but for the 'gentry' in Manchester and Leeds, two typical industrial cities, it was 41,

whereas for laborers in those two cities it was not more than 18. It can hardly be called a life if it is to be ended barely after childhood.

Sale's reports on dozens of individual Luddite assaults from 1811 through 1813 are quite absorbing, but too detailed to describe in a brief review. What they consist of are seemingly random assaults under the aegis of the mythical "General Ned Ludd" (a legendary apprentice boy who smashed a loom), stealthily wrecking of textile machinery during some fifteen months in the 19th century's second decade in central Britain, the very area where Robin Hood defied authority in the earlier transformation of Britain by the enclosure movement. That movement entailed converting commonland and forests into arable pasture.

Sale launches his book by describing the famous midnight attack of April 1812 on Rawfords Mill, a multi-story textile factory in York-

in the most affected parishes.

In February 1812, when a bill was introduced to punish destruction of such textile machines as power looms and shearing frames by the death penalty, Lord Byron rose to protest in the House of Lords, asking:

Will you erect gibbets in every field and hang up men like scarecrows? Depopulate and lay waste all around you and restore Sherwood Forest as an acceptable gift to the crown, in the former condition of a royal chase and an asylum for outlaws? Are these the remedies for a starving and desperate populace? Will the famished wretches who have bayonets be appalled by your gibbets?

The bill passed. Poet Robert Southey wrote, "This country is on the brink of the most dreadful of all conceivable states — an insurrection of the poor against the rich... Things

rience of industrialism, a stage that, once anticipated, could be eliminated. In one way or another, displacement, dislocation, impoverishment and misery have attended this process in every country that has given itself over to the factory, no matter what its political system or previous history, across the globe.

In his "Second Book," Sale proceeds to confront "the second industrial revolution," our new age of instant electronic global information, the age of the digital computer — a technology more complex and extensive, its impact more pervasive and dislocating, "touching greater populations with greater speed and at greater scales" than any previous socio-economic revolution. Sale reiterates the disheartening, ever more familiar facts about the joblessness being created since 1973 by automation, and computer-mediated industrial practices. He stresses the ever-growing gap between the very rich and the rest of us, the top quintile of the U.S. population prospering (receiving 7.5 times the income of the bottom fifth), the rest with stagnating or diminished incomes, with the top one percent of billionaires and multimillionaires prospering grotesquely (owning 35.7% of all U.S. wealth). The heralded "new jobs" tend to be dead-end, low-pay service jobs or the outsourcing of contingent labor, temporary jobs without benefits.

Meanwhile, the environment suffers exploitation as market forces drive corporations to gobble up wetlands and forests around the globe, polluting waters, poisoning soils, destroying ancient indigenous cultures. Sale is contemptuous of some economists' faith that new technologies in due course create new industries to absorb labor. Not now or again, he avers. The new high-tech world of "symbolic analysts" is capital intensive, not labor intensive. Manned jobs are disappearing permanently.

Sale's polemical tone intensifies as he elaborates on his second industrial revolution, and readers may notice his disinclination to credit environmentalists and the Green movements with success. He does cite vigorous efforts by anti-nuclear activists, the Asbestos Victims of America, Citizens Against Pesticide Misuse, the National Toxics Campaign, and other groups. He lauds such environmentalists for helping to stop the super collider, new dams in the Grand Canyon and James Bay, a new supersonic transport plane, and food irradiation. He also reports the neo-Luddites denunciation of G.A.T.T., which threatens workers and communities with abandonment, as corporations relocate their operations overseas to take advantage of low-wage labor.

However, Sale ignores other hopeful signs: the cutting of air pollution over the last two decades in the U.S. by a third; the reduction of lead emissions by 98%; the 6,000 new community recycling programs; the increased cleaning of previously polluted rivers and lakes; and the evident general raising of consciousness about disappearing rain forests, structural unemployment, and the vast gap between rich and poor.

Is Sale vulnerable to the charge of overkill, of being an urban romantic, nostalgic for a golden, but mythical past? Some, such as Anna Bramwell, author of *The Fading of the Greens* and her earlier *Ecology in the 20th Century*, would challenge Sale, arguing that only with the affluence achieved by ever more rapid economic growth can a society afford environmental reform programs. The Third World can't afford such. But Sale points to evidence that, while there have been some environmental achievements, Western nations are beset with long-term structural joblessness, insecurity among the managerial middle class, and stagnant or declining incomes for all but the top quintile of households. Sale's argument against the market system and his case for the enduring legacy of the Luddites remains compelling.

Edward Chase is former Editor-in-Chief of *New York Times Books*.

December 23, 1811.

WHEREAS

A most violent Attack was made about 8 o'clock last Night, on the House of Mr. JOHN BRETNALL, at LOCKO GRANGE, in the County of Derby, by Eight or more Persons, two of whom with their Faces blacked & armed with Pistols, entered the House, but in consequence of the spirited Resistance of the Family, retired without effecting their villainous purposes.

One of the Men about five feet nine inches high and broad set, is supposed to have his Head, Face, and Neck much injured in a struggle; and another Man about six feet high is supposed to be wounded by a Bill Hook; the other Men who did not enter the House, as far as could be distinguished from the darkness of the night, appeared to be above the common size.

A REWARD OF

FIFTY POUNDS

Has been offered by his Royal Highness the Prince Regent on the Conviction of EACH PERSON concerned in any Outrages of the above nature, and a free Pardon in case the Person giving such information as may lead to the Conviction shall be liable to be prosecuted for the same.

(J. Denny, Printer, Derby.)

(reprinted from *The Luddites*, David & Charles Archon Books, 1970)

Handbill offering a reward for the capture of Luddite instigators

shire, by some 120 wool weavers, combers and blacksmiths, an attack that was beaten back in fierce fighting. But already there had been successful onslaughts on other mills, and the desultory Luddite campaign persisted with mounting violence into the winter of 1813. Generally, severe wreckage was inflicted on the machinery and there were casualties on both sides. Sale reports that when Rawfords Mill was attacked, roughly 5,000 croppers worked in Yorkshire. By 1817, only 763 were employed. By 1830, machinery had eliminated the craft. Actual starvation was not uncommon and food riots frequent.

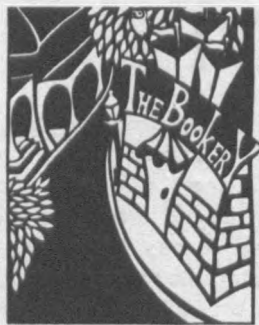
Sale establishes the fact that the government dispatched more soldiers to counter the Luddites — some 14,400 troops — than it supplied Wellington in his Peninsula campaign against the French armies. Capital punishment by hanging or transport to Australian prisons for long sentences was the fate of convicted Luddites and food rioters. Sale's summary of Luddism underscores his assertion that it represented the biggest-ever act of concerted violence in England and the last — but it also triggered an increase in Poor Law rates and food allowances

are in that state at this time that nothing but the army preserves us: It is a single plank between us and the red sea of an English jacquerie."

Sale summarizes the statistical impact of the fifteen-month Luddite "insurrection" as follows: 24 strung up on the gallows; from fifteen to three dozen killed in action; fifteen sentenced to transport to Australia; £100,000 worth of destroyed property; £500,000 to maintain soldiers in the affected areas; all told, costing some £1.5 million, laid directly to Luddite activity. Scholar of Luddism, historian Adrian Randall, is quoted as saying, "The factory would thus undermine all the values upon which the workers' culture and communities were predicated, replacing them with the new amoral imperatives of the market economy. What was at risk was not just some workers' jobs. Machinery and the factory threatened the very fabric of existing social organization."

Yet Luddism lost, writes Sale, who goes on to say:

The worst part of it is that this tragedy was not an anomaly, a peculiarity of this first expe-



Off Campus

At The Bookery

The Bookery continues its 1995 lecture series in the lecture space in Bookery II

Friday, September 15, 8 p.m.

David Lenson,

professor of comparative literature at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, will read selections from his newest non-fiction work, *On Drugs*, which ventures beyond conventional genres to view the drug debate from the largely forgotten perspective of those who use drugs. Describing in clear detail the experiences and dynamics of the drugs of pleasure and desire — from nicotine to marijuana, alcohol to LSC, and caffeine to cocaine — *On Drugs* asks what drugs really do and challenges society's accepted notions of sobriety and addiction.

Sunday, September 17, 4 p.m.



Paul West,

author of fifteen novels, including *Love's Mansion*, for which he won the 1994 Lannan Prize for fiction, will talk about his new novel, *The Tent of Orange Mist*, the story of Scald Ibis, the teenage daughter of an eminent scholar who must transform herself completely to survive in pre-World War II China.

Sunday, September 24, 4 p.m.

John Vernon,

author of *LasSalle*, *Lindbergh's Son*, and *Peter Doyle*, will read selections from his newest novel, *All for Love*, based on the life of Baby Doe. Leaving staid Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for the booming Colorado mining territory in 1879, Baby left her first husband for silver magnate Horace Tabor, owner of the renowned mine Matchless. The two were married in the wedding of the century and lived in gaudy splendor in Denver. Their glory was short-lived: Horace died in 1899, leaving Baby the now-worthless Matchless, as well as two young daughters. Baby lived until 1935 in a shack next to the Matchless, wearing burlap on her feet and scribbling her dreams and visions on scraps of paper.

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A Death Foretold

THE PROMISE OF REST

Reynolds Price

Scribner

268 pages, \$23

Edward Hower

No American novel has dealt with the tragedy of AIDS as eloquently as Reynolds Price's *The Promise of Rest*. In this concluding volume of his Mayfield family trilogy, the award-winning author, who years ago was given five weeks to live after the onset of spinal cancer, has found compelling reasons to celebrate life while chronicling the death of an extraordinarily brave young man.

Wade Mayfield, a thirty-two-year-old architect, has been estranged from his North Carolina family for nine years when his father, Hutch, learns that he is fatally ill in New York. Hutch, a poet and English professor who like his son has loved a man, can understand his son's homosexuality, but when he brings Wade home to die, he is faced with the supreme test of his life. Hutch has been a difficult father and husband; now he must summon ways to express for his family love that he never knew he possessed.

He is helped in the task by Strawson, Wade's godfather who has managed the family farmland over the years. Ann, Hutch's recently estranged wife, rallies as well. Also helping out is Ivory Bon-durant, a black woman who is the sister of Wade's dead lover. Boatie, an eccentric, saintly young man, arrives from New York to nurse Wade and interject some needed humor into the somber undertaking.

"I'm the first male Afro-American nun," Boatie tells Hutch, who is struggling with the question of how God could allow the disease to bring down so many fine young men. "God's bound to love queers; he's killing them so fast," Boatie says.

The most helpful member of this reconstituted interracial family is Wade himself. Though emaciated and nearly blind, Wade's courage and dignity bring out the best in everyone. "This sounds more like a bad song from the forties than anything else," he tells a group of Hutch's students who have gathered at his house, "but I died for love." By explaining his predicament to them, he gently forces them to face his death — his and their own — without embarrassment or shame.

Like many of Price's novels, *The Promise of Rest* takes place in a pastoral Southern setting, where people trace kinship back for generations, read great poetry aloud to one another, and do their best to live up to high codes of conduct. The terrible presence of AIDS in this world tests all its moral assumptions to the limit. The physical aspects of Wade's dying are described in heart-breaking detail — "His lungs were choked with microscopic creatures, drinking his life." But Price rightly focuses on the emotional impact of the process. At one point, as Hutch strokes his son's brow, eyelashes come loose under his fingers, and he carefully folds them into his handkerchief to save. Wade's dying becomes an act of intense intimacy between people who truly care about one another.

Such continuous intensity of feeling in a novel has its risks. The dialogue sometimes sounds poetically inflated, with long, elegiac sentences spoken in a style that varies little from that of the book's omniscient narrator. Though Hutch says that racial problems constitute the most important social issue of

our times, there is scarcely a hint of tension between the white and black characters. Anne accepts Hutch's past love for Strawson without rancor, and everyone treats Wade's homosexuality as a variation of love that merits complete acceptance and respect. Those who were dissatisfied with the film *Philadelphia*, finding the absence of homophobia in the family's treatment of a son dying of AIDS hard to believe, may have the same problem with *The Promise of Rest*.

But the novel's many virtues outweigh its flaws. Price's language is, as readers have come to expect from him, elegant, lyrical, and an enormous pleasure to read. The characters are complex, varied, and always interesting to watch as they develop. Though their implicit goodness is never in doubt, the ways in which they are challenged to transcend the pain of Wade's death provide more than enough dramatic tension to keep the plot moving. Their ability to find grace — the qualities of humility, courage, and above all, love — makes this a powerfully life-affirming work of literature.

Edward Hower's third novel, *Night Train Blues*, will be published next year.

TREE FROGS

I stop my car at the end of
the long lane. Can I hear them?
It is time to move on: I can't
reenter my childhood home.

Evergreens on the left, empty
fallow field on the right. Each
summer so far, familiar,
muted croaks, calmed me. The creek,

more earth than water, walked around
our house on soft feet. Black mud
up to my waist, sucked at my skin.
Pollitwogs in a naked

tin can, marked with a ride of rust.
Weeks later, lost to the stream
again, where they joined the nightly
creaking that sent me to sleep.

MILES LONG BLUES "TRANE"

Listening to Davis and Mr. J.C. —
Cool blues Miles blows, their wheels
roll on the rails.
The locomotives: kind of blue to me,
The two in tandem, weaving lonely
wails.

The high hat ticking off measures, all
blues.
The engine of his solo transports me
Past fog-filled fields, dimly lit by dawn,
new
As Coltrane's sax, grieving the wet
cold day.

The cool dark metal is indigo
In light which moves from night into
the day.
The train has gone, left behind me. It
blows
beyond a hill, so very far away.

Imagined whistle fades in the
distance,
as Miles and "Trane sink down to sad
silence.

— Worth Godwin

Worth Godwin is a poet and a former intern at The Bookpress.

The Purgatory of Translation

THE INFERNO OF DANTE
Robert Pinsky
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
427 pages, \$35

John Bowers

*Nulla cosa per legame musaico
armonizzata si può de la sua loquela
in altra transmutare, senza rompere tutta
sua dolcezza e armonia.*

Dante, Convivio
(*Nothing which the Muses have touched
can be carried over into
another tongue without losing its savor
and harmony.*)

The first problem facing a translator of the *Commedia* is how to deal with terza rima. Dante's interlocking rhyme pattern aba, bcb, cdc, etc. coils through the poem like a strand of DNA, providing the formal structure on which the entire edifice is erected. The primary difficulty is that English is poorer in rhyme—particularly in feminine rhyme—than Italian. The disastrous consequences of attempting to recreate every rhyme in English are well illustrated in Dorothy Sayers' translation which, though a linguistic tour de force, comes close to being unreadable. John Ciardi, in his well-known translation of the 1950's, adopts the compromise of preserving the rhyme in the first and third lines of each tercet but gives up on trying to carry over the rhyme from the middle line of each tercet to the first and third lines of the following one. This allows him sufficient leeway to write fairly supple and idiomatic English iambic pentameter lines but loses the distinctive forward motion that Dante's rhyme scheme makes possible. Still others have given up on rhyme altogether and simply translated the *Commedia* into blank verse: our own Henry Wadsworth Longfellow produced a competent but uninspired version of this sort.

Robert Pinsky, in his new verse translation of the *Inferno*, has come up with a genuinely new solution to the problem. It is simply to use consonantal rhyme instead of full rhyme. In full rhyme both the vowel and the final consonant or consonant cluster must be phonologically identical (e.g. tap/rap, lend/spend, spurns/earns, etc.), whereas in consonantal rhyme only the final consonant, or consonant cluster, need be identical (e.g. tap/sip, lend/fund, spurns/darns, etc.). The idea is that consonantal rhyme will provide sufficient structure to approximate the effect of the original, while giving the translator the freedom necessary to produce readable English verse. This has the further advantage of making available a great many more disyllabic rhymes than would otherwise be allowed, particularly if the system is loosened slightly to permit partially identical sequences of consonants, as in triplets such as bitter/enter/blunder. Pinsky further extends this approach to rhyme by treating the glides that follow tense vowels in English as, in effect, consonants and requiring them to be identical, so that now/throw, both with back, rounded w-glides, rhyme, as do stay/cloy, both with front, unrounded y-glides. It is interesting to note that some recent work in phonology treats both postvocalic glides and consonants as part of a phonological unit called the coda. Pinsky's system of rhyming could therefore be characterized in more general terms as coda rhyme.

The next question to ask is whether Pinsky's potentially fruitful innovation lives up to its promise. Here I have serious reservations. Dante's verse is written in a meter known traditionally as endecasillabico. Recent research in metrics has shown that this meter is fundamentally quite similar to the English iambic pentameter, but because of the prevalence of feminine rhymes in Italian, the overwhelming majority of

Dante's lines have an eleventh (extrametrical) unaccented syllable following the stressed syllable in the tenth position. Like the English iambic pentameter line, the endecasillabico consists of ten alternating weak and strong positions, often schematized in the following manner: WSWWSWSWS(W). In general, strong positions may, but need not, be realized by stressed syllables, while weak positions cannot (except under conditions that need not concern us here) be occupied by stressed syllables. Also, it is generally the case that each position is realized as one and only one syllable. In both Italian and English, however, there are systematic exceptions to this last principle. In Dante's verse, whenever two vowels are immedi-

ately adjacent to one another they may count as the realization of a single position (synaloepha), as in the following example (the synaloepha is indicated by joining the adjacent vowels to a single number indicating the position):



Micah Garen

ately adjacent to one another they may count as the realization of a single position (synaloepha), as in the following example (the synaloepha is indicated by joining the adjacent vowels to a single number indicating the position):

(1) Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
(Inf., I, 4-5)

In English verse, there are further possibilities: most poets permit two unstressed vowels separated by a single liquid (l or r) or nasal (n, m, ng) to realize a single position in the meter (elision), while some even permit this when the two vowels are separated by a fricative consonant (f, s, v, etc.). Some poets, such as Chaucer, apparently go still further and allow a whole monosyllabic word to be assigned to a single position along with an adjacent unstressed syllable. Finally, there are poets who seem to allow an extrametrical syllable within a line before a major syntactic break:

(2) and as I past I worshipt; if those you
seek
W S W S W S (W) W S W S
(Milton, Comus, 302)

All of these exceptions to the principle of "one syllable per position" contribute to

the complexity (or metrical tension) of verse lines, particularly those that go beyond the principles of synaloepha and elision. Robert Pinsky's translation of the *Inferno* is written in an extremely loose form of iambic pentameter. Not only are all of the exceptions described above used frequently, often with up to three instances within a single line, but he allows extrametrical syllables within a line that go well beyond anything permitted by even the most liberal writers of metrical verse. Here are a number of examples, chosen at random (elided syllables are marked by a ligature):

(3) Roaring with hunger so the air
appeared to tremble

For example, the second line in (3) above could be rendered completely metrical simply by changing the aspect of the verb from the past progressive to the simple past:

(4) While I alone prepared as though for
war

Similarly, the following line:

(5) Of lofty walls, and defended round
about
(Inf., IV, 92)

could be made metrically regular by the simple expedient of deleting the unnecessary conjunction and. In other instances it seems clear that metrical complexity is dictated by the need to force a rhyme, as in the following example:

(6) Onward he swam with motion more
and more slow
(Inf., XVII, 105)

The extremely awkward elision of the sequence and more (to say nothing of the grammatical awkwardness of the comparative more slow, which in standard modern English would be slower) could be improved somewhat by rewriting it as onward he swam with slower and slower motion (or even onward he swam with motion slower and slower), but then of course the rhyme with saw in line 103 would be lost. Similarly, each of the following metrically rather awkward lines:

(7) And now, along the narrow pathway
that ran
(Inf., X, 1)

Is lifted open, and no one is on guard.
(Inf., X, 8)

Will soon be answered now that we are
inside—
And so will the secret wish you don't
express.

(Inf., X, 14-15)
Who travel alive through this, the city of
fire,
(Inf., X, 20)

could be improved with only slight changes: And now, along a hidden path that ran; Is raised and there is no one keeping guard; Will soon be answered now we are inside—/As will the secret wish you don't express; Who travels, living, through the city of fire. The number of such instances can hardly be accidental, suggesting that prosodic complexity of this sort is part of the translator's artistic goal.

There is of course nothing inherently wrong with writing metrically complex lines. The real problem is that this practice has the unintended result of undermining the terza rima rhyme scheme whose effect Pinsky hoped to reproduce in English by using coda rhyme instead of full rhyme. The reason is this: coda rhyme in English is considerably weaker, and therefore harder to detect, than full rhyme. In order to maximize the reader's chances of perceiving the rhyme scheme, it is essential to keep the metrical complexity of the lines as low as possible. William Butler Yeats, the modern poet writing in English who has probably made the most extensive and effective use of coda rhyme, was well aware of this: the poems in which coda rhyme figures most prominently are metrically regular, making it easier for the reader to keep track of the line ends and therefore of the rhyme scheme. Reading Pinsky's translation, I continually find myself losing track of the rhyme, because the prosody is so complex that it becomes nearly impossible to keep both in mind at the same time. The more elided syllables the lines contain, the more work has to be done to parse them, and the harder it becomes to focus on the line ends. With full rhymes, a much greater degree of

(Inf., I, 37)
While I alone was preparing as though
for war

(Inf., II, 3)
O Muses, O genius of art, O memory
whose merit

(Inf., II, 6)
A mortal witness, in his corruptible body
(Inf., II, 14)

Perhaps effaces whatever memory I had
(Inf., VI, 39)

And on his property—arson, ruinous
offense
(Inf., XI, 36)

But that ungrateful, malignant folk who
descend
(Inf., XV, 55)

Jutted from the bank; we climbed it with-
out much effort
(Inf., XVIII, 67)

A second time with his staff at serpents
entwined
(Inf., XX, 43)

Into my children's faces, not speaking to
them
(Inf., XXXIII, 45)

Pinsky even writes lines that can only be scanned if three syllables are assigned to a single position, as in the third, fourth and fifth examples above. Strangely, the extreme metrical complexity of many of these lines could be reduced considerably by making relatively simple changes that would not affect the meaning in the least.

Keeping Poetry Alive:

Bridget Meeds

David Lehman has written and edited six books of criticism, four books of poetry, and is the series editor of the *Best American Poetry Series*. He has received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, and most recently, from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. In May 1995, his book of essays titled *The Big Question* will be published by the University of Michigan Press. In February 1996, Scribner will publish his new book of poetry, *Valentine Place*.

David Lehman is also a part-time resident of Ithaca. With this in mind, I met him in April 1995 at his apartment in New York City to talk specifically about his upcoming book of poetry.

Bookpress: Perhaps we should start by talking about forms in poetry. Would you classify yourself as a neoformalist?

Lehman: No, my interest in forms precedes the existence of such a movement of poets. I've always been interested in forms, but it's not a programmatic interest. I'm not interested in them to the exclusion of poetry that is written in free verse. I don't think a poem is bad if it lacks meter; one can comply with the formal requirements of a form or deviate from them, as the occasion allows. I like prose poems as much as sestinas. I don't think these attitudes would be endorsed by neoformalists.

BP: Do you find that you set out to write in a certain form or that subjects suggest a particular form to you?

DL: I tend to write poetry in spurts, perhaps because I work on so many other things, like non-fiction books and the editing of anthologies. A particular value of a constrictive poetic form is that it may get me to write something, especially if I'm fallow or not terribly inspired.

BP: Does writing non-fiction on assigned topics involve the same sort of discipline as writing a poem in a certain form?

DL: I'm a great believer in deadlines and journalistic requirements. They help one as a writer in lots of different ways, and some of those ways apply to writing poetry. I like the idea of giving myself assignments.

BP: Do you find that you hold yourself as factually responsible in poems as you do in journalism?

DL: No, the opposite is the case. I'm currently writing a book about the New York School of Poetry in the context of New York City as a cultural capital. That sort of assignment takes place in the real intractable world of facts and material resistance. You have an obligation to be accurate, truthful, and correct. Writing poetry imposes some requirements, but they're different. You can take liberties in poetry with the names of people and the dates of events. Your fidelity in poetry has to be to your imagination, not to things that happened.

People get confused sometimes, because they think poetry is autobiographical, especially when there's an "I" in the poem. Those same people don't necessarily confuse Scott Fitzgerald with the "I" who tells the story of *The Great Gatsby*, or the speaker of *Huckleberry Finn* with Mark Twain. They don't even confuse Mark Twain with Samuel Clemens. Yet in poetry, everybody thinks that if you write "My father died last

week," that your father died last week.

BP: What is it particularly about poetry that gives people this illusion?

DL: There's more ignorance about poetry. For many people, there's an assumption that one criterion of excellence in poetry is sincerity in a limited sense. There's a lack of sophistication on this score. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is not less sincere because he's not telling us about himself.

BP: Do you write mostly in dramatic personae, or mostly autobiographically?

DL: As the author of my poetry, I think

a thousand years to praise each of her body parts. Well, this is the language of poetry, of exaggeration. There's a constant conflict between this poetical impulse and the impulse to tell truths.

BP: Were you aiming for this type of heightened diction in your poem "Rejection Slip," for instance?

DL: I began with an extreme form of irony, claiming to be grateful for something no one would ever be happy about, rejection. Sometimes by stating the exact opposite of your emotions, you can come to some sort of truth.

BP: Along with truthfulness, however

nation at a great disadvantage. There are very unfavorable circumstances.

BP: What would those be?

DL: One is the decline of fame as a real possibility, and the rise instead of a form of celebrity that is created by artificial means and shortens the duration of fame, changing it entirely. For poetry to flourish, there has to be a meaningful sense of fame. The rewards do not exist in the here and now. It involves a tradition that precedes it and a future that follows it. There's a definition of fame in Milton's "Lycidas." And Keats writes about fame in the sonnet "When I have fears that I may cease to be," in the sense that fame means making a name for oneself, leaving a body of work, leaving something for future generations to remember us by, leaving an artifact of our existence that is beautiful in itself, and can instruct as well as delight. What we have instead is the triumph of the Andy Warhol idea of fame, here now, gone a quarter of an hour later, or less. Everything is condensed to the television soundbite. That's not a circumstance that could in any way be considered favorable for the writing of poetry.

BP: What do you think of the hoopla about poetry in the media lately, including slams and the Nuyoricans and poetry featured on MTV? Is this positive for poetry?

DL: I wrote a piece about poetry slams for the *New York Observer* that will be published in my new book of essays. I feel ambivalent about them. At first, I was pleased that attention was being paid to poetry in the culture at large, and I thought that this would outweigh any other consideration. My piece was very generous, considering that the quality of the work is so dismal. Much of it is poetry in name only. But what's so bad about that? People should write as much poetry as possible. Still, I feel ambivalent. We live in a culture where youth is worshipped. Much of our consumer society is oriented to the idea that the disposable income is in the hands of people aged 18-25. They are the ones for whom movies are made and for whom magazines are edited. So I guess it shouldn't be surprising that this kind of poetry sprang up, emanating from the youth culture. Some of these writers congratulate themselves for being hip and rebellious, but it's not clear how rebellious they are, since they are instantly rewarded. There's something funny about the whole phenomenon. It's a big hyped-up thing, a publicity strike, part of a culture that seems inimical to the idea of poetry. On the other hand, I suppose it doesn't hurt anything that the poems are no better than they are. One should welcome anything that has to do with poetry, the idea that poetry is attracting new people, and there's the hope that someone who gets involved with poetry in any way will stick around and discover that Wallace Stevens or Elizabeth Bishop is pretty good, too.

The glib journalistic mind would like to see in the Nuyorican poets a rebirth of the Beats, with whom journalism had a somewhat unrequited love affair. Those journalists would like to imagine that there's a class conflict being enacted here, in which you have the Nuyorican poets as the proletariat, and the established poets like Richard Wilbur, Donald Justice, Anthony Hecht, or John Ashbery as the white male power establishment. This is so bizarre as to defy credibility, because such poets find so little reward. It's incredible that they can spend fifty years writing poetry, this very lowly endeavor not rewarded in our society, only to be treated as if they were



David Lehman

it's transparently autobiographical in many ways, but that's not necessarily true for the reader. The reader with that assumption might be misled.

BP: Is there such a thing as having emotional truth in a poem without factual truth?

DL: Of course. I believe in all the ironies of poetry, and that includes poesy with all its hyperbole and extravagance, exaggeration and prettiness. There is always a conflict between poetry, in that sense, and truth. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, he writes, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." The language of poesy is evoked and denied through the negative construction. The sonnet is a love poem, and is also about poetry. It's about what is real as opposed to what is idealized. Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" is another famous example. He writes: "Had we but world enough, and time/This coyness, lady, were no crime," and then he explains how he would spend

we're defining it, what else do you think an American poet owes his or her community?

DL: I think the poet's chief obligation in America — the California of the world, always on the verge of a new reality — is to keep poetry alive. Poetry, if genuine, is a resistance manifested against what would conspire against it. Wallace Stevens has the phrase "the pressure of reality" in one of his essays. He talks about the imagination pressing back against this pressure. The best way to manifest that pressure is not by writing a poem that narrowly protests a particular injustice, but, on the contrary, to write a poem that on the surface of it has no bearing on that injustice, a poem that renews the possibility of human imagination in a sphere where that is endangered.

BP: Is human imagination endangered in America?

DL: The times right now put the imagi-

An Interview with David Lehman

Senator Pothole. But that is the way it's written up.

BP: You're writing a book about New York City and how it, as a geographic area, affects art. You also live half the year in Ithaca. Do you find that Ithaca inspires poetry in a similar manner?

DL: Poems like "Shake the Superflux" and "For I Will Consider Your Dog Molly," which are set in Ithaca, were written in the first few years of my being there. I wrote a few others, too, that have to do with the place, so I suppose I must have liked the idea of writing poems about Ithaca things or people. But I didn't do it out of any sense of obligation; it just sort of happened. I think that everyone has a landscape in mind as real. Sometimes you write about a specific place, but sometimes the poems you write are not about any particular place, and there's an automatic, "default" location. I grew up in New York City; I went to college here. I went to Europe for a few years, and then came back to New York City. It seems to embody a certain kind of reality for me, because of having spent all that time here, and because of its importance in the nation's commerce and culture. I think it was Paul Verlaine who said that every landscape is a state of mind. By that definition, I'd have to say that the ever-changing cityscape of New York is one that I carry around with me wherever I go.

BP: Tell me about your current book about the New York School of Poetry.

DL: The New York School of Poetry was a movement that attracted me tremendously when I was in college. It was one of the very first influences that I felt myself attracted to, as a poet. There were other poets that I had read before, who moved me and made me want to write, but the New York poets, particularly John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara, were a great inspiration to me. And Kenneth Koch was a teacher of mine in college. So I've long had the idea of wanting to write about them. I've written about them individually throughout the years, but it just seemed like an interesting project now that we are at a certain distance from those post-war years. And the book also involves New York City, a funny place to call home, because it changes so rapidly, far more rapidly than Ithaca. If you were born in Ithaca, and you came back to it years later, it would resemble itself, whereas New York City always seems to have been razed and recreated last month.

BP: How does a poet deal with that sense of dislocation?

DL: I feel very sad about it, because if I go up to my old neighborhood, Dyckman Street, there is very little left that responds to me and says "This is your home." It's not a friendly situation. Not to mention that the neighborhood is overrun with danger signals—crack sales, vandalism, violence and crime.

BP: You have several poems based in childhood memory. Do you feel comfortable using this material?

DL: Of course. I think that memory and dream are the two main sources of poetry, since we're always trying to recapture the former and reimagine the latter.

BP: Do you find that dreams affect metaphor making?

DL: Dreams give you a source of mate-

I think the poet's chief obligation in America is to keep poetry alive. Poetry, if genuine, is a resistance manifested against what would conspire against it.

rial. They also give you a model for a kind of narrative that obeys certain rules of sequence, but also deviates from them. The usual sense of cause and effect doesn't apply in a dream. X happens and Y happens and you have a sense of sequence, but between X and Y there's no explanation of how you got from one to the other. That's a model for writing with a certain kind of freedom. In the twentieth century, the importance we have given to dreams as sources of information about our unconscious and of legitimate forms of expression have made the dream something very powerful that affects how we write poems and make movies. The logic and knowledge available in a poem might have much to do with the logic and knowledge of dreams. People are used to interpreting dreams in ways that are very different from interpreting a text. But a poem can be as complicated as a dream. You can interpret it, though maybe not in the same way as you would other texts. The tools are different. The amount of intuition involved is different. The purpose of a poem is not to reveal its secrets to you all at once and be forgotten. The dream or the poem can reveal a great deal more upon rereading.

BP: What do you think about the future of American poetry?

DL: *The Best American Poetry* annual anthology has shown that, if you use as much imagination in publishing and marketing a book as was used in writing the poem it contains, it is possible to create a book that people will want to buy, bookshops will stock and publishers will publish. At the same time, even one who is professionally obliged to be an optimist has days when he feels that it is a losing battle. Still, either because of, or despite the fact that the circumstances are unfavorable, American poetry today is exceptionally vital. It is far more impressive to me than Irish or British, or God knows, French poetry. In America, for all sorts of reasons like the nation's sheer size, the immigrant

influx, the money, and the availability of information, there is still a support system available for poets, no matter how disadvantageous the times. As a result, we have poets as different from one another as Charles Simic, Mark Strand, A.R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich, Louise Gluck, James Tate. It's true that the generation now in their 60s is quite an exceptional one, the generation of the late James Merrill, Merwin, Ashbery, Wilbur, and Hollander. But people in their 50s are pretty remarkable too. We tend to be full of self-pity in America, but this extraordinary wealth of poetry should make us feel proud.

BP: So you do feel positive about the health of poetry in America?

DL: Well, I feel split. On the one hand, I do feel that it is very healthy, vital, inasmuch as the recent work by the poets I've named is wonderful work. But another part of me feels very pessimistic, because the conditions in the culture are really very unfavorable to the creation of poetry. It's remarkable that there's this resilience of human imagination, despite that. Or perhaps because of it.

BP: What can we expect in your new book of poetry?

DL: The new book is called *Valentine Place*, which is the name of the street on which I live in Ithaca, where many of the poems were written and where the manuscript was worked on. At the same time, Valentine Place names the chief obsessions of the book, which have to do with love, sex, fidelity, marriage, infidelity, divorce, heartbreak, and romance. There are love poems and love-gone-wrong poems, and a lot of endings in this book. Relationships have ended for different characters, who may be versions of the same primal characters. There's a form, which does not have a name, to the poems in the title sequence. They're all about twenty or twenty-two lines, with

one exception. There's a sestina in the book, and a bunch of sonnets in different arrangements. There's a poem called "Stages on Life's Way" which is made up of three sonnets, and a poem called "Infidelity," also made up of three sonnets.

BP: What else are you working on these days?

DL: I'm finishing a new edition of an anthology entitled *Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms*. It was originally published by Macmillan in the late 1980s; now the University of Michigan Press is publishing a new enlarged edition next year. Originally we had sixty-five poets, each of whom picked a poem and wrote a comment on its form or on the circumstances of its composition. For the new edition, twenty additional poets are weighing in. A number of Ithaca figures are included: Archie Ammons, Phyllis Janowitz, Robert Morgan, Harryette Mullen, Kit Hathaway.

BP: What can we expect from *The Best American Poetry 1995*?

DL: The guest editor for 1995, Richard Howard, decided that any poet who had previously appeared three or more times in the series would be ineligible for this year's book. So the emphasis is very much on discoveries and new voices.

BP: What advice do you have for young poets?

DL: I was recently at the University of Cincinnati, where I gave the Taft Lectures, and I was asked that question. I looked at the bright, eager faces in the room, and I said — I didn't know I was going to say this, it was just what I felt at that moment — that they should remember that poetry is not life. That there will come a time when all of them will feel envy and resentment, because somebody got a job that they were better qualified for, or won a prize that should have gone to them, or some other injustice, of which there is plenty in the poetry world. How are they going to fend off the bitterness and resentment? Because those things are the enemies of poetry. Unfortunately, it's all too easy to succumb. And that is why it is important to remember that poetry is not the whole of one's life, but a part of it, and that we should not put too great a burden on the poetry that we love. Keeping it alive, poetry and the possibility of poetry, that is the great thing.

Bridget Meeds is a freelance writer living in Ithaca.



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Hard-Core Romanticism

TALK DIRTY TO ME:
AN INTIMATE PHILOSOPHY OF SEX
 Sallie Tisdale
 Doubleday
 338 pages, \$22.95

Peter Fortunado

The Orphics say that black-winged Night, a goddess of whom even Zeus stands in Awe, was courted by the Wind and laid a silver egg in the womb of Darkness; and that Eros, whom some call Phanes, was hatched from this egg and set the Universe in motion. Eros was double-sexed and golden-winged and, having four heads, sometimes roared like a bull or lion, sometimes hissed like a serpent or bleated like a ram. Night...lived in a cave with him, displaying herself in triad: Night, Order, Justice...Phanes created earth, sky, sun, and moon, but the triple goddess ruled the universe, until her scepter passed to Uranus.

So says Robert Graves in *The Greek Myths: I*, giving us a version of creation according to those whose myth, he says, is "influenced by the late mystical doctrine of love." Late in the 20th century, here in the Western World, we do well to recall this tale, and to remember how important a place it gives to Eros as the principle of creation, of sensuality, in consort with feminine "Night, Order, Justice."

Eros is also called Phanes, and Graves says the name means "revealer"; though born from the silver egg of the moon, Phanes is related by the Orphic philosophers — poets, musicians, lovers of wisdom — to their symbol of Illumination, the sun. If all created things have a potential for beauty when properly seen in the light of consciousness, then Eros, properly understood, means much more than unconscious submission to animal appetite. Though at times, this is exactly what the human animal craves.

In 1995 plenty of us, some more warily and more wearily than others, will yet

acknowledge that love, or desire, or our DNA still makes the world go round. If we are Romantics, as Sallie Tisdale is, we retain a sense of hopefulness about this fact. But don't get me wrong. *Talk Dirty to Me: An Intimate Philosophy of Sex* is hardly sentimental. Nor does the first part of the title indicate Tisdale's central concern, her healthy outlook on varieties of sexual experience. Whether or not her "intimate philosophy" is anything like your own, reading her book you are likely to have the larger experience of thinking through your assumptions about the erotic and pornographic. "Dirty" she is interested in, because it suggests material which by its nature remains nonrational, explicitly sexual, pressed outside the boundaries of polite conversation.

Talk Dirty to Me says something about the world of mainstream publication in which it appears. The publishers, Doubleday, like their author, risk not being taken seriously, or worse, being taken too seriously for the wrong reasons by those who have misunderstood the place of sex and sexuality in the arts and in other areas of life. The fact that Tisdale is a woman writing about sex for a major publishing house is of significance. I for one find it liberating in the creepy, sociopolitical climate of recent times to be reminded that a woman enjoys sex with both her body and her mind; I know this about life, we all know it, or should know it, but it's still rare to find expression of the particulars by a mature writer for a general audience.

There's not much that could really be considered "dirty" talk here, and the title, which refers to a particular, somewhat humorous episode, is an attention-grabber more than anything else. But the '90s have seen a genuine efflorescence of erotica and explicit writing about sex by women (most of it published by small presses), and that this has been in some cases divisive among feminists is a reminder that individuals authenticate theory through practice. People are likely to reach various conclusions when experience varies, thereby necessitating the revision of

general theories. So goes round the world; where talking is allowed, consciousness does not remain static.

Tisdale's voice is unpretentious, filled with curiosity and appetite, spiced with a sense of humor, and sexy. Her "intimate philosophy" is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive; it is spoken by an adult who enjoys sex, and who has chosen what to reveal in print and what to leave us guessing about. Her monologue has to do with what is permitted, if we begin from the premise that the body and its pleasures are good.

This is not theoretical discourse, and while hers is a feminist and humane voice, she has no program to heal our society's confusion over the place of explicit sexuality. Tisdale tells us she doesn't want to sublimate or displace her subject into intellectual discourse. She knows well how many of her contemporaries are afflicted with an abiding fear and loathing of sexuality and of the body itself. She also knows how dangerous it has been for women to speak directly to these issues, to speak for themselves about their pleasures, especially if they diverge from so-called normative values for women.

Tisdale is the author of four other books, but the direct prelude to *Talk Dirty* is in an essay about pornography published by *Harper's Magazine* in February 1992. Of that she says:

It was the first time I'd written transparently about sex and its complicated layered meanings. Pornography is a hall of mirrors, a central symbol of the society-wide confusion over sex. The urge (which I certainly felt) to discuss pornography in solidly cerebral or political terms seemed, in the end, to be useless as well as silly...no matter what else I could say about it, I had to admit I found a lot of pornography exciting. It got me, deep down, and I could think of no better unifying metaphor for the impact of sex on my own life. Sex has the eternal charm of the body — a perpetual organic hold. Porn is sex off the leash.

For her candid, personal essay, Tisdale tells us, she received "a lot of letters in response," some thoughtful and appreciative, others irrational and censorious, including responses from "writers who identified themselves as conservative feminists," and who relied "more on epithet than analysis; their insults were graphic, vile."

I remember that essay, remember my own reactions to it, beginning with my curiosity about the magazine's motives for publishing it. And who was this woman willing to traverse such risky territory in a mainstream publication: yet another intellectual scrambling for high ground from which to survey a thoroughly vexed subject? But when I read the essay, which is subsumed into the present book, I recognized the value of her honest voice, a passionate advocate of Eros, who believes in basic human sanity. While she might not put it this way, I think she understands the place of the imagination in human sexuality, that it is through images that the human psyche knows itself, perhaps at some level even "imagining" into being a body, and fantasizing the satisfaction of that body's desires.

Tisdale believes that, unless the human imagination and our private fantasies are liberated, are allowed, our bodies and their desires will remain alien, suspect, "dirty."

The book can be compared to a form of travel writing, a journal or notebook in which the author has remarked upon items of particular interest to her. In the course of her journeys Tisdale visits with prostitutes who love sex, works on the floor of a women-owned and operated sex shop, and interviews drag-queens and practitioners of S & M. *Talk Dirty* is plain-spoken, eschewing the specialized vocabularies of experts, and though the book is organized into sections titled "Desire," "Arousal," "Climax," and "Resolution," Tisdale's method is associative and evocative rather than analytical.

Inevitably, Tisdale must consider the question of what has gone wrong with our

Refresher Course

Paulette Hackman

In the beginning, the reading I assigned from a thick anthology of inspiring choices included fiction by the old masters as well as early and later twentieth-century authors. For many of my community college students — most in their late teens and early twenties with a few older adults mixed in — "The World of the Short Story" would be their first lit course. I wanted it to be a good experience.

Our class discussions focused mainly on themes and characters and on how works of fiction are crafted. I hoped the students would also gain an understanding of imagery, metaphor, point of view, and style, although I believed it was more important for them to fall in love with literature and to discover that their own voices — talking back to the author, scribbling madly in the margins of the book — are critical to the dialogue between readers and writers.

But early on I hit a snag at the most elementary level of my plan: I couldn't understand my students' voices. The words they chose didn't make any sense. By the second week of class, Chekhov's Olenka in "The Darling" had been confirmed as an "unredeemable codependent," and Gogol's Akaky Akakievich in "The Overcoat" suffered more from "low self-esteem" than from the frigid Russian winter. At first, I found these responses comical and interesting in an absurd sort of way. But gradually, as the vocabulary of the Recovery-12-Step-Inner-Child movements revealed its seductive hold on the language of my students, I began to fear for the lives of the characters, the integrity of their creators, and especially the spirit of the instructor.

Though less than a majority of students in my class were actually conversant in this language,

they were, as they might put it, an empowered constituency. How swiftly, I noticed, the authority of their jargon silenced their shy, lazy, or uninterested classmates.

I decided to cancel reading the shorter works of Tolstoy and Melville; it would be best to plant our feet firmly in the 20th century. Stories set in more familiar times, I reasoned, would be easier for students to talk with rather than talk at. But it continued.

Families were peopled with co-dependents, abusers or the abused, victims of low self-esteem, inadequate bonding, in need of recovery, re-parenting, and more. The young woman in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" was "in denial." In Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited," Paul's one-drink-a-day hedge against alcoholism was, a consensus felt, a well known deception of an addictive personality who couldn't be trusted with the care of a beloved child. The brood of crackers in Eudora Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O." were a dysfunctional lot only to be eclipsed by the family in Joyce Carol Oates' "Where are you going? Where have you been?"

Forbidding my students words was, naturally, out of the question, especially when they were so game to talk. I would have to tease out definitions, demand clarification, insist upon examples from within the text to support theories. At times, this succeeded. Patience and tact could eventually expose the emptiness of, say, "inadequate bonding" to sum up the ageless conflict between a father and a son. On the other hand, talking things out could actually affirm a viable connection between a character "in denial" and the dramatic irony in a story. A circuitous route it was, but then who would have expected this infiltration of recovery talk in such a young group?

As semesters press on, instructors and stu-

dents in small classes get to know one another pretty well. But, aside from the usual familiarity one experiences over time, in the case of community college students, something else brings you together, perhaps because their lives are often more complicated than those of students living on campus in four-year schools. These complications spill over to the classroom and to the instructor's office, where assignments, deadlines, attendance, and exam schedules are often negotiated due to problems with transportation, baby sitters, job shifts, and landlords. Exasperating as these adjustments may be, what are the alternatives? A late bloomer myself, who took some detours before standing in front of the classroom, I could not be unsympathetic toward the students' situations.

Near the end of the term, we were scheduled to read "I Stand Here Ironing" by Tillie Olsen. The story centers around a woman who, while stationed at her ironing board, moving the iron back and forth, reflects on the circumstances that have affected the life she and her oldest child have had together. The mother's monologue is occasioned by the visit of someone, presumably a social worker or teacher, who tells her that her 19-year-old daughter is "a youngster who needs help and whom I'm deeply interested in helping." This calling to account for the past elicits a response from the mother that is both anguished and defiant.

When I first read Olsen's story 20 years ago in a Women's Studies course, our class examined its feminist issues. As for personal responses, few of us middle-class women who'd come of age in the late '60s and early '70s had any direct experience with the hardships depicted in the story. Myself, a twenty-five-year-old mother of two children, I might have empathized more with the narrator, if my identity hadn't

been centered more on my role as a daughter than as a mother.

Normally, I read a story several times for class preparation. But this time, one reading of Olsen's story was all my heart could take. One reading alone cut through layers of scar tissue and exposed the disappointments I too felt about what I'd given, or not given, my children during several turbulent years in our lives. As I read, I re-experienced the compulsive and futile attempt to sort through responsibility and blame, as if divvying things up ever explained or changed the past. I was sorry I'd made the assignment. My students wouldn't be capable of relating to this story, and I feared how they'd mishandle it. Too late, though, to assign an alternative reading, I had to desensitize myself.

Before class, on the day we were to discuss the Olsen story, I found a message in my office mailbox. It read, "I must get in touch with Tillie Olsen — Where can I find her? — What else has she written?" The student who wrote the note was a mother of six children, ten years my junior, who'd waited, she'd told me, "until the very moment my youngest started kindergarten to begin college. To make a better life."

"I Stand Here Ironing" had claimed another heart.

The discussion that day got off to its usual tentative start. Gradually, the familiar judgments were attached to various aspects of the story: "denial," "lack of bonding," "in need of validation." To this list, a new one was added — "failure to thrive" — which I found particularly poignant. Perhaps sensing my lack of fighting spirit, the recovery-talk began to wind down, and the discussion sputtered out.

"Other comments?" I asked. The room was quiet. A fresh May breeze blew through the window. It was 3:20 on a Friday afternoon —

cultural attitudes. She says,

The sex that is presented to us in everyday culture feels strange to me; its images are fragments, lifeless, removed from normal experience. Real sex, the sex in our cells and in the space between neurons, leaks out and gets into things and stains our vision and colors our lives. This is what we can't see. This is what we never say.

It should come as no surprise that Tisdale focuses on the problem of shame as central to our attitudes toward sex:

Each of us finds sexual censure in our individual lives, of one kind or another. As for myself, I've been struck (shamed) by the highhandedness — the faintly damning gentility of the auteurs. Sex in this view lacks an aesthetic; it's seen as a rather low pursuit — fun but not exactly Ivy League.

Much later in the book, when she begins to zero in on the effects of such shaming, she has this to say:

For years I examined all my fantasies, analyzed them for content and import. The YMCA showers-after-hours. Kidnapped for love. White-slave-in-the-harem. Romance-under-the-elms, in the pool hall, on the beach. At first I just felt guilty about them...I was guilty because so many of them were filled with images of forced seduction, sexual surrendering and overpowering. I was sometimes user, and sometimes used. I called them "rape fantasies," even though rape in any sexual fantasy, including mine, rarely looks like and never feels like rape in the real world...I thought then that any fantasy involving subjugation was inappropriate, unfeminist, rotten at the core. My first, protofeminist, solution to the guilt was to assume that I was incorporating real-life oppression into my fantasy life, and that with the hoary solution of consciousness-raising, I could make them go away.

Tisdale tells us that despite her best intentions, the fantasies became "more complex, more detailed. The analysis was getting in the way of the heat, and so the heat increased. Fantasies of power are largely shame-driven, and if they mean anything in particular, they mean being free — of guilt and responsibility. But I was ashamed of shame." Finally, she says, she reached a resolution to her guilt and shame through

lots of talking and listening to and reading about similar confusion in other women I admired. I reached a point where I could laugh about a fantasy I had, without embarrassment, laugh at its silliness, its obviousness, and its ability to arouse me no matter what — and that's when the guilt, not the fantasy, disappeared. And the result of that was the fantasies began to diminish. Their power over my conscious mind seemed to exist in direct proportion to my resistance.

She concludes by saying, "They will be there and comfortably so, as long as I don't waste a lot of time trying to excise them."

Tisdale is not given to psychoanalyzing herself on the page, and this reader is grateful for that. I'm willing to accept the outlines of her success in overcoming shame; I know it can be done, once the wounding — the shaming by others — has been unveiled. This form of shame or "guilt-tripping" is rather different than the internal sense of shame that is a product of conscience, and without which we cannot function decently toward ourselves or others.

The Jungians especially tell us that the myth of Psyche and Eros remains relevant for the modern world. Perhaps you remember that after she betrays Eros' trust, Psyche must redeem herself through fulfilling a series of demanding tasks set for her by the goddess of beauty and love, Aphrodite. Her worthiness, the integrity of her love must be reestablished before Aphrodite will allow a reunion with the god who first courted the girl surreptitiously. It's a story

whose metaphors move us beyond the arena of sexual infatuation and fantasy deeper into the soul (which includes, of course, the body). Psyche — meaning mind and soul — must have worldly experience, must learn to be discriminating about love's requirements, must live in the details of life before she can truly be established with Love.

Is it that Eros, the force of life itself, first of all requires that we be able to take pleasure in our physical incarnation? Then we might be able to see others clearly as beings with bodies, whose needs, however strange they might at first seem, are after all similar to our own. How else are we to listen to one another talking about sex and other basic concerns without fright or revulsion? Because we are curious, aren't we — just as

Psyche was when she held a lamp to view her lover's face — would he be monstrous as her envious sisters believed? — no, he is beautiful! — and in her excitement a drop of hot fluid spills. And that is only the beginning of love. I will give Tisdale the last words here:

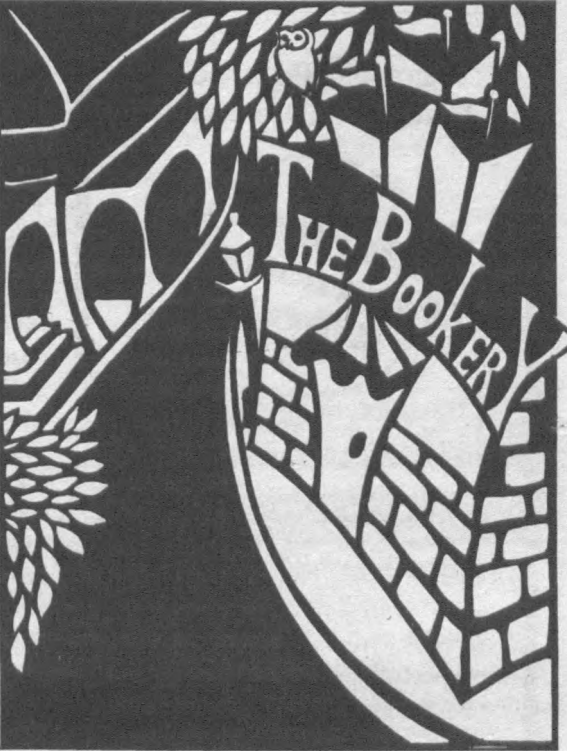
What if the pleasure principle is allowed to ripen? What if the only absolute is to protect one's health without harming the health of others? To do so, I think, requires a particular belief that in fact goes against much of the morality we've inherited — this requires us to believe in human goodness, and most of us don't.

Peter Fortunado is a writer who maintains a counseling practice in Ithaca.

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30 minutes left of the school week for all of us.

I tossed out canned questions: "Where's the tension in this story? What is the conflict? Is this a story about blame? About forgiveness? Both? What do you think?"

Students opened their books, the pages turning as answers were sought in a line or paragraph, waiting out the time it would take for someone to break the silence. Finally, one student's voice drifted up. "Well, the mother was a victim of her times, wasn't she? It was the Depression wasn't it?" To which someone else answered, "Yeah, but it's funny. This story probably has more meaning today. Like, you know, her situation must have been unusual when this was published. The '50s? Didn't everyone stay married then?"

The student looked at me, witness to the pre-1970s.

I nodded.

"Now all this stuff is real common," he said. "Nothing's changed, has it?"

We spent a few minutes cataloguing the social issues addressed in this story. Day care, health care, single parenthood, child support, the non-choice between making the money to pay the rent and being home when a child needs company. No change.

Though she'd been shy all term, one student wanted to defend the mother's skeptical attitude toward the social worker's concerns. "The mother shows she has her pride," she said. "She doesn't want anyone nosing around in their lives. She's saying the past is the past, and they've survived and her daughter will be all right." She hesitated and tried not to look around. "Well, pretty good, anyway," she added quietly.

"She should forgive herself," said an adult who had focused all semester on evidence of

low self-esteem in characters. "I think she does forgive herself. She did the best she could. She says here," she read from the text, "So all that is in her will not bloom — but in how many does it? There is still enough to live by." She paused for a minute. Then she said, "I think this story is about acceptance."

Acceptance. A blessedly clear word, I thought.

I flagged down the mother of six before she left the class. Usually generous with her ideas, she'd been silent during the discussion. I thought I understood, though. A story can be so profoundly personal that, for a while anyway, it defies sharing beyond the soul-to-soul link between reader and author. I told her I'd received her note, and we exchanged a few comments about tracking down more of Tillie Olsen's work. We wished each other good weekends, her rushing to pick up her children and me gathering my books.

When I left the classroom and walked down the hall, empty at 4 o'clock on a Friday, I felt light. I walked slowly, thinking over our discussion about the Olsen story. I thought about the belief my students seemed to have in the daughter's future and hoped it reflected the optimism they felt about the direction of their lives. I thought about the sympathy they had for all of the story's characters, remarkable in its even distribution.

Outside, the warm air reminded me that the semester would be over soon. And I wondered if, during our sixteen weeks together, I'd given as much to my students as they'd given me that one afternoon: a sign of hope and a moment of grace.

Paulette Hackman is a freelance writer living in Binghamton.

On Drugs

David Lenson

Engaging, articulate, and brilliantly argued, *On Drugs* is destined to become a revolutionary classic that redefines what it means to be "high." Calling for the acceptance of a "diversity of consciousness," Lenson delivers a scathing indictment of the War On Drugs as an effort based, like all attempts to eradicate "getting high," on an incomplete understanding of human nature.

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Romance of the Diner

continued from page 1

diner was streamlined and rounded in imitation of railroad dining cars: the cart that had been gradually transformed into an eating place was replaced by the imitation of something it had never been.

Extension of the menu followed the extension of space. The chalkboard that first featured it became the more formal cloth board upon whose ribbing small white letters were stuck. In time, refrigerated shelves imposed by health inspectors displayed perishable deserts behind glass, and it was not long until candy and mint racks flanked the cash register at the exit: the diner had become a restaurant that wasn't. And this caused the nighttime conviviality once promised by the neon to dim. The space that first created a social cluster became the domain of the loner—the self-abstracted souls of Edward Hopper or the private eye of the hard-boiled genre, isolated by the night and his secrets, confronting his cup of black coffee in a plain white cup.

That cup of coffee was brimful with symbolic meaning—all of it masculine. At the outset, the plain white cup asserted plain honesty (only what is plain is honest: no limoge curlicues here where speciousness might lurk). In the image of the man, the cup was large and full, a porcelain miniature would have been simply ridiculous, size being a part of manliness when it is justified by inner magnitude and strength. Lacking the unctuousness of Italian coffee (an unctuousness rendered even more suspect by the Italian custom of sweetening it) or the grainy density of Turkish coffee (equally oversweet), the American brew derives the better part of its virtue, like the man before it, through its strength. So the emblematic cup of American coffee is black in proportion to its masculine power, which neither sugar nor cream are allowed to mellow or dilute. Ordering it is a ritual of male asceticism: the one who requests it demonstrates that he has renounced the indulgences of a softer, richer drink: he has shown that he is trained in the ways of austerity and self-discipline.

That cup of coffee was the more symbolic in that the diner long remained a largely male purview, even though efforts were made earlier in the century to lure women into it (as a result of which, counter stools briefly acquired fancy backs). Ignoring the metal creamers and sugar bowls that remained present and within reach as faithful objects of rejection, the virtuous plainness of black coffee extended to the food served in the diner, its emblem being the rare hamburger: meat is male nourishment par excellence and the less it is cooked the more it recalls the primal and carnivorous male (the one who prefers hunting to sowing crops) in his purest, most animal form.

The world of the diner thus engendered a particular folklore concerned with foods. It was mainly functional in its appeal and, after dusk, generally masculine in its composition. It was an eatery that offered eats, with its own rituals, language and denizens. In Gerd Kittel's *Diners: People and Places*, Richard F. Snow writes:

The counter men seemed to divide themselves into two types: wiry veterans of the Depression's seventy-hour, twelve-dollar weeks, and kids in their late teens, very brisk and peppy in their white jackets and caps. This latter group seemed the more likely to throw around diner talk: "Adam and Eve on a raft, wreck 'em [two scrambled eggs on toast] and a grease spot [hamburger]." This banter never rang quite true to me, because it so often failed to fulfill the chief function of slang, which is economy. It is not really easier to say "nervous pudding" than "jello." The talk, rather, signaled the speaker's place in a fraternity. It was a happy assertion of his right to preside over all that clean, flashing metal.

That imagined trade talk must have represented a diurnal self-consciousness, that of young people behind the counter who echoed other young people, high school students or the like, for whom the diner had become an

afternoon hangout, shards of noise and laughter upon which glinted the light of day. One imagines that the "wiry veterans" who replaced them at dusk were a taciturn presence more appropriate to the diner as it became a quiet microcosm of the lonesome city night.

The trade nomenclature is pleased to divide the world of American dining into three categories: the fast food restaurant (to which the diner belongs), the family restaurant, and the "atmosphere restaurant." That division represents a hierarchy, from the most common to the most refined, but it also gives clues as to what goes into the making of such a hierarchy. Contrasting the "family" restaurant implies that the diner, even though it eventually dispensed that encapsulation of middle-class virtues, apple pie, never quite achieved full respectability. The diner is a convenience rather than an occasion, and, in that sense, the family is the occasion: moving from the confines of the home to those of the restaurant, its plenum requires and confers a social rectitude. As the nighttime loners drift in after the young have left, the diner follows the lengthening shadows along a melancholy path: it is not a suitable space in which to display the fundamental group whose collective presence effuses the optimism of moral and civic correctness.

Whereas the American nomenclature terms its highest category "atmosphere restaurant," the oldest of French gastronomic bibles, the *Guide Michelin*, analyzes its distinctions differently. Awarding stars for gastronomic excellence to a small percentage of the eating places it singles out, it allows as minimum criteria in the lowest category only fine cuisine and a reasonable price. The middle, two-star, category stresses the first-class quality of the specialties served and the wines. Only the handful of establishments with a three-star designation take into account the "elegant surroundings": to merit three stars, a restaurant must approach perfection, and since perfection is an absolute, it includes, of necessity, the decor. The National Restaurant Association's designation of upscale eating places as "atmosphere restaurants" suggests a separation between form and content, as if the predominant tone of the place were the business of specialists not necessarily concerned with culinary matters—a feeling that the "atmosphere" has been added, as must have been sprayed on the wealth of minerals and vitamins promised on the nutrition panel of the cereal box containing an otherwise limp and tasteless product.

To suggest that "atmosphere" defines only the tony restaurants is to note the self-consciousness of that particular tone—and of "tone" in general. The diner once had its own atmosphere and it was indigenous—the diner was too long proletarian to desire or afford either injections or additives. Only when the diner became a distanced and analyzable phenomenon—an objective entity rather than a subjective acceptance—were impersonal spaces instantly patinated with essence of diner.

...

Richard Snow identifies two kinds of counter people: the youngsters and the veterans we associate with the nighttime diner. But as likely as not, that veteran was a woman. If the nocturnal loner was the male we suppose him to be, and was silent as must be wordless the manly disguise of an inner woud, his silence was in fact a message crying out for an addressee—a witness, an understanding. The woman behind the counter was that recipient, an Oedipal presence still, human warmth and comfort even at the tactful remove of responsive silence.

The rough-edged diner and the times that created it have passed, but an analysis of our dining habits will usually be able to trace their roots back to the diner. Hotel School theses, restaurant surveys and consumer attitude studies confirm that friendly service competes with quality of food as the prime requirement of those eating out: the mothering presence behind the diner's counter is still desired by some part of our subconscious to sweeten the experience of eating out. The family restaurant

may be such because families eat there, but it is also an extension of those families and the reason why families eat there. The waitress (hardly ever a waiter) is the smiling daughter, wife, mother who introduces herself as an intimate: "Hi. I'm Hazel, and I'll be your waitress this evening." Her function is to blur the distinction between eating at home and eating out (the food being moreover home-style, old-fashioned, like mother's, etc.). In a culture that is good at identifying and synthesizing the desiderative, this mothering need leads to "everything is all right" (cultures that have more pride in their culinary expertise and less concern with the creation of a homely atmosphere are unlikely to even assume that something might not be all right).

That intimate presence vanishes in the upscale locale. The "atmosphere" restaurant stresses its difference rather than attempting to replicate the familiarity of the home. In every gastronomic culture, the finer restaurant offers this kind of difference, and in each the one dining is likely to experience depersonalized, efficient service rather than the expression of a familiar warmth. Each culture's restaurant proposes an adventure, the lure of the unfamiliar. But if one thinks of the French, that adventure is mainly dependent on the food: the efficient impersonality of those serving acknowledges that nothing must interfere with it. In the "atmosphere" restaurant, the ambiance provides the first taste of adventure. The impersonal service and the (sometimes overwrought) decor are primary in separating the diner from the familiarity of home and even the home's surrogate. This separation carries a risk as well as a promise: it is an adventure whose spice, like that of more significant adventures, is a soupçon of danger.

Still other reminiscences of the diner persist in the "atmosphere" restaurant. The proletarian hamburger is most likely banished from its menu, but research indicates that meat remains the entrée of choice. But in this new venue, it must contend against the old primitivism of the diner that requires the beef to stand alone, not feminized by sauces or fancy preparations, but manly in its size—and manly because it is rare. Furthermore, the smiling reminiscence of home or the sumptuousness of the upscale dining room notwithstanding, a gastronomic culture with its roots in the diner still believes that good service means rapid service. At the start, the diner was a place in which to linger, and some of that social function remained. But whether or not the customer lingered, the choice had to be his alone, not the establishment's: across the land, the contact of the patron's buttocks with the seat still triggers the pouring of coffee into the cup before him. Whereas the French will idle away the time before each dish in pleasant reminiscences of meals past, or erudite speculation about what is still to come (just as they will slow their eating through patient analysis of the dish before them), the diner's customer expects the food to arrive sequentially, on time, and not to interfere with whatever other occupation may engage him. Here, too, the "atmosphere" restaurant is conditioned by cultural imperatives, and when its service lapses into leisure it is suspect of lapsing in graver ways as well.

Times are changing, of course. American cuisine has experienced a host of revolutions in the last quarter century: people are eating lighter dishes whose preparation requires greater skill and refinement, achieved at the expense of generational memories. The "fried" tradition, once held up by some as excellently and preeminently American, is rapidly disappearing in a tidal wave of cholesterol revulsion. But beyond the large and internationalized urban centers, there persists a way of eating whose still visible watermark is the once unchallenged diner.

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The Purgatory of Translation

continued from page 5

metrical complexity can be tolerated, since the rhymes themselves are much more salient.

The difficulty of perceiving the rhyme scheme is further compounded by Pinsky's decision to make extensive use of enjambment, not only between lines but between tercets as well. Enjambment also has the effect of obscuring line ends, thus making it harder still to keep track of the consonantal rhymes. Pinsky explains in his "Translator's Note" that he allowed himself this liberty in order to try to reproduce the "tremendous forward movement" that characterizes Dante's verse. However, this loses sight of the fact that the effect of forward movement in the original Italian is produced not by enjambment but by anticipation of the rhymes coming up in the succeeding lines. Enjambment does indeed produce an effect of forward movement, but it is a very different sort of effect from that which is produced by Dante's verse. An enjambed line spills over into the next line: like a runner racing past successive distance markers, the sentence rushes onward, ignoring the line breaks, breaking down the metrical pattern. In terza rima, in contrast, every line is lightly but firmly end-stopped, producing a momentary feeling of rest in the flow of syllables, with the rhyme at the same time anticipating and preparing for the next tercet. The movement forward thus takes place line by line, while within that movement there are moments of stasis in the forward flow of syllables at the end of each line. Furthermore, the lines do not only look forward. Rather, each line looks either forward or backward or both, depending on its place in the rhyme scheme: the middle line of a tercet looks forward to the next tercet; the first line looks both backward to the preceding tercet and forward to the final line of its own tercet; and the third line looks backward to both of the preceding lines it rhymes with. The effect is one of alternating movement and stasis, rather like the motion of waves, but with an overall forward movement, as the rhyming triplets succeed one another in time.

In short, by using prosodically complex lines and extensive enjambment, Pinsky unintentionally reduces the saliency of the rhyme scheme. This in turn tends to obscure line breaks and the boundaries between tercets, ultimately producing an effect quite different from that of the original. Pinsky's verse, in contrast to Dante's, moves forward spasmodically by fits and starts, coughing and spluttering as it goes, like a car with engine trouble. Ideally, what would need to be done instead, in order to use coda rhyme successfully to reproduce in English the effects of terza rima, would be to reinforce its somewhat weak effect by using a preponderance of prosodically regular end-stopped lines and a minimum of enjambment.

It would be as well to make it clear at this point that nothing I have said concerning the mechanics of Pinsky's versification is intended to suggest that his *Inferno* is not a valuable addition to the list of available translations. In certain respects, Pinsky's version is superior to any that I am familiar with. It has a weight and density—a *gravitas*—that is capable of producing passages of remarkable power. The more horrific passages, in particular,

fare well in his hands. Perhaps it is a reflection of the time we live in that descriptions of pain, torture, degradation and shame should so often inspire our poets to their best efforts. Perhaps it has something to do with the knowledge that human beings have succeeded in this century in creating conditions here on earth that surpass in true horror anything that Dante was able to devise for his Hell. Pinsky does not spare us the notably unforgiving character of Dante's Hell and that somehow seems appropriate, too. Certainly, if one were to update the *Inferno*, our century would be able to contribute a disproportionately large number of truly evil characters whom one would have no hesitation in leaving there to suffer their appropriate punishments for eternity. Contemplating these monsters, it is quite comforting to share, if only momentarily, Dante's absolute certainty that they too are doomed to suffer the tortures of the damned.

It would be extraordinary, in a translation of some 4,000 lines, if one were not able to find a few howlers and while it may seem nit-picking, if not downright mean, to seize on these and hold them up for inspection, it nevertheless has to be done, for the simple reason that understanding both the best and the worst that a writer has to offer are usually bound inextricably together. Line 61 in Canto I reads in the Italian: *Mentre ch'è rovinava in basso loco*, which Pinsky translates as "While I was ruining myself back down to the deep." Not only is this a mistranslation—the verb *rovinare* here is not reflexive and clearly means in this context 'to rush or plunge down'—but worse yet the English means absolutely nothing. Similarly, line 37 of Canto II, *E qual è quei che disvuol ciò che volle*, is translated: "And then, like one who unchooses his own choice." This is far too literal: the verb *disvolere* means "to no longer want," hence the whole phrase means basically "to change one's mind," but in any case the translation as it stands is, once again, not English, though in this instance just barely comprehensible. Lines 32-36 of the translation continue: "And thinking again undoes what he has started/So I became: a nullifying unease/Overcame my soul on that dark slope and voided/The undertaking I had so quickly embraced." This whole passage is at best obscure, but the phrase "a nullifying unease" is truly barbaric and to claim that it "overcame my soul" is nothing short of comic. In the famous inscription at the entrance to Hell at the beginning of Canto III, line 3, *per mi si va tra la perduta gente*, is translated: "THROUGH ME YOU ENTER THE POPULATION OF LOSS." Admittedly, the phrase *perduta gente*—"a people that is lost, or damned"—is awkward to translate, but just about anything would be preferable to the population of loss, which once again flirts dangerously with meaninglessness. In line 13, Canto IV, the phrase *nel cieco mondo* is translated into "the sightless zone." In this context *cieco* clearly means "devoid of light." Surely, with a little work something less obscure than "the sightless zone" could have been found. Line 10 of Canto VII, *Non è sanza cagion l'andare al cupo* is translated: "Bound for the pit, this is no causeless trek." This seems like a needlessly eccentric way of saying that there is a reason for Dante's descent into Hell, which

is the sense of this line in the particular context. A little further on, line 18, *che'l mal de l'universo tutto insacca*, is translated as "That sacks up all the universe's ills." To translate the verb *insaccare*, which in this context would mean something like "to bundle up," as to sack up, an expression not heretofore known in the English language, demonstrates once again the unintentionally comic results of a too literal translation.

Perhaps enough examples have been provided to allow me to make two general points. The first is that in translating between languages such as Italian and English, it is tempting, but quite dangerous, to assume that etymologically related roots can simply be carried over from one language to the other with even roughly equivalent meanings. Such a strategy will frequently work, but not often enough to warrant complacency. Examples such as those just mentioned could have been avoided simply by asking the question: "Is this good English?" Second, Pinsky is altogether too fond of abstract phrases that are either devoid of any clear meaning or so obscure in the given context as to be uninterpretable. Expressions such as a nullifying unease, the sightless zone, and so forth, should have been ruthlessly exorcized before publication. Again, this is not even a question of good translation: such locutions are bad English, regardless of what they were intended to translate.

These particular difficulties are perhaps symptomatic of a more general problem that pervades this translation: Pinsky simply can't make up his mind whether to write modern, idiomatic American English or to write high-style "literary" English. On the one hand, he uses contemporary words such as shit, crawl, etc. along with modern contracted forms such as don't, you'll, and so forth; on the other hand, he uses archaic words such as alack, nay, wherefore, accursed, wont, etc., along with old-fashioned literary diction such as may it not displease you, I beg it of you with all my heart, had my years been more, woe to say, be off with you, and so forth. These are of course the extremes. In between, he uses for the most part an oddly stilted diction which appears to be an attempt to negotiate a compromise between contemporary, casual speech and a more elevated literary language. How else can one explain lines like the following: "...My own flesh was but still/A little while denuded of my shade"; "Having said this, she turned toward me the splendor/Of her eyes lucent with tears—"; "Until the angel's conclusive trumpet sounds"; and so forth. Yet at other times, particularly in purely descriptive passages, Pinsky is able to find a more idiomatic and straightforward diction of the sort one might expect to find in a good modern poem.

It seems quite likely that the explanation for these inconsistencies lies in the deeply ambivalent feelings with which contemporary poets view formal verse. We live in an age in which it is considered almost as quaint for a poet to master the art of writing formal verse as it is for a politician to write his or her own speeches. Poets no longer write sonnets as a matter of course. Hence they have no training in adapting the contemporary language to the requirements of metrical verse forms. Faced with the task of writing formal verse, perhaps they lapse almost unconsciously into the diction of a

century ago—or into some peculiar hybrid of modern and archaic poetic diction. The existence of such attitudes may also help to account for the extraordinary metrical complexity of Pinsky's verse. Since formal verse is considered by so many in the literary establishment to be virtually taboo, it must be made "difficult"—if it is to be written at all—so that it will not be thought that one is merely writing pretty verse. In part, then, the stilted diction and the metrically complex lines characteristic of this and other recent attempts at writing formal verse may be a form of hypercorrection on the part of poets who no longer have at their command an instinctive and automatic ability to organize the contemporary language into verse forms.

Despite these criticisms, however, Robert Pinsky deserves our gratitude for having the nerve to attempt a new verse translation of the *Inferno*. It may be that formal verse is as defunct as the quill pen. Alternatively, it may be that the appearance of this translation is an indication that the time has come for poetry to renew itself by returning to the traditional sources of its power: meter, rhyme and formal structure.

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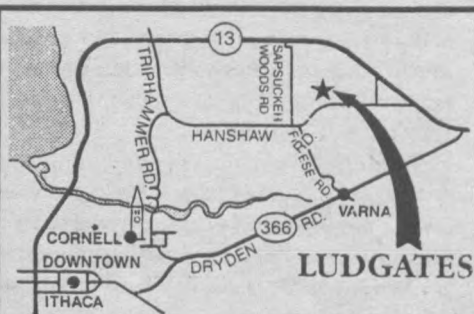
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What It Was Like

Kenneth Evett

...Continued from April issue

For a newly married man of my generation, the onset of World War II in Europe made planning for the future in this country provisional; so when the Art Director of the Denver Public Schools offered me a stop-gap job teaching in a local high school, I accepted. I stayed with that onerous occupation until the Federal Section of Fine Arts, in one of its last bountiful acts before being eliminated, came to my rescue with a \$1300 mural commission for the Humboldt, Nebraska Post Office. With the prospect of this sum to sustain us for a year, I quit the teaching job at the end of the term; my wife and I gathered our belongings, along with the new member of the family, our four-month-old son Dan, and returned to the more amenable bohemian life of Colorado Springs.

Highbrow mystery writer Lillian Bueno DeLatorre offered us the use of her house for the summer in exchange for taking care of her pair of neurotic mother and daughter dogs. With a house at our disposal and a room to spare, I invited my gifted younger brother Bob to stay with us while he studied music at Colorado College with visiting composer Roy Harris. He welcomed the chance, though he might have hesitated had he known that one day Elizabeth, the daughter dog, driven by God only knows what perverted canine impulse, would jump onto the couch and pee on him while he was lying there absorbed in a book. Despite that event, he lived with us until he was taken in as a member of the Harris menage of student slaves. Through Bob's connection with the Harris family, we became friends with the composer and his pianist wife, Johanna. That contact eventually opened the way for us to enter a wider arena of American cultural life.

One of the visiting critics at the Fine Arts Center in 1941 was Woodstock artist Arnold Blanch. He casually suggested that I might benefit from exposure to the creative life of the Woodstock Art Colony and proximity to New York museums and galleries. With all the heedless impetuosity of the young, we decided that this was a good idea. After signing up for artist John Carols' studio-house for the winter, we bought a lumbering trailer to carry our worldly goods and set forth in our now domesticated convertible on a pilgrimage to the art meccas of the East. While my wife held our seven-months-old baby on her lap, we made our laborious way across the country. Alternately held back or goosed onward by the trailer, we stopped overnight in primitive cottage camps and frequently pulled off the road at wayside diners to warm the child's milk bottle. When we reached Saugerties, New York, five miles from our destination, one wheel from the trailer broke loose and rolled down the main street ahead of us. We were dragged in ass-backward ignominy to a garage for repairs but finally made it to our new mountainside home. As a minor footnote to the history of travel and finance, the trip took nine days and cost sixty-nine dollars.

Compared with the rugged forms of the Colorado Rockies, the surrounding Catskill mountains seemed tame, but I was surprised and impressed by the brilliant fall colors of the region. I spent my days working on the Nebraska mural and knocking down dead pines in the surrounding woods, then dragging them back to the house where I sawed them into lengths that would fit into the pot-

bellied stove that was our sole source of heat.

We were introduced to the local artists and soon discovered that the Colony was divided into warring factions of Conservatives, Stalinists, and Trotskyites. As a born naïf, influenced by the pro-Soviet writings of the Red Dean of Canterbury and Bernard Shaw, given to Calvinist certitudes about my favorite worthy causes, and aware that Russian armies were fighting on our side against the Nazis, I had no trouble joining the Stalinist camp. At that time, the Woodstock political radicals were also the aesthetic radicals, though nothing going on in the Colony compared with the revolutionary innovations then brewing in New York. A few of the local painters were breaking away from

torian poked fun at the neo-Baroque interlocking rhythms of my mural studies, but he provided continental insights that were new to me. After the war, he helped in the return of art work stolen by the Nazis and eventually wound up as Art Librarian for the Library of Congress.

I enrolled in a gas-welding class and soon landed a job in a local factory that produced motor mounts for DC3s. There I had a chance to test my fanciful notions about the working class in a real proletarian environment. We worked eight hours a day, six days a week on daytime, swing, and graveyard shifts. I joined the union and formed an improbable ideological alliance with a lathe operator who was also a tough, hardline Communist organizer from Central



Kenneth Evett, *The Welder*

the realist mode of the Thirties. Philip Gauston and Anton Refregier were experimenting with Cubist usages, and Reginald Wilson employed flat planes of color in a style derived from Matisse. I picked up on a few of these concepts and had an intimation of the elitist pride that goes with being in the vanguard.

On a fine late autumn day, December 7, 1941, we were invited to a party where we played tennis, drank applejack, discussed the shattering news from Pearl Harbor, and pondered our uncertain futures in a world at war. For me, there was nothing for it but to complete the mural, roll it up, take it to Nebraska for installation, and then move to Colorado Springs in the hope of finding a defense job to support my family and, incidentally, to avoid the draft.

After limping across the country in our old car, dodging tornadoes in the Midwest, we finally made it back to the Springs. We rented a one-room apartment that shared a bathroom with the other tenants on the same floor, a German emigré art historian and his elegant English wife, a niece of Eric Gill. They were nudists, and the third floor scene was sometimes illuminated by the flash of their suntanned backs and bottoms as they scooted down the hall. The art his-

Europe. The rest of my fellow workers were mostly Southerners who had moved north to find defense jobs. At first they were friendly, but after I began to make sketches of factory life to relieve the tedium of the endlessly repetitive work, they became suspicious, thinking I might be a spy. When I wrote a letter to the local paper protesting the expulsion of a black woman from a certain area in a downtown movie house, they concluded that I was a subversive Communist and sent an emissary during the graveyard shift to warn me that they intended to tar and feather me, Southern style, at some future date. This revelation of lumpen proletarian prejudice had a cooling effect on my superficial Marxist fervor, and, although the threat was never carried out, I spent the rest of my time in the factory under a pall of dread.

By contrast, when off work, I was leading a completely different kind of existence. The Fine Arts Center had given me a studio where I spent my free daytime hours converting my factory sketches into oil paintings, and we had moved into a section of an exotic mansion that Roy Harris had acquired as another temporary stop in his divagations around the western world. Before

moving to Colorado, Harris had been Composer-in-Residence at Cornell. He had settled his family and followers in a big old house on Lake Street before moving on to Telluride House, where my brother was later sustained by a fellowship. After accepting a new job as Composer-in-Residence at Colorado College, Harris transported his entourage back to Colorado Springs and bought a house designed and lived in by the son of former President Chester A. Arthur. Situated on a small mesa, the house opened out to a view of a private park, Fountain Creek, and Pikes Peak. There was a separate apartment in the north wing, and Harris suggested we move in. We formed a neighborly bond with the family next door, and once more were invited to parties with the local aristocrats and visiting celebrities from the East Coast.

In those days Harris was riding a wave of chauvinist patriotic feeling. He was hailed as a native genius from the western plains who expressed our national spirit in his music. Commissioned by such diverse organizations as the Boston Symphony and the Paul Whiteman Band, he was written up in *Time* magazine as America's number-one composer. Other musicians came to visit; among them, Vincent Persechetti, Antonia Bricca, John Edmunds, and the number-two composer, Aaron Copland. Both Harris and Copland had studied in Paris with Boulanger, both were using American folk tunes in their compositions, and the two of them produced works of poignant significance for our generation. In one of the ironic shifts of American taste and fame, Copland eventually surpassed Harris in frequency of performances and took over the number-one spot for the time being.

Of all the visitors that summer, none was more important to our future plans than the publisher W. W. Norton and his wife, Polly (professionally known as M. D. Herter Norton, translator of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*). They had driven out west to retrieve their daughter, Annie, from a Wyoming dude ranch and wanted to deposit her in the Harris household until it was time to send her back to New York for the fall term at the Brearley School. We became friends with all the Norton family and later on renewed our acquaintance in their Grammercy Park apartment in New York.

In the summer of '43, my pregnant wife was obliged to go to Cambridge to assist her mother who was recovering from an operation. After her departure with our son, I suddenly felt liberated from domestic responsibility and, being bored to death with factory life, I was willing to face whatever the future had to offer in order to escape from it. Behaving like a dead-beat dad, I moved next door and engaged in the charged musical and emotional life of the Harris menage. I spent the summer painting images of war workers for an exhibition at the Fine Arts Center and, with the help and encouragement of photographer Lucille Dandeleit, managed to get the show on the walls. After the opening, I parted from my Colorado friends, sold the green convertible, packed my bags, and boarded the Rock Island Rocket for Chicago. While antelope, startled by the train, dashed off over the desolate terrain of eastern Colorado, I sat in the tail-end parlor car, drinking beer and watching my beloved Rocky Mountains fade from view.

Kenneth Evett, painter and emeritus professor of art at Cornell University, is a member of the National Academy of Design, New York City, from which he recently won an award for merit at the 170th members' show.