

# The New Orphic Review

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# The New Orphic Mandate

Ernest Hekkanen

**WHY COMMIT** the foolish act of publishing a new review in the dying days of the 20th Century, when there is such a glut of magazines on the market and apparently not enough readers to go around?

The answer to that question is, in part, addressed in Jurgen Joachim Hesse's article "An Essay on Self-Publishing." In Canada, as well as in some regions of the States, venues for voices — in particular, new, ethnic or off-beat voices — are threatened with extinction due to what might be termed the mainstreaming of literature, a market-driven phenomenon meant to sell a ubiquitous, readily identifiable and easily accessible voice to as many consumers as possible. Also, many venues for voices are supported by academic institutions and/or government agencies, which have hidden and in some cases not so hidden mandates having to do with authority structures, scholarship, community standards, political correctness, the *MLA Style Manual*, Canadian content and other odious types of quotas, none of which have anything to do with good literature.

*The New Orphic Review* intends to buck that trend. Let me quote a passage from my book *Turning Life into Fiction: an aesthetic manifesto*:

Too often, in North America, creative writing programs, and publishers, put too much emphasis on *finding one's voice*. That is comparable to physicists who are bent upon trying to find the ultimate sub-atomic particle that gives rise to everything else; anthropologists who are determined to find the indivisible ancestor who has given birth to the species; or metaphysicians who are engaged in tracking down the original singularity — be He God or the Big Bang. There is something faulty with the underlying assumption and, in large part, this is culturally and economically driven.

The reason creative writing programs, and publishers, preach the maxim that one must *find one's voice* is due largely to an unquestioned philosophic and, indeed, psychological predisposition that has since acquired economic trappings. To be a person with one voice is to be a person who is somehow more stable, more integrated. To be a person who hears more than one voice is to be a person of schizophrenic nature or split personality — in other words, a less integrated individual. For instance, we tend to avoid people who purport to hear voices. They are perceived to be a bit crazy, a bit loopy — that is, worthy of distancing ourselves from. This attitude, unfortunately, has carried over into the realm of literature, and it has been given validity by the publishing industry. Once a writer has acquired a public voice, such as Stephen King, Joseph Heller or John Irving, publishers like such a writer to continue pumping out books with that same voice so as not to confuse, or possibly antagonize, the reading public. Readers, apparently, want a writer to have a single voice so they can go back to that writer time and time again, knowing they can find pretty much the same voice. It is comparable to going back to a well to drink water flavored by the same minerals. We get used to a certain taste and we want more of the same, apparently.

The difficulty is that voice can become a straitjacket that a writer must wear — or, if you prefer, it can become a kind of business suit. I find the single voice approach to writing rather tiresome. Once I've read a couple of books by a writer with the same old voice, I find I can't endure reading any more of his books. I tend to think: "Oh, I've read this before. He hasn't learned any new tricks." This can be

said of Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Gertrude Stein and John Steinbeck. All of them had very recognizable voices that changed very little from book to book....

One of the reasons Ernest Hemingway has made himself an object of so many contests devoted to mimicking, if not mocking, his voice is because Hemingway began to ape himself, to become his own Hemingway clone. He became a caricature of himself and so made himself a convenient object of ridicule and, to some extent, it probably contributed to his suicide. One way to take back definitive control of your life is by committing suicide. One way to take back possession of your voice is by silencing it! Anyway, in our confusion and despair, we tend to think so.

By the time of his death, Hemingway had become an industry. He did not own his voice as much as did his publisher. He couldn't have broken out of that mold if he had wanted to, for his critics and image-makers would have said: "You must be out of your cotton-picking mind, Ernie. This isn't like you!" That, to some extent, is why *The Garden of Eden* was published so long after his death, for it was feared that it would damage his image. And yet, how refreshing that book is after slogging through all the others that parade *ad nauseam* his machismo and American swagger. However, think how much better that novel might have been had Hemingway been brave enough to drop his Hemingwayisms. It was simply too late for him to do so. His Hemingwayisms had straitjacketed him. He had become deadly earnest about his voice.

*The New Orphic Review* will endeavor to remove the straitjacket of voice by entertaining a myriad of voices. It will endeavor to entertain a variety of approaches and styles, as well as a broad range of content. Alongside established voices will be voices heard for the first time. The review will refuse to be categorized or confined or censored. That, in part, is why the editor-in-chief has decided not to accept financial support from branches of government, institutions or corporations, because it is the nature of such organizations to wield control. However, the review will encourage advertisers to lend their support, with the understanding that they will be allowed no control or influence over the contents of the magazine.

I should probably indicate, very briefly, why I have decided to call the magazine you have in your hands, *The New Orphic Review*. The most important word in the Orphic tradition is "theory." Nowadays, when we use the word "theory," we are talking about a hypothesis assumed for the sake of argument or investigation, or a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles

offered to explain phenomena. However, theory once meant something entirely different. In his weighty tome, *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell has this to say:

[Theory] was originally an Orphic word, which [F.M.] Cornford interprets as 'passionate sympathetic contemplation....' For Pythagoras, the 'passionate sympathetic contemplation' was intellectual, and issued in mathematical knowledge. In this way, through Pythagoreanism, 'theory' gradually acquired its modern meaning; but for all who were inspired by Pythagoras it retained an element of *ecstatic revelation*.<sup>1</sup>

"Theory" allows a meditator's consciousness to pervade the object of meditation – to enter into it, to *know* its essence. Later, this type of knowing proved fundamental to the Gnostic tradition.

Before I go any further, I would like to say that this review is indebted to Pythagoras, as indeed much of Western Civilization, even in this age of degeneration, is. Pythagoras was born in Samos around 580 B.C. Legend informs us that he was introduced to the Mysteries of Isis by the Magi in Egypt, travelled to India to learn aspects of the Mind from Brahmins, spent time in Palestine where he was taught by Rabbis the Inner Traditions of Moses and journeyed on to Phoenicia where he had the Adonic Mysteries conferred on him.<sup>2</sup> And, in addition to this, he is credited with the Pythagorean Theorem, which has built into it a system of mystical revelation.

*The New Orphic Review* will endeavor to follow in this tradition. Emphasis will be placed on *passionate sympathetic contemplation* or, if you will, epiphany. The aim will be that of synthesis. The muse, for us, includes all of the arts, not only the visual, literary, musical and performing varieties, but also those dealing with mathematics, science, philosophy and religion. Any art form that will further the elasticity of the human mind is an art form acceptable to *The New Orphic Review*.

This is not the first New Orphic movement. In the early part of the 20th Century, Guillaume Apollinaire spearheaded a similar movement, more by accident than by design, when he decided in 1910 to dub certain painters Orphists, much to the chagrin of some of them. According to Virginia Spate:

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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1961, p. 52

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie and David R. Fideler, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library*; and Thomas Stanley, *Pythagoras, his life and teachings*

The Orphists conceived of their art as an expression of 'modern consciousness' and were influenced by contemporary science, technology, literature, and philosophy as well as by the actual experience of living in the contemporary world. Their awareness of this world was of such complexity that it could not be embodied in structures which show only finite things in one place at one moment in time. They wanted to express what was called 'simultanism', the mind's grasp of the simultaneous existence of an infinitude of interrelated states of being.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the New Orphic movement promoted by Apollinaire, which put so much emphasis on pure painting, this review will attempt to attain states of theory primarily through the use of words, hoping it will lead to discoveries of one sort or another. *The New Orphic Review* will attempt through words and pictures to reacquaint people with a sense of awe, with a sense of mystery — a prerequisite to the attainment of theory. It will be open to nearly any approach or genre, just as long as the submitted work has inner coherence and ultimately leads to synthesis.

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-figurative Painting in Paris 1910-1914*, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.3



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## A Sailor's Pay

Jack Cady

ONLY THE sea remains the same. The city of Portland grasps its way toward the surrounding hills of Maine where once stood the cold green of conifers. The port hums with offloading of goods from container ships where once floated only trawlers and lobster boats. I return to a place where darkness is old, if not ancient. I carry a worn claspknife, one blade broken, but with a small marlinespike that is still intact.

The past compels me to deal with shades. Curious matters are reported in the press. I am the last man alive who understands them.

And, the coast of Maine is no wrong place to look for specters. Ships have passed the Portland Head for three hundred and fifty years. This harbor has recorded a thousand wrecks, but it has not recorded wrecks that happened in darkness when the sea swallowed hulls in one enormous gulp. At Portland Head the sea builds during northeast storms. Waves vacuum the bottom.

Expiation is played out in hideous resurrection. A Coastguardsman named Tommy pilots a steel hulled forty footer, twin diesels screaming wide at twenty-two hundred rpm. An engineman named

Case dies horribly. A seaman named Alley fails a task, and an engineman named Wert turns coward; while a madman howls.

The newspaper reports that fishermen report ghosts. It does so tongue-in-cheek, inferring that the fishermen are drunk. I'll allow they may be drunk, but that doesn't mean their vision is unclear.

My name is Victor Alley. Immediately after W.W.II, I was stationed here, doing harbor patrols from the Coast Guard base in South Portland. I was a very young man, and this is a young man's story.

When you are young, and when the world asks you to go into action, mistakes happen. Unseasoned men ride the great urgency of action and emotion, responding to feelings of duty and feelings of guilt. They do not have words or balance in emergencies. Sometimes people die in order for young men to learn how to handle themselves. Two days after my 19th birthday our story went like this:



Winter darkness shrouded the inshore islands, and enclosed the harbor and channel and buoy yard at the Coast Guard Base in South Portland. I shot pool in the barracks and hoped my girlfriend would phone. We had already made our evening harbor patrol. The boats were secured. When the call came over the p.a. to proceed with our boat I did not even rack my cue. Just laid it on the table and ran. Our Cap got fussy when those boats didn't move quick.

As I grabbed foul weather gear, Wert still searched for his. Then he followed, trotting, not running. His rating called him a third class engineman, but nobody ever saw him get his hands dirty. He was football-player big, with a moon face.

Case, our first class engineman, had the engines cracking and stuttering as I made it to the boat basin. Beneath the floodlights of the boat basin the forty footer seemed more like a tiny ship than a big boat. It was painted white as snow on mountains, and it carried a high bow, a real wave buster. It sported low rails and plenty of working room aft. When we jumped aboard, and I cast off, our bosun mate, Tommy, sapped it hard.

Those engines could scream like animals. The stern grabbed deep, digging in with the twin roar of diesels as the boat moved out. Those engines were still cold. Tommy knew better. He cleared the end of the pier and cut through shallow water, cross-cutting flooded tideflats to the channel. Spray rose luminescent in the darkness. I climbed up beside Tom. He was hitting it just way too hard.

"You'll drag the bottom out," I yelled. I could feel fingers of rock reaching toward the hull. Tommy looked kind of crazy. Tall and

skinny with thick black hair like a Portuguese. Just crazy. He muttered a name. He stood at the helm totally concentrated, and motioned me away.

I stepped aft. The engine ran at least two-thirds. Tom pushed it that way until we made the channel, and then he ran the engines full. They screamed in overspeed, the bow high and rock steady in the hard hand of the water. Case tapped my shoulder, and we both moved forward to be away from the scream of engines. We did not know that Wert tagged along behind us.

"The Portland cops called. We're after a boat," Case told me. "Guy who stole it killed his old lady with a knife. He's got their kid in the boat with him. They think."

"Who thinks?"

"The cops didn't find a kid's body. The kid and all of her clothes are missing."

Tommy did not let up. He held it wide open in the middle of the channel, heading seaward. Distant lights of Portland and South Portland started looking fuzzy, the way they do just before winter fog arrives.

Wert interrupted us. The All-American Boy. His voice practically bubbled with excitement. "This beats towing in broken down fishing boats. A murderer."

"Get back to those engines," Case told him. "Don't take your eyes off that oil pressure for a second."

"If we're going to have a murderer, we'd ought to have a gun." Wert acted conversational.

"You want a gun, join the Army," I told him.

Wert just asked for it, leaving those engines at those rpms, and then refusing to hurry when Case gave an order.

"You done it this time," Case told Wert. He literally turned Wert around and gave him a shove aft. Then he turned back to me. "He lies better than I tell the truth. Waste of ink to put him on report." Case was tense, and that was unusual. He was mostly easy going, a guy without enemies. Wert even liked him. He was the kindest man I ever knew. I'd learned a lot from him. Case had broad shoulders, broad face, nice smile and not much of a beer belly.

"I gotta talk to him." Case motioned at Tommy.

"The engines?"

"Sure," Case said, "and some other stuff."

I figured the engines were either okay, or wrecked by now. "What are we doing?" I asked Case.

"We're hurrying to put the cork in the bottle. We're blocking the seaward side. The killer can't escape through the harbor mouth. At least that's part of it."

"What's the other part?"

Case looked like he wondered if I would understand. "Tommy's acting weird," Case said. "He sorta gets his beanie unscrewed in emergencies. This ain't just about some nut and a stole boat."

I almost understood. I knew the story. During the war Tommy served on a cutter escorting convoys. On a dark night a freighter was torpedoed. There were survivors in the water. Tommy had the deck on the fantail because the gunnery officer was forward.

It was an awful story. Tommy spotted the survivors, and sonar picked up the German sub at the same time. The sub hovered a hundred feet down, directly below the freighter's surviving crew. The captain of the cutter made a command decision. He depth charged the sub. Men struggling in the water turned to bloody pulp. A few survivors on the outskirts of the explosions did not die. The captain made the decision, but Tommy gave the order to drop the charges. It was one of those things that nobody talks about, and everybody seems to know about.

"Tell him not to get too weird." I didn't know what else to say.

"C'mon," Case said. "Let's talk that poor fella out of wrecking those engines."

I followed Case, and he climbed up beside Tommy who leaned way out around the spray shield. The engines screamed, and the bow rode so high at this speed that he could not see a thing. Case put one hand on Tommy's shoulder, grinned at Tom like Tom had just told a pretty good joke, and then Case eased the controls. Speed came off, the bow dropped, and the boat skidded a little sideways. We'd come far enough that we could see the lighthouse at Portland Head.

"Take a strain," Case said. "Guy with a wild hair crossways can't figure anything out."

"The police boat is out checking the islands," Tommy said. "If that guy gets in behind the islands we've lost him." He did not even hear Case.

"Get it figured," Case said. "What you're doing ain't working." He paused as he figured the next move. He looked toward the misty lights that told of fog. "At best we've got an hour. Go up to the Head along the edge of the channel, then double back along the other side. He won't be riding the middle of the channel."

"I want a piece of that clown." Tommy's voice sounded in control, but still sounded a little crazy.

It came to me, watching him, that Tommy had been quiet for too long. Been holding everything in. I figured he didn't care about the murderer. He just wanted to hit something that needed hitting.

"Cruise it slow," Case said. "Use the searchlight, because he'll be running without lights."

It's a big harbor, nearly as big as Boston. You could hide two hundred lobster boats in this harbor, and the odds on finding even a dozen of them would be pretty long.

"Because the guy's crazy," Case said. "He's runnin', but I doubt he's going to hide. If he hides we won't find him."

The radio crackled. Then the crackle blanked as one of the cutters gave its departure message. I could not figure out why headquarters decided to send a cutter. That cutter would do no good out here. It drew maybe twelve feet of water, and where we were going there was only wading room. Maybe the radar on the cutter would help.

We cruised the starboard side of the channel as far as Portland Head, then turned around and cruised the other side coming back. Fog gathered. An occasional horn or whistle sounded. Fog settled from above until it finally pressed against the water. It was thick above, thinner at the waterline.

A thousand-to-one shot, but there seemed nothing else to do except search the islands. Dull, freezing work. As the ice fog gathered the searchlight became useless. The fog did not lift after nearly five hours. It looked like it was going to be another one of those cold and futile nights.

Wert's teeth chattered. "It's cold."

"It's November."

"Take us home, Tommy."

"Go sit on an engine."

We traded off watching-standing in the bow. Tommy kept the engines barely turning. He searched along the beaches of the dark islands. Didn't use the searchlight. We just stood in the bow and listened, hoping to hear the sound of a lobster boat's engine. It was about 0330 when the cutter called, reporting a target on its radar. A small boat moved along the South Portland side of the channel.

"Got him," Tommy said. "Let's get him good." Tommy had sort of settled down, but now he started to get all ruffled up again.

We were all tired, cold, and we had taken some spray five hours back. Nobody was wet, but nobody was exactly dry. Tommy shoved the rpms ahead, then lowered them a little as he realized he was being stupid. That boat was forty feet of steel hull. Not something to shove through fog at high speed.

The cutter talked us across the harbor and through the fog. We moved too quick, taking radar readings from the cutter. I don't trust radar, and I sure don't trust a set I'm not looking at. I always trusted Tommy.

As we overhauled the cutter we could see its searchlights swallowed by fog. Just beyond the lights, right on the edge of the lights, the lobster boat looked like a little ghost. It was weaving in and out past the rocks.

It's a cliff along there. High-walled and granite and straight up. The lobster boat made its way toward a notch not big enough to be a tiny cove. It was just a place where the rock face was broken away

and guys moored sometimes. We ran past the cutter, taking off speed, and coasted along the lobster boat. We were maybe twenty feet away.

The guy was hard to see in the dark and fog lying beneath that rock face. This close in our searchlight helped. I ran it over the boat and the numbers checked. This was the man.

The guy stood behind the wheel. He turned when our light hit him. He shook his fist and yelled, maybe daring us to come in. The lobster boat edged nearer the rock. I did not believe the guy was insane. He ran the boat too well, discounting the fact that he was where you shouldn't run a boat.

Then he turned his face full to mine, and I believed it. He was like an abandoned beast, like a dog that's been run over and is not yet numb in its dying. The guy's eyes didn't seem like eyes; just sockets; deep, empty, vacant.

Tommy moved in closer, maybe six or eight feet away. The old lobster boat kept chugging. We were so close I could see blistered paint in the glow of our running lights. The madman started howling.

"Can't head him off," Tommy said. "He'll beach that thing. There's nothing but rock in there."

"Beach him," Wert said. "That kid ain't on that boat."

"Get back to those engines."

"If he'd swiped the kid in that kind of hurry, you think he'd have time to pack her clothes?"

"Move it aft," Case told Wert. "Get back to those engines." He paused, like he was thinking about what Wert had said. I couldn't figure if Wert was right or not. He sort of seemed right. "When we figure what we're going to do," Case told Wert, "I'll come and let you know."

Wert laid aft.

"We'll use three of us," Case said. He laid it out. Tommy was to bring the boat close alongside. Three of us would jump. I was to go forward and get the kid, who had to be in the wheelhouse. Wert would kill the engine on the lobster boat. Then Wert was supposed to help Case with the madman.

"And Tommy," Case said, "you hold steady. Because man, if he puts that thing on the rocks we're going to need you."

"He's got a knife."

"Yep," Case said, "and I got myself one hell of a big crescent wrench." He turned aft, yelling at Wert who stood beside the engines looking determined. Wert rubbed a fist into the open palm of his other hand.

When Tommy closed I jumped. The lobster boat ran in the shadow of the rock face. It loomed over me, darker than the rest of the dark. As I hit I felt the lobster boat shudder and rub the rock someplace deep. I lost my balance. We were so close-in that I actually

shoved back to my feet by pushing on the rock face; while somewhere behind me Tommy yelled, "Left rudder. Left rudder."

I came from the bow, around the starboard side of the dinky wheelhouse. The madman stepped from the wheel to meet me. I was scared. Couldn't think of what to do, but my legs just ran me into him. Hit him like I was a fullback. He stumbled aft against Case who was on his knees. I think maybe Case sprained or broke an ankle. That lobster boat was just trash, the decks full of junk and gear. Tommy was still yelling, "left rudder, left rudder." I heard the forty's engines dig in as Tommy cut to port to give us running room. As the forty's stern slid past I looked up and across, into the pale moon face of Wert. He stood motionless. The guy looked frozen with fear, wide eyes staring. He hadn't jumped.

You never know — even after years you can never decide — if what you do is right. Everything happens so fast. If I didn't detest Wert so much, I would have listened to him. Maybe saved Case.

What happened is that I did what I'd been told. I grabbed the helm and threw it hard to port. The boat edged away from the rock. It handled sluggish, already sinking from the lick it took on the rocks. Forward of the wheel a red light burned in the little cabin. I was supposed to get the kid, and so I went down there. Old coats, old blankets, slickers and boots. A gush of water through the ruptured hull. No kid. I must have wasted half a minute. I turned back to the deck just as a searchlight from the cutter swept us, and just as the forty's engines started howling.

It all happened in slow motion, or that's the way it seems. The madman stood above Case, and the madman howled almost like the engines. He had both hands raised high together, holding one of those long, thin stakes that lobstermen use to pin fish in their traps. The forty roared someplace real close. I heard a bow wave, but you never hear a bow wave — not like that — unless it's pointed right at you. Case yelled something, tried to throw something at the madman, but you can't throw much when you're on your knees. I dived over Case, trying to tackle the madman. There was a shock, the lobster boat driven sideways, a crash of timbers; and a fish smell came off the deck as I rolled. Something, a lobster trap maybe, clipped me alongside the head. Then I was in water that is death-dealing cold, struggling to stay up.



The boat crew from the cutter took us aboard, dried us out and gave us clothes. At first I didn't remember much. I sat for a long time on the messdeck shivering and drinking coffee. Didn't see Tommy. Fig-

ured they were working on him. Didn't see Case. Saw Wert. He sat at a table facing me, sullen, wearing his own clothes. He'd got his feet wet, and he put them on a bench, rubbing his legs and rolling up the wet part of his dungarees so they came to his calf.

"There wasn't no kid. I told you. They beached what was left of that boat and there wasn't hide nor hair."

"What happened?" I couldn't remember anything. Then I started to remember a little.

"Tom lost his head and rammed you. Dumped you all in the water, then jumped in to pull you out. The forty's back there now, high and dry and cut wide open."

It was coming back now. "Case?"

Wert just plain looked sick. "Guy stabbed him. Tommy rammed you because he was trying to keep the guy from stabbing Case."

"The madman?"

"Jumped back and got himself killed when the bow of the forty pinched him."

And that's when the memory came clear of Wert's white face rising like a pale moon above the rail, the vacant look, the struggle and noise at my back and the roar of engines.

"Where were you?" I was getting cold again.

He had his story down pat. Like a first-grader reciting about Mary and the lamb. "We were about to jump, and the engines went rough. Case said to check it out because we couldn't afford to lose power. I checked, but before I could jump Tommy kicked it ahead." He turned his back to me, swinging away, and propped his leg up to inspect his toes.

They pulled me off of him, somebody said. Then their chief bosun sent me to wait it out on the fantail. Probably because I had shoes on and Wert didn't.

I went to the fantail figuring that things couldn't get any worse, and they got a million times worse right away.

Bodies are always stored on the fantail. I sat beside Case after I found which one he was. Kind of patted the old blanket he was wrapped in. I couldn't figure out why the best man I knew had to be dead. Wasn't thinking very straight.

Then I did start thinking straight, thinking about what I'd seen when I checked to see which one he was. Case was pretty tore up, but mostly just mangled. There was only one wound above the waist, and that was way above the heart, nearly in the left shoulder. That madman had not stabbed Case to death.

I'd always trusted Tommy. Tommy was my friend. He had taught me a lot. But, Tommy was the one who killed Case while trying to save him.

You never know if what you do is right, and that's especially true when you are young. You operate on the basis of what you know.



One thing I knew was that the local coroner was a lazy old drunk. Twice, while on Shore Patrol, we'd taken bodies to that coroner. He dumped them in a stainless steel tub, cut away the clothes, and said something like "This poor old buster drank hisself to death." I knew that coroner would do no autopsy.

If he saw a wound over the heart he would blame the madman. He'd not say a word about Tommy.

I pulled out my claspknife. It carried a marlinespike, about the same diameter as a stake that runs through lobster traps. Even today I can't believe my courage and ignorance. I stabbed Case, stabbed a dead man, right where the heart would be. It was just a little blue hole that did not bleed, but, what with arterial damage and salt water, none of the other wounds were bleeding.

I remember vaguely wondering how much jail time you could get for stabbing a dead man.



Years pass, but memory is relentless. Such an act wears on a man's soul. Sometimes the memory lies faded and dull among brighter memories of youth. At the same time, the memory never leaves. Maybe I did Tommy a favor, maybe not. The police filed no civil charges, and the court martial found him innocent. The court concluded that, although unable to save Case, he may well have saved me. The court did not like the destruction of an expensive boat.

Tommy came to a bad end. He started boozing when on liberty. We saw his tall frame and black hair bent over too many glasses of beer in too many sailor dives. He went AWOL for a month, was reclaimed from a drunk tank.

In those days the Coast Guard was a small and personal outfit. Our Cap tried to save Tommy by transferring him to a weather cutter. The Cap figured, since the cutter stayed on station for a month at a time, Tommy would have to stay sober in thirty-day stretches. Tommy slipped overboard one night as the cutter passed the Portland Lightship. The investigating board called it an accident.

And Wert came to an even more macabre end. On a night of no wind he wandered among buoys in the buoy yard. The buoys stood silent, the giant whistles, the lighted bells, the racks of nuns. Some were barnacled, waiting to be sand-blasted and red-lead. For no reason, and against known laws of physics, a lighted bell rolled on flat ground. It weighed maybe a ton, and it crushed Wert against the pavement of the storage area. There was not a breath of wind, but men on cutters swore they heard the bell toll, and clank, and toll.

When my hitch was up I did not reenlist, but fled from salt water. The next few years were dreary; odd jobs and bad jobs through the middlewest. I attended college at night, got married, finally graduated from college, got divorced. Nothing seemed to go exactly right. It came to me — in, of all places — the bus station in Peoria, that this awful incident of youth kept me from my true calling, the sea. I traded my bus ticket to Chicago for a ticket to Seattle. From Seattle I went to Ketchikan, fished salmon, then finally found a permanent berth on a tug hauling barges from Seattle to Anchorage. After many years I rose to master of my own vessel.

A lot of downeast sailors, mostly fishermen, drift into Seattle and Ketchikan and Sitka. On a snowy January afternoon in Sitka, forty years after the event, I heard stories from a couple of Maine men who vowed never again to enter Portland harbor. There was enough illumination in their drunken talk to convince me it was time to come to terms with the past. I booked a flight to Portland.

Through the years certain questions haunted that incident of youth. I thought about them on the plane. What happened to the child? What did Tommy see as he kicked the forty footer ahead? What, for that matter, did I see? I am old now, and am well acquainted with the way the mind manufactures illusions. What did Wert see? What caused a puritanical lobsterman to suddenly sink into the depths of insanity; for the lobstermen of Maine are usually stern and steady fellows.

After checking into a Portland hotel I went to the newspaper office and was extended every courtesy. The report from so many years ago seemed sketchy, but it did contain the names of men and the name of the child. The child, it was reported, had been taken away by her grandmother before the ugly murder.

So much time had passed it was unlikely the grandmother still lived. I searched the phone book. The grandmother was not listed, but the child's name was. Of course, she would now be a middle-aged woman. I phoned, made clumsy explanations, and she agreed to meet me for lunch.

To an aging man, the woman who met me in the hotel lobby seemed to shine with both dignity and beauty. The coast of Maine is hard on men, but often even harder on women. This slim lady's face was weathered, crow's-feet around bright gray eyes, and her hands showed that she was not afraid of work. Long, dark hair displayed streaks of gray, and her conservative gray dress fell well below the knee.

"It's a jigsaw puzzle," she told me once we were seated for lunch. "You must remember that I was little more than a baby."

"I wonder what is happening in the harbor," I said. "The newspaper plays this for laughs." Beyond the windows, banks of piled snow

lined streets that are asphalt now, but in my day were brick. Sun glistened on patches of ice, and the thermometer stood at zero.

"I know exactly," she told me. "I own a ship chandlery. The story comes together in bits and pieces. Men talk even when they want to keep quiet."

Men heard more than they saw. In winter darkness of early mornings, when ice fog covered the channel, fishermen reported the low sound of diesels. There would be a nearly hysterical cry of, "Left rudder. Left rudder." When that happened men became terrified, and minded their own craft. A radar screen may be completely blank, but no sailor trusts the things, and no sailor fails to react when his vision is muffled by fog.

The sound of engines would then rise to a roar, as men blindly threw their helms over to get away. Then would come a great rip and tearing of metal and wood; and then silence. Into the silence a voice would speak: "A sailor's pay. A sailor's pay."

Men reported the voice as unworldly, or as worldly as the voice of the sea. They then heard the diminishing struggle of men overboard.

"I'll tell what my grandmother told," the woman said. She smiled as if distracted. "The people of Maine have a reputation for being taciturn, but among themselves they chatter like jays." She hesitated, and then made a whispered confession. "I never married. Old-fashioned, maybe, and partly superstitious. My father was insane, my mother no better."

"If this is too difficult for you...."

"I never really knew them," she reminded me, "but my grandmother was my best friend."

Beyond the windows bright colors of automobiles contrasted with piled snow and sun-glazed streets. Tall buildings rose to cast dark shadows beside the busy docks.

"Maine used to resemble Alaska," the woman said. "In Alaska people still know each other."

She was right about that. There is still, in Alaska, the feeling that 'we are all in this together'. When Alaskans meet in improbable places, say Indiana or Australia, they either know each other, or find that they have mutual friends. It's a big state with a small population.

"This was an incident of war," she told me. "Or, maybe it was an incident of youth. The sailor named Tommy came to visit my grandmother on two occasions. He knew my father. During the war they both sailed from this port. My father served aboard a freighter. Tommy sought forgiveness for my father's death."

Old memories stirred. At last there seemed to be some sense to all of this.

Her father, it developed, was one of the survivors from the torpedoing when Tommy followed that fateful order to drop depth charges. Her father was concussed, suffering what must have been awful

brain damage. Her mother, who had a reputation for being fey, met his changed condition by sinking into a virulent brand of New England religion. She played the role of saint to his role of hapless sinner before an avenging God. It proved the wrong approach.

"I don't forgive my father," she said. "I don't even excuse him. There is no excuse for murder."

She was correct, of course. No one worth a dime resorts to murder, no matter how crazy he gets. Still, most murders come from situations and passions.

"Tommy believed himself doomed," the woman told me. "He felt that fate pushed him into a world where he was forced to kill my father. The depth charges failed, and it was terrible for him to think that he was forced to kill a man after failing to kill him the first time." She smiled, but the smile was small and tight. "Don't be fooled. If the roles were reversed my father might have done the same thing, and reacted in the same way."

The woman prepared to leave, returning to her everyday work and everyday life. "Try to think about the minds of the men," she said, "and think about the sea, because the incident is only that, an incident."

I saw that she did not know more than she told, but that she *thought* more than she would say.

"Darkness tries to kill light," she murmured. "That is the business of darkness." As I helped her into her coat she added: "Remember that all of you were very young. My father was twenty-five, and Tommy could have been little more."



I thought of the immemorial voice of the sea as I sought to rent a boat. The sea speaks with the sounds of thunder, or it is susurrus, or it hisses, or it murmurs. It is nearly as ancient as the earth. The sea has swallowed men who have spoken a thousand different languages: it has taken into its restless maw Persians, Phoenicians, Romans, Spaniards and Englishmen.

And I thought of Maine and of Portland Harbor while checking the engine of a rented workboat, that, like myself, neared the end of its working life. A thousand vessels have died in these harsh waters, while on land people erected crosses facing the sea. Many of the graves of Maine are invested only by memories.

And I thought of youth, and of the great passions and inarticulateness of youth. I did not wonder why Tommy felt the need to strike out. It is clear that he was quiet because he was too young to

mobilize words and alter his confusion. Little wonder he felt doomed.

And, as ice fog began to settle over the harbor around midnight, I thought of Wert. If the sea would not forgive Wert, if, in fact, the unforgiving sea had reached ashore for Wert by using a barnacled buoy, I could still understand. He had been a kid confronted by madness, and he had no experience with madness.

Finally, as I got underway, I thought of Case. He still stood in memory as the finest man I've known. I wondered if the memory were true.

The old boat ran smoothly enough. The gasoline engine pattered as I traced the starboard shoreline. Fog lay heavy above me, and tendrils of fog began to reach toward the surface of the restless and flowing water. The tide was running. Along the coast of Maine it will rise or drop seventeen feet during winter. I searched my memories, of Case smiling, teaching a young sailor how to bend lines, and of Case coaxing the roughness from an engine, as if the engine were a living thing.

Fog clustered on the rails and deck of the workboat. It froze in whitely glowing frost. Fog glazed the silent nuns which marked the channel. Small pieces of driftwood bobbed away from my low wake as I eased from the channel and toward the cliffs. After forty years it seemed a man would forget his local knowledge of rocks and current. Yet, I had total recall of the shoreline. I arrived at the scene of my worst memories.

When the small anchor held I cut the engine. Low sounds of moving water served as background for the muffled clank of a bell. In the far distance a ship's horn hooted, and from the shore a police siren wailed faint through the frozen night. Fog covered the water so absolutely that no light from the city penetrated this dark corner. No living man could discover me here. No living man would want to.

Faint and close astern a gasoline engine pattered. It was unmistakably a lobster boat headed toward this anchorage where sheer cliff gave way to broken rock face.

Fear is an old friend. I have known fear in a thousand storms. I have heard fear, and felt it, when my vessel's radio picked up the terrified voices of doomed men; men giving last loran positions as their ship took its final dive. Fear always stands near those who go to sea. At first you learn to bear it, then, finding its true nature and depth, you befriend it.

Somewhere in that fog a ghostly forty footer was even now being directed across the channel by radar from a ghostly cutter, a ship by now mothballed or sold for scrap. Somewhere close astern a spectral lobsterman pattered across the restless face of moving waters.

The sound of Tommy's diesels rose in the fog, as the sound of the lobsterman closed. The sounds converged, and it was then the lobster boat coasted past. It hugged the cliff.

Red light in the cabin, and red from the port running light, made a diabolic mask of the lobsterman's face. The mask blazed as true madness, not insubstantial apparition. Both man and boat seemed solid as the deck beneath my feet. If anything, it was madness that was spectral.

But, then, I have also known madness at sea. I, too, have wielded a knife, if only against a corpse.

The madman cut his engine to a low mutter, then turned to face me as the lobster boat slid past. Torment distorted that face, and it was torment I had never seen. I have seen men die, and seen them live when they wished to die. I have seen victims of hideous burns, and men flayed to pieces when lines or cables parted. Yet, this torment went deeper than physical pain. Forty years were as one hour to this man who had just killed his wife. His face twisted with guilt, and I looked at a man doomed to perpetual retelling of his story. The face rose from the depths of certain, Puritan hell.

The man laughed, his voice casting strokes of anguish through muffling fog. He motioned toward me, beckoning me to follow him. His boat began to rock. With the engine running low there was not enough power to keep the boat's head pointed toward the sea.

The bow of the forty footer appeared, sliding whitely through mist. It was as insubstantial as the lobster boat was substantial. The forty footer wavered, more ghostly than the surrounding fog. Were it not for the solid sound of engines the forty would be vague as a cloud. I watched the drama unfold; watched ghostly forms of men huddling in quick conversation as the forty swept past, made a turn toward the channel, and eased back toward the lobsterman.

The forty made its turn, then eased toward the cliffs, closing alongside the lobster boat. I could see Tommy clearly. His black hair glowed above a face only slightly less visible than darkness. For moments his face seemed only surreal as he concentrated on laying the forty alongside. Case and Wert — and a vague shape like an echo of me — stood at the rail. Two figures jumped, and to his credit, Wert tried. His shoulders moved forward, but his feet did not follow. He fumbled, fell against the low rail, regained his feet.

I watched us make mistakes, as young men in action almost always make mistakes. The few minutes of action aboard that lobster boat stretched toward timelessness. A slow motion movie.

Case fell and rolled. My own vague form hesitated, finding its feet, as the madman stepped from the wheelhouse. The madman carried no weapon, and he raised his arms. As the form ran into him, I could see he only tried to shield his face. The madman fell against the wheelhouse, then rose slowly back to his feet. My form disappeared

into the wheelhouse where it would port the helm, then search for a child who was not there. Case slowly stood, his left hand holding a wrench, and his right hand clasped to his left shoulder. His wound came from falling against a spike or a tool.

The madman howled and slowly retreated to the bow. He screamed, "Stay back, stay back, stay back." Then he screamed, "Tommy, Tommy, Tommy."

Case followed him as the forty made a tight sweep away and turned back toward us. Case should have waited for help. That madman was no threat. As the madman pulled a stake from a lobster trap, Case stumbled. He was on his knees, trying to throw the wrench, when my shade appeared from the wheelhouse. The two men were so close that my dive at the madman actually carried me over Case's back; and I, watching my own ghost, saw that the madman tried to stab no one but himself. The sound of the forty's engines rose.

How much did Tommy see? He saw it all. How much did Wert see? Practically none. Wert stood in the stern beside the engines.

And so it was that madness covered Tommy's face, and that in this time of torment two madmen sacrificed themselves on the altars of their guilt.

Tommy, who had killed with depth charges, now drove toward the rocks in a last and frantic display that may — or may not — have had the least thing to do with saving Case; a man who did not need saving. The madman stood facing the huge blade that was the forty's bow, and he screamed in exaltation or expiation, waving his arms toward him as if to attract the bow against his chest.

When the forty hit rock it stumbled, then drove its bow onto the beach, the tearing of steel striking showers of sparks as it crumpled against rocks. Wert tumbled against the engine house as water flooded the stern. Tommy cut the engines, ran aft where the lobster boat lay rolled on its side in shallow water. The bow was sheared away, and beneath the hull extended legs in sea boots; legs of the lobsterman, twisted and torn. Case lay against a crumpled rail with blood draining in arterial spurts, while my faint form lay halfway in shallow water, my head resting on a rock like a young boy nestled against a pillow. Tommy did not dive in, he fell in as he hurried first toward Case, then toward me.

I do not know whether it was my voice — although I think it was — or the voice of the sea that called forth: "A sailor's pay. A sailor's pay."

They gathered about me, the spirits of those four men, as I drew up the anchor and began working the boat back toward moorings in the city. The pale, moon face of Wert lived faintly in the mist. It silently protested, explained, attempted to find language that would in some way speak inexpressible thoughts.

Case stood beside me at the helm — the wan form of Case, the kind face of Case — a man who had made his own young mistakes. He did not bare his chest, did not display his wounds. If anything he seemed proud that I had raised a knife to help a friend.

These were my comrades. In many ways they were closer to me than the living crew of my Alaskan vessel.

Tommy and the lobsterman seemed no more than tendrils of fog that intermixed, that somehow bonded together for the present, and perhaps for eternity. It came to me that all of us, or parts of us, are doomed to strut our roles on that obscure stage during all nights when ice fog lies across the harbor. The lobsterman will endure his earned portion of hell, and we, the crew of that forty footer, will inflict our errors on him.

I now understand that Tommy's silence was the silence of madness. When he could not speak he took action, perhaps even trying to do the right thing; but I know now that no one could protect him from the knowledge that he had killed Case. I also know that Tommy protected me, for he had to have figured out my share of our mistakes. From that weather cutter to which our Cap transferred him, he slipped overboard in search of silence. He knew that, sooner or later in his drunkenness, the story would get abroad.

Tommy was heroic in his way. Darkness reached for him twice, the first time with depth charges, the second time with the grounding of the forty. He fought against darkness in the only way he could. He sought the eternal silence of death.

Darkness tries to kill light. I pulled the old claspknife from my pocket. Wert seemed only confused, while Case smiled. The interweaving forms of the lobsterman and Tommy appeared to express only sadness. Perhaps the knife should have been thrown overboard.

But, it still rests in my pocket, to be carried until death, and perhaps carried to the grave. This knife is all I have of youth, because I know now that the part of me that remains on that cold coast is the ghost of my youth, forever tied to the rising scream of diesels.

The men disappeared into the mist as I groped the final approach to moorage. There is little left to say. I will return to Alaska, and will make three more trips from Anchorage, maybe four. Then I will retire and find a small apartment near the docks. Although I will never finish my business with my comrades and the sea, I think perhaps they have finished their business with me. We, who were never really at war, have somehow still discovered peace. I think that between all of us, all has been forgiven.



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## Zoë Landale / Two poems

### Catch A Falling Star

These days all I see of stars are snowy  
bursts of blossom in trees.  
Doves that open their wings  
and fly off to some other page  
or life.

I move white circles on  
a white page with a finger tip.  
This is a Kousa dogwood, this a Japanese  
honeybells tree, best appreciated from beneath.  
The scent of it falls from hundreds  
of down-facing flower-beaks.

Around me, the lives of women flow  
like water. The surging of ourselves over  
steep clay banks. How we join  
stories for a brief time and move on  
having shared one another's grief  
and borne it toward laughter or at least acceptance.  
Some greater transparency.

The flowering trees are bridges  
between the clean  
blue of the sky, and the face of the ground.  
Sheeted with veronica, a blue puddle  
of tiny fallen stars.

This is a journey we are on, why  
kid ourselves?  
We are ourselves rushing water,

never the same twice,  
 though our obsessions remain constant.  
 What we catch in our opened hearts  
 are reflections of the blooming tenderness we throw  
 toward one another;  
 stars we put in our pockets and then  
 give away.

## The Green Woman

Days are repeated stars  
 of new green leaves.  
 I pray for clarity,  
 for the design of the universe  
 to come clear.  
 Outside the living room, Japanese maple leaves,  
 big-leaf maple leaves catch in my eyes.  
 I sit silent  
 wonder what I was doing  
 before the edge of colour on their points  
 had me tracing their shapes  
 beyond the window.

Oh, we keep a clean house.  
 The floor shines and I can turn from  
 leaves to find rest in the earthed red  
 of it, but outside the sky is rushing dizzily  
 north and I say to the wind  
*Where are you?*  
 It is a cold friend  
 but constant.

At the swamp I throw sticks  
for our dog to swim for and lose.  
Doing so much planting  
I am losing my language.  
Mainly touch suffices; my fingers  
curled round a root's tangled dialect,  
the visitations of May foliage against sight;  
*osmanthus, mahonia* with their holly-like prickles.  
My garden plans anchored to the dust  
with round stones, one white edge of paper lifting  
to the breeze.  
The dog's affectionate exuberance. Muddy, her brow bone  
against my face.

This spring I am the green woman.  
I pray now  
not to be overwhelmed.  
All this life radiates out  
and out  
speechless from my earth-cracked hands.  
I am dumb  
with much birth.

JURGEN JOACHIM HESSE lives in Vancouver, B.C. A former staff writer with *The Daily Colonist*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun*, he prepared dozens of documentaries as an award-winning broadcast journalist for the CBC. A long time self-publisher (Thinkware Publishers), his latest books include *Voices in Exile: Refugees Speak Out*, *Waiting for Zero Hour*, *Voices in Mexico*, *The Terror of Consumerism* and *Winter Journey, then and now*. "An Essay on Self-Publishing" will appear in Hesse's *The Word: An Adventure of the Mind*.

## An Essay on Self-Publishing

Jurgen Joachim Hesse

THE COMPULSION to write has suffused mankind ever since our earliest forebears carved hieroglyphs and cuneiform into stone tablets to record their thoughts, stories, and events. It seems we are, collectively, unable to resist seizing the pen and leaving words for posterity — whether or not posterity cares to read them.

But to see our words transmitted into readers' minds, we need to see them published, preferably *en masse*, and for some profit. Writing is a serious and painstaking process that demands original thought and discipline. Not for the faint of heart is the task of composing sentence upon sentence of elegant prose or dazzling poetry.

Yet the joy of seeing the product of our mind published in so-called hard copy annuls the hundreds of hours of slave labour at the typewriter or, increasingly, at the computer keyboard. Writing is a masochistic pursuit; it reminds us of the joke about the man who keeps hitting his thumb with a hammer. When asked why he does that, he replies, "Why, it feels so good when I stop."

Once writers have completed their manuscript, the question of publication arises with great urgency, for few people are content just

to jot down their words and let the pages stack up in a closet. They need airing out. Someone else needs to see them, enjoy the message they contain, or condemn the writer as a philistine, if not worse. What to do?

Personal letters are the most inefficient method of disseminating words — they are one-on-one missives, often destroyed after just one reading. How much better to reach a wider audience to lend impact and import to our words. That is called publication.

Essays need serious literary magazines. Articles are published by magazines and newspapers. Poetry finds a niche in slim volumes. Novels and nonfiction are presented to the public in book form. The common denominator is the publisher, a commercial enterprise whose primary intent is to make money. Publishers may well allege selfless motive, yet the iron rules of commerce dictate whether a publisher accepts a manuscript in the first place. If a publishing house (magazine, et al.) cannot persuade itself that a certain *oeuvre* will attract readers, chances are slim indeed for the novice, the unknown writer to be published.

The chances for errors in judgment are legendary. Writers worth their mettle have learned, most often by painful example, that their manuscripts cannot find a publisher, no matter how hard they try. Until, that is, one day, one glorious day, a smart acquisitions editor discovers a worthwhile manuscript in the slush pile, as the stacks of unsolicited scripts are commonly called. That day, however, may never arrive for the majority of writers.

The task of finding a publisher for one's manuscript is nothing short of Herculean. It drains a writer's usually slender financial and emotional resources.

Let us consider the progression of events that may (or may not) lead to the discovery of a worthwhile manuscript by a commercial publisher.

First, the author needs to learn the fine art of submitting the manuscript. There are rules to be followed. Luckily, an entire publishing enterprise exists to help the writer prepare a submission — addresses and names of publishers; in what form certain publishers will accept manuscripts (or fragments), and how to compose query letters. But despite painstaking care and diligent effort, the writer may not succeed. There are too many damn writers around, and they all want their manuscripts published.

Sending out unsolicited manuscripts is also labour-intensive and expensive. Paper, envelopes, postage, plus the many hours of drafting and redrafting letters, often exceed the writer's pluck and disposable income. To make a hit with a publisher, the right one needs to be targeted for a specific manuscript. The success rate depends on many factors.

Often writers come up with the obvious after a few (dozen or more) rejection slips. They just might do better by hiring a literary agent. Better to pay 10 to 15 per cent commission than not be published at all. But unfortunately, the successful agents are overrun by putative authors and turn down new clients, while newcomer agents may have a poor track record.

Yet here is the writer's credo, and it is a risk: publish or perish! Publish or perish is the cynical *bon mot* coursing through the halls of academe. Professors, so the dictum goes, cannot achieve the desired status of tenancy without publishing a certain number of books. Publish or perish is a common writer's nightmare. None of us wants to write, seeing our words headed for oblivion. All of us write, intentionally, for posterity.

So, many dollars later, exhausted from sending out stacks of soliciting envelopes containing our samples of prose or poetry, we take stock. This process of hoping for acceptance may take months, or it may require years, depending on our individual reserve of determination. Sooner or later, we may grow listless and become terminally discouraged. Maybe, just maybe, our product (i.e. manuscript) just doesn't measure up to standard?

Maybe, just maybe, the manuscript we are trying to market is flawed?

Or perhaps there is a conspiracy out there, a conspiracy of mediocrity? After all, who are these acquisitions editors? Are they themselves failed writers, emotionally warped by envy? Is that why these milquetoasts are rejecting our brilliant manuscripts? Should we even bother with them?

Whatever time it takes, the day may well arrive when unpublished authors stop sending out envelopes to publishers and decide to publish the manuscript themselves. After all, western history is full of literary giants who chose this route when they were turned down. Self-publishing appeared to be the logical alternative to not being published by one of the commercial houses.

The author of this essay has himself been a self-publisher since 1985. In his letterhead he carries the following three words: Reading, Thinking, Writing. It is a contraction of Isaac D'Israeli's *aperçu*: "There is an art of reading, as well as an art of thinking, and an art of writing."<sup>4</sup> The progression of reading, thinking, and writing, seems appropriate for a self-publisher. One leads to the next.

In terms of commercial success and decent revenue — call it profit, if you will — the author's self-publishing company, called *Thinkware Publishers*, has been a relative flop. Those are hard facts, but far from feeling dejected, the author-cum-publisher is still at it, thirteen years later, and with more than 20 books to his credit.

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<sup>4</sup> *Literary Character*, ch. 11

Here are the two positive aspects of his self-publishing mini enterprise. One, the books look good, they are well edited with the help of friends, they sell reasonably well, and they bring the self-publisher a modest cost-plus revenue. Two, publishing one's own books is an immensely rewarding experience. Twenty books in twelve years – a respectable track record.

As a result, this essayist never runs out of ideas for the next book. Writer's block is an unknown quantity to him.

However, to douse the enthusiasm with a cupful of cold water, being a self-publisher may be seen as not quite cutting the mustard. Let us look at the negative aspects:

Distribution to a mass readership is the Achilles heel of the self-publishing industry. Most professional book distributors will not accept self-published books. Even if they were to relent, their commission of 17 to 20 per cent (in addition to the usual 40 per cent commission booksellers demand) will often make the difference between financial recovery of self-publishing cost and loss. For this reason, shaving publishing costs down to a minimum is essential – but this comes under the rubric of technical know-how and is not discussed here. The author's booklet – *Publish Your Own Book: The Shoestring Solution*<sup>5</sup> – tackles the subject.

Booksellers are usually reluctant to accept a self-published book for a number of reasons, foremost the need to deal with a single small press rather than a book jobber with many titles in his assortment.

Most literary editors will refuse to review unsolicited books sent them by self-published authors. Publicity being one of the lifelines of a successful author (besides word-of-mouth), this is a serious situation. This author expects that, in time, reluctant literary editors will realize that many self-published books – fiction, non-fiction, and poetry – are equal in quality to books presented by commercial publishers large or small.

These drawbacks are inconvenient, but they dim in significance when compared with the overall satisfaction of being a self-publisher. In recent years, especially in British Columbia, there has been a sudden proliferation of small presses that has occurred simultaneously with that of self-publishers.

Small-press publishers work on marginal budgets and could not exist in Canada without blocks grants, i.e. subsidy, from the Canada Council.

By comparison, self-publishers rely on old-fashioned practices of costing a book to the bone and making do with marginal revenues above and beyond cost.

Overriding those significant concerns and limitations is the following phenomenon.

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<sup>5</sup> Thinkware Publishers @ (604) 324-4733

There is an enormous interest in the written word despite the often-announced demise of books, magazines, and newspapers in the relentless path of that voracious steamroller, the television industry with its lowest-common-denominator standards. To wit the growth of bookstores. When the author came to Canada from his native Germany in 1958, Bill Duthie had just opened his first book store on Robson Street. That was it for good books in Vancouver, he recalls. Now there are a handful of Duthie Books locations and a slew of other book stores, an increase disproportionate to the growth in population. That development bodes well for the future of all kinds of books.

What we are beginning to see these days as this century, and with it the millennium, draws to a close, is a diversification, a balkanization if you like, of the written-word industry. On the one hand, we witness conglomerates banding together in gigantic publishing empires whose acquisitions editors seem to dictate public taste by launching blockbuster novels of little, if any, literary merit. John Grisham and Danielle Steele come readily to mind here. That trend, in the Seventies and Eighties, seems to signify the dearth and death of small-press publishers, of which self-publishers are an integral part.

Quite the contrary has, in fact, occurred. Perhaps as a backlash against the all-powerful multinationals everywhere, including the mass-book industry, or perhaps for different reasons altogether, we writers have decided to go it alone in many cases, i.e. to hell with the Big Boys! The readers everywhere seem to agree. CanLit has become respectable internationally, and not just because of the success of Margaret Atwood et al. Hundreds of unknown writers have been published, and keep publishing their own works. We can, and will, go it alone. The big publishers in effect conspire against us relatively unknown writers, so we will thumb our noses at them and put out quality books in small numbers.

One of the success books two decades (or was it three?) ago was the wonderful volume, *Small is Beautiful*. That message of hope and reassurance seems lost when enterprises seem to have grown beyond reason and decency into monsters that gobble up profits and minimize human rights. But writers are individualistic by nature and resent such global repression of taste and choice. The proliferation of chain enterprises is being offset and balanced by puny little entrepreneurs, by tenacious mom-and-pop storefronts, among them the dozens of self-publishers which ensure that the written word remains honest and not just an extension of corporate megathink.

Well, then, in a world where books have accelerated the rise and fall of blockbusters within a space of six to eight weeks, the books by self-publishers are beginning to command a position of dependability in the readers' minds. It is reassuring to find that even a giant among blockbuster writers, John le Carré, will be remaindered for \$6.99 a short time after his latest thriller is marketed. It is reassuring



**for the self-publishers to discover that their own books remain at full price even years later.**

**In other words, never mind the risks. Damn the Big Boys in publishing, full speed ahead!**

CHAD NORMAN lives in Burnaby, B.C. His latest collection *The Breath of One* appeared with Ekstasis Editions. The following poems are from the manuscript *And These Are My Elders: Poems of Tribute and Thanks*, 30 poems celebrating 30 Canadian poets.

## Chad Norman / Two poems

### A Tooth in the Whistle

for Anne Marriott

After five days alone  
the decision arrives:

to locate, attempt to borrow  
the one part of your life  
from the one source left:

your poems.

After five searches along  
the library shelves  
all that is located is an anger:

two fat men-riddled anthologies,  
one (somewhat) recent collection  
& the end of the anger  
one late-eighties phenomenon  
titled, POETRY BY CANADIAN WOMEN.

But between them all  
after the counting  
& the disbelief  
seven poems, seven honest poems,

what's to be the best:  
your life.

You once told us about  
"a great library  
where long seaweed scrawls  
are the only message left in rotting books."

This is the Anne I want back.  
 Before the stroke,  
 when for a time you slid under,  
 gave up the air  
 for the sunken cities,  
 sliding so naturally down  
 into memory & desire  
 as the death for you  
 began to follow.

For you there are no rotting books  
 & the only message left  
 goes beyond all the oceans,  
 goes beyond the cities below  
 or above the surface of our skin.

A picture of you makes its way,  
 not from the back of a book  
 but from the back of a café  
 where poems are being read,  
 yours, those of wind & land,  
 alive in a room of air  
 like the one where in a wheelchair  
 you breathe alone with the days  
 & the last word on that  
 became the decision  
 to leave for us the years 1945-1971.

After 4 books & the G.G. Award  
 the decision arrived:

to locate, attempt to borrow  
 the quiet of a man  
 from the one poem left:

your choice.

But what more needs to be known  
 when one was being loved.

# The Tender

## for Robin Skelton

Never under-estimate the sparrow

but even more so  
in these abyss-seeking Times,  
the just & unbouncing seed.

Thrown by the handful to feed,  
to lure, to heal,  
the unusual urbanite seated  
as the seekers go by in buses,  
going, gone, to be busy,  
uninterested in benches.

Robin, you are few,  
unprepared to be blind  
or even half so  
in this litter-owned sprawl,  
the rare & authoritative tender.

What you tend is the art of Poetry,  
the sound, the sight  
of so many other Times so fixed  
as forms of then stay on in stanzas,  
staying, still to be basics,  
survival in words, poem on page.

You are the man with time in his head  
& the sky left in one eye,  
& the Coast in the other.

Here is where you will scatter,  
fitted for the beaks of the few  
who stand by your bench, waiting,  
for no bus, but a society  
able to differ between  
the tending of poems  
& the planting of fingernails.

CATHERINE OWEN hails from Burnaby, B.C. Her poems have appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, *Antigonish Review*, *Prism international*, *TickleAce* and the anthology *Chasing Halley's Comet*. Her book *Somatic – The Life & Work of Egon Schiele* will appear under the Exile Editions imprint in 1998. The following poems are from *Starvation Landscape*.

## Catherine Owen / Two Poems

### Transience

*monarch*

last days.

light sieves through hours, glances  
off snags,  
exposing spores and huckleberries

I stand in a widened place  
and watch a butterfly bring alighting.

Wings seal and splay, refracting against  
the surface of leaves, this fragile  
yellow time; release resistant, continuous.

rayed flight, a glint as the cycle persists,  
the circular rise and landing.

brief life at the center of everything  
(all that is luminous      elusive about the wild)

*infanta*

you possess some of what my loss is,  
child on the path - with your white & gold

presence, one unmarked hand reverently  
plucking salmonberries. The language of your body

gleans in the crux of trails, your small age  
knows these woods with a faith I attempt

but fail at, knowing better the systems set  
to destroy its wildness. Watching your delight

in the moment, it's as if you too will vanish,  
be felled along with this forest, unable to exist

once the machines assert themselves  
 into your infant certainty. And if you survive

once this setting is defaced, you will be  
 as transformed as memory, asphalt applied

to the place where trilliums and ferns once pushed,  
 the mystery of your childhood diminished.

## Disembodied

The elbow of the millennium  
 asserts itself in the clearing

: from a vast, blasted landscape  
 one marionette bone victorious  
 between sky and a vacant bowl

waste exudes from bowels (bruised nests, entrails  
 a discarded forest steams in the bucket      tendons  
 tremble from exertion      a torpor of metal  
 shudders

the machine ceases

from the cusp of the hill  
 a vista weeps irreparably  
     - roots of the past ruptured, upturned  
     whole moments of childhood

(in the clearing, it is exclusionary, stern with fleshlessness,  
 dominant as a steeple

at work,  
     even unseen,

dismantling memory.

MARGRITH SCHRANER was born in Switzerland and came to Canada in 1969. Combining an interest in writing and photography, she co-authored (with Ernest Hekkanen) the wildly experimental *Black Snow: an imaginative memoir*. Her passionate interest in herbs and healing has led her to offer the course *The ABCs of Herbal Self-Care*, which draws its inspiration from her teacher, Yarrow Alpine, and from the wisdom of Tibetan Buddhist teachings and teachers.

## Meddling in Nettles

### A Personal Essay

Margrith Schraner

*"NEW ORPHIC HERBS – why did you have to take over Ernest's name for your herbal company?"* my daughter Klea asked me not too long ago. *"Couldn't you have come up with a name of your own, something that reflects your own intentions, your own direction?"*

*"You mean, something like *Jumping Cedars*,"* I volunteered, cleverly combining the sound of my Tibetan name, Jhampa, with that of the magnificent Westcoast tree which over the years has clearly made itself known to me as a spirit guide. *"I think I'll reserve that one for my next venture. Right now, I'm happy with New Orphic Herbs. The New Orphic Gallery events have brought interesting people to our house, and New Orphic Publishers is beginning to show signs of flourishing. Why shouldn't a little bit of the positive karma from that name rub off on my own fledgling enterprise? I want to see where it leads me."*

For a long time now, Ernest has been urging me to write *An Herbal Odyssey*. My excuse for not doing so has been that I am too busy living the journey, that I can't write about it, too. In other words, the Big Picture eluded me; I was too embroiled in its details.

Now I see the Herbal Odyssey as a phenomenon growing quite organically from the same source as the Orphic movement. My work as a practical herbalist, wildcrafter and medicine-maker is informed by the same process of *passionate, sympathetic contemplation* that instructed the Orphics, and if the story unfolds at times in what looks like a non-linear way, it is evident, in retrospect, that both method and wisdom have been equally responsible for helping me arrive at the healing information about certain plants which nature in her infinite generosity allowed me to obtain.

I have always been mystified by how one obtains healing information. The many herbals and field guides now on the market are veritable catalogues, chock-full of plant folklore, listing the chemical constituents of medicinal plants and their *actions* in the body, as well as extolling their many virtues as food for health. While such information can be helpful and beneficial, it seldom delves into the mystery of how such knowledge was originally obtained. What was the experience people had with these plants? What furthered the early herbalists' understanding? What conclusions did they arrive at, based on their experiences?

The shamanic healer and author Susun S. Weed offers this explanation:

When we open all our senses, including the psychic ones, to the green world, we learn to hear and understand plant language. Through shape, color, location, scent, texture, taste, and energy, plants tell us how they will affect our bodies, which plant parts we can use, and how we can prepare them.<sup>6</sup>

This form of listening or attunement happens for me each year with a different plant. The search tends to get somewhat obsessive. I have the description and use of a medicinal plant quite clearly in my mind, while Ernest is the one who usually ends up finding it. Like a dows-er, he will quite suddenly turn off some main road and walk on silently for a long while; then, suddenly, there the plant will be! I spot the plant and exclaim with joy. When pressed to reveal the secret of his ability, which strikes me as uncanny, he humorously dismisses it with the line: "Well, I'm your sniffer dog, aren't I?" or else he says something mystifying like, "You have to think like the plant. What surroundings does it thrive in?"

The nettle prefers to have its feet in damp soil and its head in the sun. It likes to grow at the edge of the woods near blackberry brambles or in places where the earth has been recently upturned. I tend to see the nettle as a protectress, wisely keeping intruders at bay while

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<sup>6</sup> Susun S. Weed, *Wise Woman Herbal: Healing Wise*, 1989, p. 256



giving the earth a chance to heal itself by adding its own rich store of proteins and minerals back to the soil each fall.

The nettle's habitat exudes a certain magnetism, a vibration which we have learned to recognize; it is information obtained from a contemplative interaction with the plants we are wildcrafting, and it helps us to locate that herb again and again. We enter into a vital relationship with it.

More often than not, however, we tend to disregard the magnetism certain plants have for us, or we for them; it is at times a very subtle force of attraction that helps us get close to plants that have something to give us. When suddenly a rare kind of joy is kindled in me, it may actually be a subtle hint that I am in the right place at the right time!

Each spring I look forward to locating the first nettles, sometimes as early as February, when they have barely broken through the layer of twigs and dead leaves on the ground. With their slight red tinge, the dense green clumps make me think of small rhubarb plants. Then, as nature becomes more bold and the pale spring sunshine turns to some real March warmth, the nettles grow exponentially, within a week or so, to four times their height.

The warm breeze, the robin song, the babble of a brook, the swoop of eagles over nearby cedar trees all add their nuances to what I conceive of as the nettle mandala. I am in there, somewhere, but I have lost all sense of time and place, and I am now in communication with all the coarse and subtle symmetries that this mandala offers for my enjoyment. Once again, I have returned to a wild place in nature. Getting to such a place is at once, for me, a way of returning to wilder, less cultivated and, therefore, more essential places within myself. The natural world around me reflects something that is deeply essential in myself. In this essence I recognize my own true nature.

As early as the sixteenth century, the Swiss physician known as Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541) had arrived — through his studies of nature, magic, the occult, alchemy and astrology — at the insight that there were essential qualities underlying all phenomena. These he called the *essentia*, and expounded the theory that the therapeutic value of a plant is revealed by its *signatura*, a certain physical resemblance between the outer shape of the plant and the organ it was purported to cure. Extrapolating from the famous Doctrine of Signatures, followers of Paracelsus developed the thesis that

Since strawberries resemble the growths caused by leprosy, they must be a remedy for it, and it is obvious that the walnut is suitable for all brain complaints — the shell is

the skull, the inner skin the meninges and the nut the brain itself.<sup>7</sup>

Among Paracelsus' followers was a so-called *mystical* botanist, the Neapolitan Giambattista della Porta (1535-1615) who, in his *Treatise on Plants* in eight volumes, reached the following conclusions:

any root or fruit shaped like a heart is a cardiac drug; the maidenhair fern is effective against baldness....scaly fruits, like pine cones, are good against toothache....Finally, he compared the physiognomy of plants, particularly their flowers, with the organs of animals, and from the temperament of the latter, he deduced the plant's therapeutic strength.<sup>8</sup>

Paracelsus "tried out the effects of belladonna, opium and stramonium on himself and died as a result."<sup>9</sup> But his Doctrine lives on. A more recently published herbal states the following:

Eyebright was known to the ancient Greeks but its medicinal status was firmly established by subscribers to the Doctrine of Signatures. They likened the purple-veined white flowers with yellow spots to a bloodshot, diseased eye, and designated the plant a cure for eye problems.<sup>10</sup>

Healing modalities such as homeopathic remedies and flower essences are examples of vibrational medicine which make use of this 'signature', or energy imprinting, thereby stimulating the body's own innate healing response. Samuel Hahnemann, an 18th Century physician, is known as the father of homeopathy. Dr. Edward Bach, an English physician who was a student of the writings of Paracelsus and Hahnemann during the 1920s, developed thirty-eight Flower Remedies. Both Hahnemann and Bach observed the "profound relationship between a person's inner condition — the attitudes, emotions, and spiritual orientation — and his or her state of health."<sup>11</sup>

Paracelsus' insight that the outer form of the plant is a representation of some aspect of its inner qualities assumes a special validity when the contents of an herbal compendium of plant lore is suddenly matched by one's personal experience. The nettle, for instance, makes its presence known unmistakably to one who treads unaware. A

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<sup>7</sup> Christoph Jakob Trew, *The Herbal of the Count Palatine: An Eighteenth-Century Herbal*, 1985, pp. 62-3

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63

<sup>10</sup> Anna Kruger, *Canadian Nature Guides: Herbs*, 1992, p. 71

<sup>11</sup> *Yoga Journal*, Jan/Feb. 1985, pp. 8-14

quaint quote from an Elizabethan herbal focuses on the fact that the common nettle, is “covered with a downe that stingeth and burneth,” and is rightly called, in popular usage, the Stinging Nettle:

Neither without desert his name he seems to git,  
As that which quickly burnes the fingers touching it.<sup>12</sup>

Although this powerful plant does not invite approach, it has a unique way of getting our attention. One only has to experience its stinging once to develop a healthy respect for it. It is, indeed, with respect that I approach it in the spring. Wearing gloves, I take out my pocket knife and cleanly and easily cut off the top five leaves and stem. I harvest the plant with respect, taking some and leaving some to follow its natural, reproductive cycle. From both sides of the stem I have cut, I notice upon my return two weeks later that two new tops have miraculously grown. My wildcrafting technique is therefore more like pruning, which enhances the plant’s strength and helps it to grow more voluminously.

In all my wildcrafting, I follow the Wise Woman tradition, and silently thank the plant for its medicine. I make a point of leaving some kind of offering in exchange. Through this practice of giving and taking, I am more deeply attuned with the realization that everything exists in dependence upon everything else, and that I am an integral part of this vast pattern of interrelatedness, where abundance and gratitude are of equal value.

The Wise Woman tradition is about connecting with the ancient wisdom that has lived for aeons inside of us. It helps us remember who we are and what we know. This realignment with the wisdom and knowledge about the healing power of plants begins to happen when we rely on our own observations and allow ourselves to be guided by our intuition. This reinforces our primary, *and primal* connection with the earth. We do not need to travel very far. The plants that often turn out to be our most cherished allies quite often grow like weeds not far from our own backyards; our medicine is easy to obtain, inexpensive, effective and safe. Wildcrafting our own medicines fosters our self-reliance.

Unlike the Heroic tradition, which prescribes strict, often harsh measures, or the Scientific tradition, which prefers to dissect and quantify, the Wise Woman tradition celebrates healing plants in their role as natural allies for transformation. An attitude of compassion toward others, as well as toward ourselves, is at the root of this tradition of nourishing in order to heal. The plant will quite naturally

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<sup>12</sup>*Gerard’s Herbal: The History of Plants*, Marcus Woodward, ed., 1994, pp. 158-9

support the needs of the body; the nourishment contained in the plant will strengthen the body, thereby assisting it in its own healing.

The nettle is a provider of strong nutritional support as well as fiber. An 1803 utterance by Thomas Campbell reveals that not only were the nettle's fibers made into paper pulp, spun and twined into strong rope and knotted into fishing nets, they were also fashioned into cloth:

I have eaten nettles, I have slept in nettle sheets, I have dined off a nettle tablecloth.... I have heard my mother say that she thought nettle cloth more durable than any other...linen.<sup>13</sup>

It is with a certain degree of fondness that Susan Weed invites her "sister spinster stinging nettle to dinner." This form of wild spinach is, after all, highly nutritive. "The Tibetan Buddhist saint Milarepa, student of the great translator Marpa, lived exclusively on nettles during his retreat, and it is said that he became both green and enlightened."<sup>14</sup>

I grew up in far less enlightened times. From the age of three weeks on, which happened to coincide with the time of my weaning, I suffered from asthma, a condition that stayed with me for most of my life. I was two and a half years old when I was separated from my parents and sent to a children's sanatorium in the Swiss mountains; the high altitude and fresh air, it was believed, would strengthen my weak constitution, as would the goat fat that was rubbed on my spine. My parents were not allowed to visit; this, it was believed, would only add to my emotional upset and feeling of separation and abandonment, thereby aggravating my condition.

These attitudes toward health and healing were informed by heroic and scientific paradigms which are still very much in use today. Here's a sampling of Susun Weed's rather cartoon-like descriptions:

The Heroic tradition, with its motto "no pain, no gain" rests on the premise that we are ill because we are unclean. Guilt and atonement are big in this tradition. Illness is an indicator that we haven't followed the rules, that we need to clean "that filthy colon," use laxatives, vomit or resort to other cathartics and purge thoroughly. Health and happiness must be taken by force from a universe which offers mostly pain and sickness, negativity and dirt, chaos and imbalance.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Susun S. Weed, *Healing Wise*, p. 166

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

The motto of the Scientific tradition, on the other hand, is "Get Fixed Fast with Active ingredients:"

All plants are potential drugs: they can kill you in their unpredictable crude states; they are potent helpers when refined into synthesized drugs. Herbs and herbal medicine are ineffective as well as dangerous. It's best to leave such things to experts.<sup>16</sup>

The Scientific tradition, Susan Weed maintains, extends the heroics of modern medicine into the domain of military reasoning:

Death sends against us teeming, deadly bacteria, greedy opportunistic invaders always ready to sicken us and kill us. Death sends viruses to gain entry slyly and attack from within the cell, weakening us, destroying our defenses...Our defense against death is the immune system, helped by modern scientific medicine. The immune system wages war on the enemy's troops. The Scientific tradition offers new killer drugs, new micro-spies, and continually newer, better, stronger protection on the battlefield. Is it any coincidence that General Electric and Hewlett-Packard, among others, produce both medical and military products?<sup>17</sup>

What this tradition fails to recognize, however, is that its linear methods of attack and defense tend to further weaken the individual. Many people in hospitals are ill with the side-effects created by these potent drugs.

Needless to say, as a young person growing up in a small village in Switzerland, I failed to respond adequately to the heroic and scientific approaches chosen on my behalf. No one paid any particular attention to the fact that I was a dreamy child, not venturing forth to discover the world and preferring, instead, to sit and observe things close up, pensively scratching a small patch of eczema on my cheek. I did not start walking until I was sixteen months old.

I was struck once by a remark that correlated the outward expression of an illness with a psychic or spiritual source, that people with asthma tend to be hesitant, pensive individuals and that this hesitancy may be viewed as a metaphor for a fundamental reluctance toward coming into this life. While this assertion may sound simplistic, it nevertheless struck a chord in me. I was indeed a sensitive child with

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 61

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 63

a weak constitution and an inherited tendency toward allergies. I was also introverted and displayed a reluctance to participate in vigorous activity.

To breathe deeply is to have a desire for life; breath is therefore the essence of life. I lost touch with this essence on more than one occasion. I was hospitalized several times because of asthma attacks. My desire for life faded in direct relation to my inability to breathe. I was, physically and psychologically, feeling stifled; I was losing touch with my own essence. My asthma became so bad, doctors prescribed Ventillin and other drugs – small white pills that made my heart race and left me feeling weak and debilitated.

It should come as no surprise, then, that I needed a sense of greater personal freedom to bring about the necessary healing in my life. My karma changed dramatically when I came to Canada's Westcoast, having left the prescriptive and controlling forces of my past for more open vistas. Gradually, I began to breathe more deeply and freely, to discover how good it felt to roam and to gather healing plants. I was instinctively drawn toward the stinging nettle.

Although I ended up healing myself of asthma, I did not deliberately set out to do so. It all happened quite naturally, over the course of quite a few seasons. I had fallen in love with the stinging nettle. I longed to be near it, returning periodically to harvest it during its spring growth. I made an infusion and drank it as a spring tonic tea. I ate it – steamed like spinach with garlic and butter. I dried its leaves and, obeying the prompting of the lunar calendar, I made my own tincture which I could enjoy during the winter months. I dug the bright yellow rhizomes in the fall and soaked them in apple cider vinegar for my salads. I collected the seeds and sprinkled them as a condiment on my food.

The frequency and duration of my asthmatic episodes grew less, and finally I was able to throw away my allopathic puffer. I attribute this little miracle in part to the small amount of histamines contained in the nettle. The histamines build up and act like an inoculation in the body, thereby reducing the reactivity to allergens and lessening hayfever-like symptoms such as itchy eyes and wheezing chest.

Among folk medicine applications of nettle, whose Latin name is *urtica dioica*, is "the curious practice of urtication – thrashing painful arthritic limbs with the fresh stems, which act as a counter-irritant. It is also known to cure rheumatism by its stinging action."<sup>18</sup>

Friends recently told me that in Finland it was a common practice to apply whole body wraps or nettle compresses for the same medical complaint. I have also heard it said that the juice of the bruised nettle leaf contains the very antidote for the burning caused by the stinging

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<sup>18</sup> Anna Kruger, *Herbs*, p. 125

hairs. The remedy is thus released homeopathically: what it causes, it can cure.

It is early April now, and on my floor upstairs, nettles are spread out on sheets, drying. Slowly, over the past weeks, the heady smell of green, fresh drying nettles that permeated the house when they were first laid out is changing. The leaves rustle as I turn them daily, wearing my gardening gloves for protection, as they haven't lost their sting. The red tinge on the nettle leaf, which bespeaks the presence of iron, is turning to a rich, deep violet hue.

The only other herbalist I know who is not afraid of admitting to passionate sensory experiences with healing plants and their usage is Michael Moore. His descriptions are often anecdotal and encourage more creative uses. And so it is with the nettle. He proposes that large quantities of powdered nettles be stored in individual bags in the freezer and pulled out for use one bag at a time. "This," he concludes, "gives you the chance to fondle the dark green powder of summer past, as the snow piles up outside.... It is green food your body recognizes and can help build blood, tissue, and self-empowerment."<sup>19</sup>

As I bundle up the dried nettles, putting them in bags for delivery to my local organic food store, I catch a whiff of the pungent, musky odor that reminds me that this is potent medicine. I am grateful for the transformational role stinging nettles have played in my own healing. "When a person feels like a victim, overwhelmed by feelings, depressed, passive and over-sensitive," writes the British herbalist Elisabeth Brooke on the emotional uses of herbs, "nettle will help her to contact the warrior within."<sup>20</sup>

I wish to acknowledge this green ally, for it has toughened me up from deep within, taught me to have fiber<sup>21</sup> and courage, and helped me to be in charge of my own life.




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<sup>19</sup> Michael Moore, *Medicinal Plants of the Pacific West*, 1993, p. 188

<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Brooke, *Herbal Therapy for Women*, 1992, p. 131

<sup>21</sup> Kruger, *Herbs*, p. 15, Nettle from the Anglo-Saxon or Dutch word *noedl*, on account of its fiber content.

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IRENE WANNER hails from Seattle, Washington. Her short story collection *Sailing to Corinth* won the 1988 Western States Arts Federation Award for fiction. She teaches in the University of Washington Certificate Writing Program, edits nonfiction for *The Seattle Review* and reviews books for *The Seattle Times*. "Change of Heart" is an excerpt from her novel-in-progress *White Roads*. Other excerpts have appeared in *Antaeus*, *The Antioch Review* and *Blue Mesa Review*.

## Change of Heart

Irene Wanner

BARRETT LEFT the rig idling, hopped from the truck's warm cab into a frigid wind that spun snow up Truckee's old main street along the river, and ran toward the welcome glow of tavern lights. Before he faced the interstate and Donner Pass in this weather, he had to try calling home again. He'd been trying for a week ever since he left on this run. All he got was his own answering service with the option to leave a voice mail at the house. He had left a message every time — all excuses — for his wife. Barrett feared Lee had left him.

Now he ducked through a pair of swinging doors and a well of light into the bustle and thump of Saturday night. Brushing the snow from his shoulders and eyebrows and beard, he crossed to the bar. The long and narrow room, packed with the weekend ski crowd, smelled of beer and aftershave, perfume and freshly popped popcorn.

"Double Scotch," he told the lady bartender over the beat of the band. One eyebrow was pierced and she had a small silver skull nestled at the side of her nostril.

She set him up.

Barrett swallowed the drink, savoring the stinging heat that made his eyes water momentarily, then asked, "Got a pay phone?"

"In back. By the johns."

He set a twenty on the bar and ordered another round. This time, she poured to the rim as he paused to read a handbill advertising happy hour appetizers. Barrett was well aware he should know better than to belt down doubles on five hours' sleep in the past forty-eight and next to nothing to eat, but his worry upset his stomach too much for jalapeño poppers or cheesy potato skins.

Carrying the drink to the phone, he dialed. At last, Ariel, his older daughter, answered. "Finally," he said. "A live human person."

"Dad? Hi, yourself."

Barrett drew a breath. "You're house-sitting?"

"That's me, all right. Beloved feeder of horses and dogs and cats."

Oh, Jesus, he thought, Lee's gone. "How's it going?"

"Okay. You?"

"Home by morning, I expect."

"How's the road?"

"Slow. And, you know, seven thousand feet coming up." He cleared his throat. "But listen, I've been calling and calling."

Ariel hesitated.

"Is your mom around?" he asked.

A week ago, he learned she had slept with another man. Once, Lee told him. He interrupted. Once. A hundred times. What's the difference? Either they trusted each other — wholly, without reservation — or their marriage was bankrupt. Now he cringed to think how self-righteous he'd sounded. In fact, he had sounded exactly like his alcoholic old man all those years ago, the hypocrite playing the martyr to a woman whose desertion was deserved. And like his old man, Barrett hadn't let Lee explain. He hadn't considered her side at all. He told her not to be there when he got home from this job on the road.

"Dad?"

In one swallow, Barrett finished his drink. Dancers filled the room, all young, carefree kids. The beat of the bass thumped almost in sync with a red and yellow neon sign blinking in the front window. Overhead, a mirrored globe spun slowly, flashing moving rainbows. Barrett pressed the ice-filled shot glass to his forehead. On TV, a woman swam in a shimmering turquoise pool, her long hair rippling in shifting light and shade.

"Mom left for grandma's house yesterday," Ariel explained.

"I see."

"Jenny went with her."

Jen, his other daughter, was eleven. Older than when he'd learned about his parents going their separate ways, but still, the idea that he had caused the same stupid melodramas shamed him.

"You okay, dad?"

Nearby, a young woman danced. She had black hair braided diagonally across the back of her head. Silver flashed on her ears. She

wore a men's tux shirt, a jaunty little black bow tie, and a red waistcoat with tight black jeans over cowboy boots.

Ariel spoke.

"What?" he asked, staring at the woman. Once in a while, years and years ago, Lee had sometimes worn her hair braided this way. Sometimes he'd braided it for her, his fingers in her rich blond hair, her head touching his chest as he worked standing behind her. "Ari, did your mom get any of my messages?"

"Well...." Again, she paused.

Barrett closed his eyes against the persistent throb and swirl. "Because no one answered. All week."

"I told her to wait for you, dad, that you didn't mean it. But she needs time to think, I guess. And space."

The farm Lee had inherited from her mother in eastern Washington was eight hundred miles from home. Plenty of space, he thought. Barrett opened his eyes. "Nothing else, hon?"

"You know mom. She won't discuss things. She asked me to stay over and feed the beasts. Little enough."

"Thanks, Ari."

Tired, he leaned against the edge of the booth. Probably Lee and Jen had arrived by now. There was no answering machine, no caller ID. If he could make himself phone her, Lee would most likely answer. But he still resented the idea of apology.

The woman with the braid swung in a circle, orbiting an older man who tried to cover his bald spot with long strands of what remained pasted across a shiny scalp. Sympathy stirred Barrett. The guy wore his pants tucked into ridiculous furry after-ski boots that came halfway up his calves, making him resemble a Budweiser Clydesdale.

Catching Barrett staring, the young woman winked.

He heard himself say, "So your mom didn't leave any other word at all?"

"No, dad. Sorry."

It seemed to him he should say something reassuring. He was supposed to be the parent, after all, the mature adult with answers, but here among the loud music and others' good fellowship, he couldn't make a start.

Go head, he told himself, have a drink. Have a couple. It's happy hour, after all. Drink like your old man and then blame him.

"Dad?"

"Yes."

"Mom didn't want to go. You just didn't give her much choice."

Over the past few days, Barrett had been imagining how Lee must have felt being told she was not wanted. Twenty-two years together. She had always been the patient one, the one who put up with his short temper and drinking.

"Hey," he teased Ariel, "how'd you get so smart?"

"Call her, dad."

"Maybe."

"Call her."

"Anyway, hon, you'll hold down the fort?"

"Count on me."

"I do."

"Don't drive all night if you're tired," she said. "Honest, it's just as easy for me to go to work from here."

"You're a good kid, you know?" And so much like Lee, he realized, offering help without being asked, wise and funny, generous, a friend to rely on. Barrett was suddenly aware how lucky he had been with his family and how much he had taken for granted. "Love you, sweetie. See you when I see you."

"Drive careful."

"Hey."

Barrett hung up. His mind filled with memories. Lee on the road with him all those years ago. Makin' time, he'd say, grinning, meaning making up time for the time we stole makin' time in the truck's sleeper. Just kids, he remembered, who couldn't get enough of each other. And after, we'd eat greaseburgers wrapped in foil and chase them with truckstop brew as strong as tar or watery and tasteless — "This coffee isn't weak," Lee would joke, "it's helpless" — and we doctored the logs so they never showed our real hours, the long hours Lee stretched over me, under me, in me, alongside me.

Barrett blinked away the images because now he saw her legs raised and spread, then her soles lowering to stroke someone else's sides. Her tongue traced someone else's throat. Her breath came hot in another man's ear, her teeth teased his nipples hard, and her nails glided as softly as a falcon's wings cut air across some stranger's back.

He wanted another Scotch. But when he turned, Barrett found the woman with the braid waiting.

"What if I said take me away from all this shit?" she asked.

"What shit is that, exactly?"

"The guy I'm with. This place."

Looking at her smooth skin, Barrett thought of Lee. All he wanted was to lie down, draw her into his arms, spin some dreams with her, make love, sleep. He wanted things to be the way they'd been a week ago.

"Me," he confessed to the handsome young woman, "I'm just more of the same old shit."

"Yeah?" She raised an eyebrow. "For sure?"

"Definitely."

The woman before him was half his age. Twenty-two, maybe, like Ariel. Barrett could not understand why she was coming on to him. Sugar daddy? He realized, to his surprise, he was vaguely flattered.

"Why be hard on yourself?" She touched the bare skin where his shirt collar was open at the hollow of his throat. A diamond glittered on her ring finger. "Got a place nearby?"

Barrett's heart quickened. "No."

"A cozy little condo? Where we could...." She smiled. Her other palm slipped under his vest, low on his belly.

He couldn't help shifting to her touch.

"Whoa," she said. "That's nice."

In the crush of dancing bodies, he let himself steady against his heartbeat and her hand pressing his erection. Her perfume, like lilies of the valley, caught with the rush of his blood, dizzying him. He stepped back.

"Oh, *now* I get it," she said. "Married, I bet."

"Maybe."

"*Maybe* married." She laughed. "Great concept."

"Thing is," Barrett told her, "I'm not interested."

She yawned. "No? Really?"

"Really."

He stopped himself from saying something stupid, returned to the bar and ordered another double. Outside, snow whirled past the window. Barrett glanced at the TV, then into the mirrored depths beyond. He found the woman with the braid, seated now at a little round table with an ice bucket and two champagne flutes half full of bubbly. Her gaze never left him, even when the bald guy slipped onto the bench beside her.

"Hey," the bartender said, moving into Barrett's line of sight.

Barrett met her eye.

She leaned close. "You going to be another one of those assholes blows in here and starts fights over quickies in the crapper? I don't need the hassle. Get off someplace else, okay?"

"Sure," he said, disgusted.

Not waiting for change, he belted the drink and hastened outside. Wind swirled snow up the street. He jogged to the rig's far side to take a leak there above the river. Cold stung his face and hands and ears as he listened to the band's muffled swing against the faithful chuff of the diesel he'd left idling.

There'd be nothing to it, he knew. All he had to do was step inside again, give a sign, and she'd ditch the bald guy somehow. The truck's sleeper was clean. Warm. Lee had loved that safe, small space. Barrett stood in the cold, his penis in his hand as the wind brought his whisky breath to him.

"No way."

Buttoning his fly, he bit back the liquor stink and the echoes of his father's shabby excuses. Barrett did his routine check of the truck, then climbed behind the wheel and released the brake. The long road lay snowy before him. He made his way out of town, passing the new malls and developments lining the interstate. The truck sideslipped across a patch of ice at the entrance ramp. Barrett drew a deep breath and shifted up. He wanted to picture Lee and Jen safe, safe from the storm where he'd sent them with his childish, unforgiving jealousy.

Stop judging Lee, Barrett told himself. You of all people.

He tugged at the crotch of his Levi's. Lifting his foot off the fuel, the rig began to coast as he struggled to get comfortable. The urge to turn back seized him. He let the truck drift onto the shoulder and stared into the dual white swirling tunnels his headlights cast into the snow that spun past the windshield.

Then, as he had been doing for the past week, he contemplated the angry face reflected in the rearview mirror, trying to understand who was looking back at him. He wanted the young woman with the braid. He wanted her all night long, a mindless, senseless, hard-driving fuck that went on and on and on until he was so spent, no guilt could reach him and he could sleep in peace.

His fingers moved from the gearshift up his left thigh, cupping himself.

Wind whistled past the rig's chrome stacks, buffeting the truck. More snow slanted through the highbeams. He couldn't stand to face himself, the image of his father.

Barrett flipped down the sun visor where he kept a faded photograph. Ariel, about twelve and just developing a woman's figure, was wet from body surfing and glistened sleek as a seal; behind, waist deep in the ocean's small blue breakers, Lee held Jen, an infant then, naked in her slender young arms.

Touching Lee's image, he understood he must apologize. She was his best friend, after all, not only his lover but also the woman who made his life worthwhile. She deserved better. And if they were to have any future, he would need to quit denying his problems with booze. He was damned if he'd end up repeating his father's mistakes, too arrogant to ever say I'm sorry, an aging alcoholic all alone, his kids hating him and his wife gone.

"That was you, you old fuck." Barrett found first gear, glanced into the darkness behind, and turned onto the road home. "Always finding fault. Never a change of heart. I'm not you. I'm nothing like you."

MICHAEL HETHERINGTON lives in North Vancouver, B.C. The following stories are from his collection *Disputed Magic*. Six of the 20 stories have been published, in *Geist*, *The Malahat Review*, *Matrix*, *The New Quarterly*, *Blood & Aphorisms* and *ON Spec*. *The Playing Card: A Novel in 52 Chapters* is looking for a publisher.

## The Doorman

Michael Hetherington

I WAS walking up the street from the bus stop when I noticed a Chinese woman walking down the hill toward me, dragging her umbrella along the pavement. I had never before seen anyone drag an umbrella. It seemed disrespectful somehow.

The doorman at The Grand Eloquence Hotel was watching her too and motioned to me to come over. I had walked past the same doorman at the same time each morning for many years. It was the first time he had shown any familiarity. Although I was on a strict schedule of walking around the corner, through the front door of the office building, and onto the elevator by 7:58 a.m., I went over to speak to him.

"That's my lucky sign," he said. "A dragged umbrella — I've been waiting for it for years." He looked at his watch. "I have to go buy a lottery ticket while there's still a 'seven' in the time. It's almost eight." He was agitated and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. "Can you cover for me? Just open the door for people. It'll come naturally." And he rushed off.

I felt I had no alternative but to oblige my fellow man. I put down my briefcase and lay my overcoat on top. I pushed back my shoul-

ders, puffed out my chest, and buttoned up the front of my jacket. I did not look like a doorman, but I could do the job nonetheless.

Soon I realized that I not only had to open the door, but also hail taxis, tell people which way to Stanley Park, pull suitcases from the trunks of cars, and explain that no we did not have valet parking.

Despite the unexpected additional duties, I came to like being a doorman very much, and I hoped the regular doorman would not come back. I knew I could indulge briefly in that hope, because he was sure to return and reclaim the post he had held so faithfully those many years.

But half an hour went by. I was already late for work, but I did not care. A man holding shrink-wrapped flashlight batteries carried off my overcoat while I was occupied holding the door for a model in a fur coat. For some reason, I was not concerned.

Just before nine, my colleagues who started work an hour after me walked by. None of them noticed me because — I know these people — they take no mind of doormen. When I finished my stint as doorman I was determined to change their attitude — maybe by writing an editorial in our weekly news-sheet.

A few minutes later, while I was pulling three pairs of ski boots from the trunk of a Jaguar, a man in a business suit with a red fabric lunch bag stooped and picked up my briefcase and walked away with it. I thought to myself, "Good riddance. I'm a doorman now."

I began to fear more and more that the original doorman would return and take away this new opportunity for meaning in my life. Maybe he was just having an extended coffee break in the McDonald's around the corner. I had given up one life and now feared losing the other. If I were expelled from this august position (I'm not joking — that's how I felt about it) I feared I would have to become a notary, as fortune cookies had long predicted would be my fate.

I felt very useful in my new position; I think that's what I enjoyed most about it, compared to what I did in my office all day. Although not everyone I helped acknowledged my assistance, I took my duties as doorman seriously. That is common, I think, when you are new at a job. So although many people ignored me, as if I were just some mutant door hinge, others thanked me profusely, told me about their dogs or their children, and stuffed money into my hand or directly into my pocket.



The doorman never came back and I stayed on. In November the hotel management named me "Doorman of the Year." Astoundingly, my employer considered my secondment to the neighbouring hotel a marketing coup and continued to deposit my paycheque into my bank account twice a month.



Sometimes I wondered what happened to Cecil, the other doorman. At the worst of times I feared he had bought an unlucky ticket and then did himself in. Or, if he had won, I feared he would be unhappy — squandering his life on a Caribbean beach, wishing he had something productive to do.



Three years later on a Tuesday morning the same Chinese woman walked down the street. This time she was not dragging her umbrella, but swinging it like an English banker. And to my great surprise, Cecil walked with her, holding her by the arm. He had an air of contentment and I genuinely believe he did not realize he was walking down the same street past where he used to work.

A few days later I received a written memorandum from the hotel management, saying that they were installing automatic doors over the weekend and that after the end of the week my services would no longer be required. I came by on Saturday, sadly, and was surprised to see Cecil among the seven workmen unpacking their tools to work on the doors. I sat in an armchair in the lobby and watched them work all morning.

At noon the Chinese woman brought tea on a cart and served it to the men who all thanked her politely. After he had drunk his tea, Cecil insisted that the woman sit down on a chesterfield in the lobby; he served her tea and sang her a quiet song, the words of which I could not make out. By the end of the afternoon the new doors were in. I walked out the other way, unable to bear seeing them open without me.

On Monday I went back to my office and applied for a position as a receptionist. The personnel manager wouldn't hire me because I was a man. He told me to get a man's job, and showed me the door.

MICHAEL HETHERINGTON. (See entry on page 57.)

## Socrates' Chicken

Michael Hetherington

*"Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?" (Socrates' last words)*

JUST BEFORE my friend died he declared that he owed me a chicken. I had no recollection of such a debt and I challenged him about it. I didn't want him to go to his rest thinking he owed me something he did not.

"I want to be like Socrates, don't you see?" he said, lying in pain on his bed by the apartment window.

I didn't know what it had to do with Socrates, but I said, "Of course, Socrates."

He seemed to rest a little more easily then. "Are you sure it wasn't a lamb?" I asked him. It had become difficult to find things to talk about.

"No, no, it was a chicken, definitely a chicken," he said. He was very set in that. I had thought a lamb would be more dignified than a chicken. Besides, I would rather have had a lamb to remember him by than a chicken.

I had known him for only about a month. He was not as ill when we first became friends. We met in a cafe where there was no room for me to sit on my own, so I sat at his table in the corner and he didn't seem to mind. At first he went on reading. Indeed, I wanted to

read as well. I had looked forward all afternoon to sitting with my newspaper and a small cup of very strong coffee. He was drinking chocolate.

When I put down the paper to take a sip of my coffee and to look aimlessly onto the street, thinking I might see a pretty girl walk by, I casually looked over at him. He too had put down his newspaper. I can't remember now who spoke first. Whatever either of us said, it was likely uninspired. But we fell to talking.

He did not tell me all of his closest secrets that day, but I started to learn a few things. I was hesitant to open up about myself. I did admit to wanting a wife. I had been looking for some time. I had in fact come to the village hoping that there might be someone there to my liking, but I had not and have not met her yet. I tell myself every day, "It could be today," but as the days roll by I believe myself less and less. Still, I had heard there was a girl here who only came out on Easter Sunday. She showed herself only then, to go to the cathedral on the market square. It was rumoured that she was looking for a husband and would choose one some Easter. As Easter approached, the town filled up with young men like me, all waiting for the infanta, as she was called.

On Good Friday my friend said to me, "Remember, buy yourself a chicken from the money you find in my drawer, and a good cup of coffee at the Cafe Zinc if there's any money left over."

He stopped talking then, and his eyes closed. A few minutes later he stopped breathing, and all I could hear or feel was the air blowing in from the street, through the apartment window. I took the money from the drawer as he had bid me and went to the market.

"I want a chicken for Easter," I said to the bewildered butcher.

"But we eat lamb on Easter," he said to me disdainfully.

"It must be a chicken," I said.

And so I prepared for Easter and hoped the infanta would look at me that year. Two days later the priest announced to a church overflowing with expectant young men that Maria Sophia Magdalena had died two months before. A murmur and a groaning reverberated throughout the church, and from several places men got up and walked out before the service was over. One even called out "Deceit!" over the praying congregation as he walked noisily to the back of the sanctuary.

I had planned to go directly home after church to prepare the chicken for dinner, but I stopped at the Cafe Zinc to spend the last of my friend's money on a cup of strong coffee. I noticed at a table by a pillar a bearded, pudgy, bulbous-nosed man who was talking excitedly to a group of youths and asking them questions. I couldn't help but observe these things as I tried to read my paper at the corner table. Amongst the listeners in the cluster around the bearded man was a youth with a striking resemblance to my recently deceased friend.

I thought no more about it, finished my coffee, left a tip that was larger than required, went home, and ate the chicken.

JOANMARIE TENZIN PARKIN lives on Quadra Island, B.C. Artist, mother, potter, dweller of islands and realistic follower of Buddha Dharma, she has been writing since she was eight years old, in an attempt to understand her life.

## Spring Thoughts from the Bluff at 129 Joyce Rd.

Joanmarie Parkin

Jet trails  
Eagle tails  
    white on bright blue sky dome  
Breeze teases my nose  
Seals honking below in an azure-blue sea  
Gentle lapping waves  
All over big stormed-tossed chaos  
Eagles — 9, 10, 12, 13, all overhead  
Some very young, yet....

Do some yoga here on green mat of grass  
Lay back, stare up at the sky  
Form is Void  
Void is Form  
    All gone me  
    All gone you  
I could die very well  
on such a day  
as this one is.

Love,  
    Tenzin

JAY HAMBURGER is a poet, playwright, environmentalist, human rights activist and Artistic Director of Vancouver's grassroots *Theatre in the Raw*. He authored the chapbook *Faith Rescue*.

## Jay Hamburger / Three Poems

### Song to a Mountain's Disruption

[To Roger & Denise Lagassé and the *Friends of Caren* environmental group]

log this place to bits  
log it, thus the order  
scorch the ole earth  
it will all come back

log the hill and the yard  
log gimmie log, log gimmie log  
gimmie more and more, ummmm  
gimmie ah gimmie gimmie

log and don't listen  
log till the hill is cleared  
log onward into tomorrow  
last left of none

log hear me cut;  
cut, hear me wash,  
wash duff off that earth face  
yes down to the exposed rock

log hear me moola  
moola in me pocket  
tree all gone – hey!  
trees no more, no no

log hear me paper  
or cabinet or chair – house;  
wind whistles over clearcut  
hey, wind moves on through

log, pull yank and yell

log, buck    yield and    yell  
           log, years    heart and    yell  
                   heart, folks        it is torn

          log 'em old-growth trees  
           log 'em ancient dear old buggers  
 for what use are the decadents?  
           hey, can't remember my own name

          log our own heritage, history  
 log out that species' habitat  
 change is due brother  
           oh, so fast the cutcut    cut

          cut with chainsaw, sister;  
           hack and squirt that limb, uncle;  
 burn to ash that slash, auntie;  
           plow, dynamite, bulldoze over, my god!

          log that old bell  
 log that old house  
           log that great earth sky spirit  
                   what is left weeps    oozes    cries  
   cries    and    cries

*May/Sept, 1991  
 Garden Bay  
 Kleindale, B.C.*

## Men Come and Go

Men come and go —  
           on the road, off  
           and onto the streets....

men like tides moving  
           ...onto the shore  
           back out to sea;

passing thru a town tired  
           roaming, looking for a job

or a place to stay....

can't find no job or  
 been turned out of the  
 house 'cause of a bad  
 break-up with a lady

men like the tides  
 come and go, roaming  
 looking for a place  
 to stay

hitting the high road....

*Savannah, Ga  
 March 5th, '83  
 written near a few palm trees  
 after a number of nights  
 in men's Shelters*

## What Left is There?

There is a street in Esteli  
 near a school  
 where Spanish  
 is taught to  
 Americans

And at the corner of that street  
 a building in Nicaragua  
 has been blown away  
 by Somoza's bombs;

Just the shell  
 of a wall  
 left standing

Plaster riddled by  
 bullets from  
 streetfighting



with townfolk  
government troops  
revolutionaries  
resisters  
to the dictatorship  
during the overthrow  
attempts

What left is there  
for the walls  
to take?  
in the manner  
of violence  
or chunks  
of plaster  
missing;  
deep holes where  
bullets  
have ripped  
have burrowed  
have struck....

As if what has already  
happened to such  
brick and mortar  
were not enough  
to create  
a peace.

*on the way to Managua  
from Esteli, Nicaragua  
Oct., 1984*

GEORGE PAYERLE, a Vancouver writer, has authored two novels, *The Afterpeople* and *Unknown Soldier*. His stories and poems have appeared in periodicals and anthologies in Canada and abroad. "Christine in Winter" comes from his unpublished novel *By the Banks of Babylon*.

## Christine in Winter

*for Patricia Horrobin*

George Payerle

SHE GOES down the trail from Marine and Chancellor. The leaves are all dead. Some cling to branches of trees harder than the sky in bleak midwinter. It is the season of Christmas and Solstice, shooting stars and a rumoured comet.

She has none of these. Most of the leaves shape themselves to mud congealed the way the skin of a cold scrotum congeals. Some lie strewn on the underbrush like dead lilacs in Ophelia's hair. Numbers lie on her mind, the Dow Jones at close, the Tokyo opening. They rustle and fidget her. The path stumbles into the ravine on earthen steps hoarded in by lengths of round timber spilling in an arc down the ravine's maw. Her legs follow this, supple, articulate, knees and ankles and hips of a warrior nimble in the court of battle, to spill her mind down toward the sea.

Wet maple leaves dull edgewise among the alder suckers sprouting from the mudbank. There has been slippage of earth here. A glacial edge tipping remorselessly into the hungry sea. Her heart moves. It notices itself, moving, turning inside her body as she takes the ball bounce-passed from outside the top of the key and drives for the basket, all bangles shorn from her long hard limbs, and stuffs one into the clear space amongst the barren arms of defence stinging her skin. The numbers of her final game — 30 points, 15 rebounds, seven

assists, and they wondered where she would go – Italy, perhaps, where women are paid to throw balls through hoops. She passes under the giant cedar lying dead like a lintel over the trail.

It's mud below. Her feet suck at each step. Not Italy. An MBA with two kids and Bob nursing the scars of another year backing the line in Canadian pro ball. Her thesis to finish. The Mobility of Property in Expanding Markets. Lydia Rose. Why Lydia Rose, just now? Her fists clench. "Mother!" she shouts into the empty trees. A couple in winter garb trudge up the slope toward her. They stare. Her voice rings in the trees staggering on the ravine's banks. Her mother in the air like a tocsin peal of bells.

Not Italy, but an MBA and two toddlers Jo and Joe a year apart and Bob's big hands swollen from pounding helmets and pads as he reaches toward her. And the men in the tower downtown saying Christine, what should we buy next? Expo coming. Billy Bennett's dream, Vander Zalm's glory. World-class Playland of the World, and Asia coming. Lydia Rose. What should we buy next? Mother's vision of China and we are all one in the shadow of the mushroom cloud. What should we buy next? Mother's fingers gnarled around a cynic's grasp for innocence. What should we buy? I'll tell you. I'll make a play for you. And her arms fire the ball to Lillian breaking like a tungsten dart down the left side. The couple in sensible anoraks red and blue stumble up the mud, staring not to stare at her. The sea opens in a frothy patch of fluid steel through the trees. The numbers slough from her mind.

Lillian's body like a crossbow's twang flung out to lay the ball up over the rim and dancing in the showers, slashing corona-sprays of victory from her spungold hair and dazzled breasts, a muscled dance around the gold-furred fulcrum of her loins. Bob's fascination – to see Lil naked. And he never did. Fantasies of shared locker rooms, but in the end they'd shared only their own – two – bodies in the haystack surf off the Westcoast Trail. Never down to Wreck Beach in summer. Never down to the elysian strand, clothing optional in an endless season of the '60s. Her own fascination. Limp dicks like a field of harvest wheat and women wearing nothing but themselves, without fear.

Bob's body leaning over hers, sculpted alabaster-rose bruised and cleatmarked as the gridiron whereon he earned his daily bread and his hard curved out from him rose alabaster bud split at its tip with a dark elliptical I and veined stem leans into her fork like nothing known in her woodcourt wars. Windflowers, she thinks. Anemones of blood.

The concrete blockhouse where men huddled over tea and stacked munitions in an older war. It hulks above her in the beach-head loam, portals half buried. Bob, she thinks. Bob. The grey air heavy as water low to the sand in which her feet sink. Was hope. We

had that. Jo and Joe snuggled to their mother's teats, teeth and tongues and gladness. Down the slope of sand the sea spread its small white horses before her, advancing from the black-blue misty mountains at the mouth of the Sound. She can hear the sand crinkle in the silence of the foggy sky. It's Sunday, she says. It's always Sunday.

She takes off her clothes. Reboks on the sand. White ankle socks. Pale ankles slipping through the bunched legs of grey sweats, and the shirt pulled over her ears, fleece-lined, stamped Property of UBC Athletics across her breasts. She stands and looks around. The beach is deserted, ones and twos of bundled folk here and there far off saying moreso that it is deserted. She unclips her bra and wraps it around her silky coral briefs, stuffs that in a shoe, socks in the other, wraps both those in the sweats and ties the skirt arms around to make a bundle. Sand creeps between her toes, damp and thick on top, powdery just under. The empty gun tower stares out to sea, saying GRAD '85 and FUCK YOU in white and chartreuse. She walks down the sand slope, westward.

Goose bumps roughen her skin. You could use that to grate a lemon, she says, and smiles. You? Who. The cold touches her bones. The damp of the grave. You're crazy, Christine, she says. You. Her smile aches at the corners of her jaw and she lets it go. Her feet try the rocks and find them smooth and round and uncertain. They'll be rougher, feet, she says, and lets herself go down through her chest and belly and into her buttocks, a mobile pool lapping high as her womb and flowing through her thighs and calves to the feet searching for purchase on edges and fissures of stone, to the skin of her soles and toes, calming them. She moves like a cat on the hunt. The supple core of her sways from the pads of her feet up through her to the gyro spinning inside against the arch of her skull. The other tower watches out to sea on the far point, its buttress breaking liquid gunmetal waves.

The rocks grow barnacles and filmy green weed, bright and smelling of clear winter tides. There is an ache in Christine. Her feet curl around stone and find good purchase. Her body is her animal, surely and without thought. The cold is outside her. Inside, the supple warm muscle of herself aches. She cradles the weight of her movement and croons, It's Sunday. It's always Sunday. You.

The rocks at the tower's base are sheeted in spray. She holds her bundled clothing high, balanced on the crown of her head, and doesn't read the messages screaming in purple and yellow and green on the tower's walls. The concrete is skimmed emerald with algae. She scents its fetid interior, rotted wood and human piss and feces and trash over the decades since no enemies appeared for it to fight. The fetid scent of memory in the chill salt air. Spray beads on her front like a coat of liquid mail. Her nipples tingle. Flotsam in the

surf, a lettuce and a smashed crate, two plastic jugs, an orange. As though a ship had gone down. The ache gathers itself in her throat. She stares across the shipless sea towards the western islands imagined in the mist. Water beading on her forehead drips down her nose.

Then... then she thinks. Then? It's cold, she says. She turns.

Three men stand as though in loose formation. Two guards on the points, the centre a bit back, to deal. Three quite young men, in jackets and jeans. She stares at them, and lowers the bundle of clothing to her belly. They move slowly, spreading out a little, closing on her. Hunting. Their feet are sure on the rocks. They have muscles under their jeans, the hands and necks and faces of jocks. Let us share locker rooms, she thinks. She feels anger. The ache in the long muscle of herself hardens and cools and she stares at the men, an anger standing there. Spray lashes her buttocks. The men come closer, their feet careful, their arms coming up and out, for balance, for danger. Or capture.

They come quite close, silent. She ignores the two guards and focuses on the centre, still playing back. The guards stop, not close enough to touch. The centre has dark hair and a Greco-Roman face, good for Olympic wrestling or a marquee pose. An intelligent face. The playmaker. He comes forward and stops close enough to touch fingertips at arms' length.

They all stare at one another. She can feel the other two staring at her. She holds the eyes of the one in the middle. Dark as night. The anger wants to smash them.

"You're getting wet," he says.

If he hadn't smiled, she would have thought it a good line.

"You too," she says. Not a good line.

He smiles more broadly. "But we're dressed."

You shit, she thinks. She holds out the bundled clothes as though they were a ball. "Take it," she says. "Try."

One of the guards lunges, but he's too far and she's too quick. She whips the ball aside and high over her shoulder. No one to pass to. The other guard tries to leap and slips on the rocks and has to use his hands to save himself.

The dark one whistles. "Lady," he says, "you're built." He shakes his head. "At this time of year. Are you crazy?"

She thinks he might really be asking. She just stands there, the bundle raised high, like a ball, like a club.

"Or d'you just like to show off, huh?"

She shakes her head, slowly.

For the first time his eyes leave hers. They travel slowly down the length of her, pausing here and there. With his attention distracted, she begins to feel released for speech. "All those muscles," the young man says.

"Maybe she's a dyke," says one of the guards, helpful.

The dark one stares at her crotch. Let us compare mythologies, she thinks. She looks at his. It shows no more than it would if he was wearing a cup. The anger clenches. Maybe he is. She feels like a statue. Maybe I wouldn't like this place in summer, she thinks. A lot of men with cups on, and women like living statues. Show me a hard, she thinks.

"Hey, Ronnie," says one of the guards. The dark one says nothing, mesmerized by her groin.

But if you showed me a hard, I wouldn't like it, she thinks. If you showed me a hard I'd tie you up like a pretzel, guards or no guards. She snaps the ball forward, like a kendo stick. Ronnie jumps.

"I came down here to be alone. On this beach, people go naked."

Ronnie's midnight eyes come up to hers. He blushes. "I'm sorry," he says. "We're from California," he says. She says nothing, staring at him over the grey bundle of cloth. "We're Phigis." He looks at her earnestly.

"You're not afraid of us, are you?" he asks.

She shakes her head, slow.

"Are you into judo or something?" he asks hopefully. He gestures. All those muscles. She shakes her head.

"Get off my beach," she says.

He stares at her. "We could go someplace," he says. "I've got a towel in the car. You could put your clothes back on."

"Get off my beach!"

He winces, like an animal told to go. He looks around. No one says anything.

He gestures to the guards. "Let's go," he says. "It's cold."

She watches their backs, as they stagger over the rocks, no longer certain. She hears one of the guards say "What a twat!" and she's not sure if he's praising her genitals or maligning her attitude. Neither of the others says anything. Christine gathers the damp bundle of clothing to her chest and trembles. You fool, she says. You. Christine. And starts over the rocks along the beach stretching southward from the tower.

There are three sandy coves among the rocky marches of the shore. They curve back under the overhang of trees and run out into the waves. She stops at the middle one and walks up to the back of the cove, spreads her bundle in a square on the sand, and sits. She draws her knees up to her chest and folds her arms around them, props her chin on top. Stares west into grey blankness from which the waves roll.

I'll tell you what to buy next, she says. I'll make the plays. I'll buy the whole fucking Pacific Rim for you. We'll make this town just like L.A. or Singapore or Hong Kong. The Pearl of the Orient. And to hell with smog and acid rain and the rape of the land and concrete towers one by one. I am not a whore! I am not going to be poor, ever. I am

not going to marry a man for his money. Mother! Can you hear me? I don't give a damn what Bob earns! We'll never be poor. Our kids will never be poor! We will satisfy mammon and its towers and we'll fucking well *own* the bastards. Me! I, Christine Donaldson Stewart will do this thing! And a great sob bursts from her diaphragm and shocks hell out of her and she buries her face against her knees and weeps.

It's hard. It comes in long waves from the core of her and keeps coming and it's hard. Hell! she says. Hell, hell, hell! as she can between sobs. Bob handsome and kind and no more imaginative than he might be. Poor Bob. A backer through and through, all guts and reflexes and heart, soppy as a big-eyed dog. A wonderful father laying his body on the line in pro ball and in her bed and cradling babies in his broken hands tenderly as her breasts in the night. She sees herself in the office tower in yellow light, matron and mistress of all she surveys, in playing trim still as her children climb to the top of the mountain her mother had climbed to look down on the ships on the sea. And married the wrong man, her father. She looks up and her eyes see funny things through the tears, like peering through odd-shaped crystals. But there are no ships on the sea and she's married to Bob and taken his name and his children hers, girl and boy, Jo and Joe, Jorinda and Jorindel. Poor babies, how could I? That's what comes of reading books and playing life like a full-court press. And taking an MBA while mothering two kids and hiring herself out to boardroom sharks and seeing what is to come.

What have I done? What am I about to do? She sees it, and there are no ships, just the sea and the mist and the far shore of the Pacific, like a dream. She mourns the passing of the wooden court from her life, the game played for free. Lillian's body like electric joy in that moment of the showers, win or lose, between the game and life.

I am a whore, she says. The whore of Babylon.

She puts her chin on her knees and stares at the grey sea empty of ships and buildings and men.

Figures in duffel coats huddle along the edge of the water and stare at her and hurry on. She frightens them. They have seen men on the sand, solitary, fully clothed, Asian, practise the graceful dance of Tai Chi. This naked woman frightens them, one of their own kind, still and pale and lethal in midwinter as though practising the kata of an obscure and far deadlier martial art. In an older time they would have crossed themselves. Now they just hurry on, pretending she isn't there. She knows this. She doesn't really see them, but she knows this, their fearful, furtive little hearts pretending she isn't there. She is empty.

Christine crushes an egg in her hand. She watches it drip, the yellow and the white. This is the world. This is what I see.

Where does this egg come from? The sea? Am I?

She goes to the edge of the sea and washes her hands. She looks at the water. Its clarity. The anemones and starfish hanging on in the rock-sheltered pool amongst undulating weed. Barnacles like razor teeth. The gullet of a shark, she thinks, and steps in.

It's cold, colder than the chill air. The bottom among rocks feels gritty with smashed shells. She walks out until the sea nibbles at the curls of her public hair and wavelets splash over her mons. Her body aches in two halves, the one below so cold, the one above wanting not to be. No one says anything. She's not sure there's anyone back there, any beachwalker to watch, and she doesn't turn to look. But no one says anything. Mist makes the horizon a receding infinity of sea into sky where Vancouver Island should be — undoubtedly is. There is a ship. A black freighter begins to go grey as it heads out there, and almost certainly won't bump into Vancouver Island, believing it to be there, obdurate in the soft chill visible universe. Unless the ship itself becomes insubstantial as the mist which swallows it.

She can no longer see the rocks through the water, only glints of grey and gloom down past the pale wavering columns of her legs. Her feet have bumped things and trodden on razor edges, scraped on shark gullet, slipped, gone on. She swims.



Back toward the trail leading up to Chancellor and Marine, she sees a fire. Day has gone and the mist has gone and there are stars in the holes in the sky. Two people make shadows, moving around the fire-light. They have a telescope, a large telescope on a tripod in the sand. And blankets, and a hamper of things. Christine walks into the fire-light.

The people look at her.

"May I sit by your fire?" she asks.

They look at her. The woman bends down and picks up a thermos and a cup.

"You're white as snow," the woman says. "You must be frozen."

Christine walks past the fire and sits on a log near it. The log is warm from the fire. She puts down her bundle.

The man picks up a blanket and holds it out to her. Christine shakes her head.

The woman pours a cup of something steamy hot and offers it.

"Thanks you," Christine says. The cup glows in her hands. It makes her hands glow. She can feel the warmth make them transparent, like cupped light. She holds the cup against her heart and looks at the man and woman. They are middle-aged, and do not seem



alarmed. Concerned, maybe. She has not frightened them. She is glad.

"You have a telescope," she says.

The man and woman look at each other. Christine takes a sip from the cup. It's tea, terribly strong and very sweet and laced with rum. She puts the cup back near her heart. The warmth flowing down inside her meets the warmth of the cup and she feels utterly transparent. She watches the beating of her heart make shadows in the firelight. The woman reaches out a hand toward Christine. She motions it away. "A telescope," she says. "To see."

The woman nods. She has fair reddish hair in the firelight, and green eyes.

The man says, "The comet's visible, with the telescope. You'll be able to see it, if the overcast breaks southwesterly." He's more middle-aged than the woman. His face has the mahogany of weather. All weather. And deep lines which are not yet wrinkles. People have their lives, Christine thinks. The woman is simply a woman still, neither young nor old. The man is almost an old man.

"You're a sailor," Christine says. Perhaps the man in whose boat Lydia Rose fell asleep, sailing. The man her mother should have married. My father, Christine thinks.

The man smiles. "I sail," he says. "I am a marine architect." He says it precisely.

"An engineer of human souls," Christine says.

The man and woman look at her. The man laughs. "An architect," he says, "of hulls."

Christine looks into the woman's jade green eyes and sees herself, seated naked by the fire. How odd, she thinks. But not odd at all. She smiles at the woman. The woman's face moves, not to smile, but to be there, open. The human soul.

Christine looks past them to the sky. There are stars, and a dim small shape like a blur on the cornea, a smudge of light.

"It's clearing southwesterly," she says.

The man turns to the telescope. The woman looks at Christine. The man fiddles with the telescope.

"Narrow field of vision," he says. He looks at a star chart. "I've got the coordinates... I'll have it in a minute, then you can come see."

Christine stands. The woman's eyes rise with her, as though she were raising herself to fly.

"It's there," Christine says, pointing, "under Orion's elbow and a few points westerly."

The man turns sharply. The woman smiles. "You can't see it with the naked eye!" he snaps.

The woman turns to him. "She can."

The man adjusts the telescope. He looks through the eyepiece, straightens, and looks with his naked eyes. He turns again. "She's

right, of course." Pause. "And if you know where it is, maybe you can see it." He looks at Christine and back at the sky. "With the naked eye. At least I can imagine I can."

"Yes," the woman says.

Christine pulls on her sweatpants and raises her arms through the clammy arms of the shirt slightly steaming and warmed in patches by the fire. "Thank you," she says when her head has emerged again, hair plastered across her face. She wipes it away.

The woman says, "Perhaps we should thank you."

The man looks at Christine. He has crinkly eyes that have seen weather, and sunlight on the water, and countless stars. "You're a sailor," he says.

Christine smiles. "My mother," she says, "sailed." She bends to pull on her socks. It's then that she sees the blood. It stains the white cotton all along the soles of her feet. The woman watches. Christine takes her underwear out and pulls on her shoes. The feet sting. There is blood in the sand where they had rested.

"I should say our names," the woman says. She turns her hand to herself. "Pat," she says. And turns her hand to the man. "Tom," she says.

Christine nods. "Thank you," she says, and turns away from the fire. She walks along the beach toward the trail, her underwear in her hand.

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## An Exploration into the Viability of the Global Economic Design

Ernest Hekkanen

THE BOMBING of the World Trade Center in New York City on February 26, 1993 is a good place to begin an inquiry into the viability of the global economic design. It's a good place to begin because, as *Time* magazine pointed out in a March 8th article called "Tower Terror," it is "a landmark target near Wall Street ...chosen with a fine sense for the symbols of the late 20th century." That is to say, the World Trade Center's existence was taken rude exception to because of what it stands for.

In conflict resolution it is necessary to understand the underlying forces that have resulted in the conflict if the conflict is going to be resolved, and I feel we must not do that one-sidedly by placing all the emphasis on the terrorists and the forces they represent. We must also investigate the nature of the WTC in order to discover if, indeed, the center was a passive victim in the assault or a more active participant in its fate.

Before we can begin to understand why the WTC was singled out as a target we must realize that, even though it is an extremely large complex, it is nonetheless a model — a model of grand scale, rife with visible and invisible infrastructure. When I say that the WTC is a model, I am, of course, indulging in the use of metaphor, so, before I

go any further, I would like to make it clear what I mean by metaphor.

If we credit what dictionaries tell us, a metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. The use of metaphor is so prevalent I could not avoid using one in my attempt to state what a metaphor is. Metaphors are all-pervasive in the language. They are so useful we employ them in both casual and technical language in an effort to explain what we mean.

As David Bohm and F. David Peat point out in *Science, Order, and Creativity*, "The notion of a metaphor can serve to illuminate the nature of our scientific creativity by equating, in a metaphoric sense, a scientific discovery with a poetic metaphor. For in perceiving a new idea in science, the mind is involved in a similar form of creative perception as when it engages in a poetic metaphor. However, in science it is essential to unfold the meaning of the metaphor in even greater and more 'literal' detail, while in poetry the metaphor may remain relatively implicit."<sup>22</sup>

That is precisely what I am going to attempt to do with the World Trade Center in New York City. I am going to attempt to unfold the meaning of the center in greater and more literal detail; for, until we understand the metaphor of the WTC, we are not going to understand why it was targeted by terrorists.

Can this be done?

If we subscribe to the remarks of the physicists Bohm and Peat, we are led to the conclusion that we can, because that is the very nature of inquiry. Further along in *Science, Order, and Creativity*, the authors say, "It is clear that creative perception in the form of metaphor can take place not only in poetry and in science but in much broader areas of life. What is essential here is that the act of creative perception in the form of a metaphor is basically similar in all these fields, in that it involves an extremely perceptive state of intense passion and high energy that dissolves the excessively rigidly held assumptions in the tacit infrastructure of commonly accepted knowledge."

What comprises our *commonly accepted knowledge* of the World Trade Center? According to a March 8, 1993 article in *Time*, it is "the second tallest building in the world and a magnet for 100,000 workers and visitors each day." This is not an inconsiderable statement. The fact that the WTC is "the second tallest building in the world" suggests that it is one hefty monument. We build monuments of tremendous stature to impress ourselves with the fact that they "stand for

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<sup>22</sup> David Bohm and F. David Peat, *Science, Order, and Creativity*, Bantam Books, 1987, p.137

something," to prove to ourselves that they "cast a considerable shadow across the land."

The fact that the shadow of the trade center melds with shadows of other tall buildings in the same vicinity and consequently gets lost among them, is less important than the metaphoric shadow it casts across the landscape of the business community. Also, the fact that the center is a "magnet for 100,000 workers and visitors each day" suggests that something pretty damn important must be going on there, otherwise the faithful would not be showing up in such enormous numbers to pay tribute to the enterprise(s) being carried on there.

The above, one-line description in *Time* gives us only a vague idea of what goes on at the WTC. It is assumed that we *know* what is going on, that it is of "general knowledge" and needs no further explanation. In effect, the article does not unfold the meaning of the trade center in greater and more literal detail. Instead, the writer has opted for a poetic metaphor which allows the meaning to remain relatively implicit. It relies on the reader to bring meaning to the metaphor. For an American, the meaning might be one thing; for an Iranian, Latino or Russian, quite another.

Obviously we must figure out what the WTC stands for; we must unfold its meaning so it is no longer implicit but, rather, explicit. On reading what is about to follow, it might often seem as if I am stating the obvious, but too often we Americans, in an effort to further our notion of what is best for the world, refuse to see or acknowledge the obvious.

So let's take a closer look at the trade center, beginning with promotional material in *NYC Access* by Richard Saul Wurman. It gives us a brief overview that helps to establish the myth of the center. In *NYC Access* we learn that "the World Trade Center consists of six buildings — the towers, three low plaza buildings, and the 22-story Vista Hotel — which form a semicircle around a 5-acre plaza. All buildings are connected at ground level by the concourse, a vast shopping mall and pedestrian walk-around filled with 60 shops, banks and the concourse restaurants and gathering places.

"The twin monolithic towers are, at 110 stories, the highest and most prominently sited of any buildings in the city, rising as an architectural gateway to Lower Manhattan. The World Trade Center offers 9.5 million sq. ft. of office space, and is home to more than 1,200 trading firms and organizations...Almost 2,000 cars can park in the underground garages, and it is a major station for city subway and PATH lines."

More detailed than the *Time* article, *NYC Access* helps us comprehend the center in terms of the context of New York City. We glimpse it as a tourist might glimpse it. We "see" the shops, banks and restaurants as they are conjured up for us by words. It is given significance

and stature as an “architectural gateway,” another metaphor; and even more importantly, it hints at what is going on by mentioning the fact that trading firms are housed in the WTC.

We are also made aware of the fact that it is a “major station for the city subway and PATH lines,” indicating that it is of considerable importance to the context in which it finds itself. This is confirmed by a March 1st, 1993 article in *The New York Times* which explains that the WTC “contains 10 percent of lower Manhattan’s office space and some of its biggest corporate names.”

Obvious, yes, but let us pursue the obvious a little further. Let us survey what is going on in more detail so we might unfold the meaning in even greater and more literal detail. Orla O’Sullivan reports in *American Metal Market* that “The Commodity Exchange (Comex) and the New York Mercantile Exchange (Nymex) resumed business March 1, ‘93, after the Feb. 26 explosion...” Roger Benedict tells us in *The Oil Daily* that “Future trading will shift to the International Petroleum Exchange in London during repairs.” In *American Banker* Jeanne Iida explains that the explosion “halted many financial institutions’ operations. Branches of Citicorp, Chemical Banking Corp and Republic Bank of New York were evacuated...”

Then, again, in *Pensions & Investments*, we are told by Terry Williams that “the business activities of many of the institutional investment firms” were effected by the blast. But, to get right down to the nitty-gritty of what goes on at the trade center, let us once again consult the March 1st article in *The New York Times*: “Besides the commodity exchanges, which set prices on everything from gold to cotton to heating oil, Mr. Tese said other key tenants would also be operating” only three days after the blast. If this isn’t adequate evidence of what is going on at the WTC, *Business Insurance* reported after the bombing that “Many large companies – including Guy Carpenter and Co. Inc., Aetna Life and Casualty Co., Deloitte and Touche, First Boston Corp. and several Japanese banks – moved thousands of employees to branch offices.”

In only a few hundred words, I have been able to indicate what is going on at the World Trade Center. I could, however, go on for many more pages, detailing what exactly the brokers, financial institutions, law firms, custom house and commodity exchanges accomplish in a single day. But that isn’t necessary. All we have to understand is that “commodity exchange” is by far the most important activity taking place at the WTC. All the other activities are handmaidens to this major activity. They exist to support and facilitate what commodity exchanges accomplish.

What, in fact, *do* commodity exchanges accomplish? Basically, they match up demand with supply. If in one area of the world we have companies that demand cotton, gold, oil, paper, et cetera, and in another area of the world, we have companies that can supply these

items, a match-up (or set of match-ups) is made, selling prices are determined and the goods are exchanged. All very simple and straightforward, really, and, on the surface, innocent enough.

It is my contention that we can learn a lot about the function of an organization by looking at its design and how it fits into the context in which it finds itself. This is nothing new. Scientists have been studying phenomenon in this manner for a long time now. Take, for instance, the science of biology. More often than not, animals that have wings can be counted on to fly; animals that have fins can be counted on to swim. Form and function are very closely related. So let us look at the form, or design, of the WTC and see what we can gather from it.

I would like to look at three aspects of the trade center: 1) its structure, 2) its communication system, and 3) the commodities it deals in, hoping to unfold the metaphor of the center in greater and more literal detail.

1) The WTC can be seen in terms of a hive within a hive. The first innermost hive is the WTC. The mass transportation system, located in the subterranean bowels of the hive where the explosion took place, allows the worker-bees optimal entry into the center. They ascend to the honey-combed structure of the Twin Towers to labor so many hours each day, so many days each year. To accommodate the 50,000 worker-bees, there is an elaborate system of shelves, both actual and metaphorical, upon which they labor at their various tasks. However, it is important to see that this hive is not a hive unto itself. It is located inside another hive, namely Manhattan which is, in turn, located inside a larger hive called New York City which, in turn, is located inside an even more monstrous hive called the United States of America. Also, it is important to see that the worker-bees in the innermost hive do not actually act like real honey bees who leave the hive to gather nectar and bring it back to the hive to be stored as honey for use during times of scarcity. So what do these worker-bees do? A partial answer to this lies in the communication system.

2) By all accounts, the communication system at the WTC is a very up-to-date, sophisticated one. However, immediately after the bombing, David Deshane, on the 105th floor of the center, reported to *Time* that "All the computers shut down, then all the phones shut down." And yet, as Kevin Tanzillo noted in *Communications News*, even though the blast "knocked out a large portion of the communications systems serving the building, companies were able to recover rapidly by rerouting their voice and data networks." That seems to suggest that the communication system is not only sophisticated but terribly vital to what goes on at the center. In effect, rather than leaving the hive like honey-bees to bring back sustenance to the hive, the worker-bees at the WTC conduct metaphorical flights out into the countryside to bring back a kind of "rarefied nectar."

3) When we look at the hive that is the WTC, it is obvious that very little actual "honey" is stored on site. We see some "honey" being stored in shops and restaurants, but certainly not enough to sustain 50,000 worker-bees for very long periods of scarcity. So where is the "honey" being stored? In greater Manhattan? In greater New York City? Yes, some "honey" is stored in these outer hives; however, don't forget, there are even greater numbers of worker-bees in these outer hives. The hive that is New York City would not, in fact, be able to sustain all of its worker-bees for very long on the "honey" stored in the elaborate "honey-combed" structure of the city. In the event of a long, sustained period of scarcity, millions of worker-bees in this hive would simply perish. They would be allowed to die; they might even be "pushed" out of the hive to fall to their deaths, which happens in real hives during sustained periods of scarcity.

What we have, in effect, is a man-made hive in which worker-bees are consuming the nectar brought back to the hive just about as rapidly as it arrives along established lines of transportation. We have created a perfect scenario for disaster, largely because we have created a design for the hive that makes the worker-bees utterly dependent — not independent, as various advertising and promotional schemes would have us believe when we buy a car, drink the latest beverage or purchase the newest fashion. In the hearts and minds of those working at the WTC at the time of the explosion, there was confirmation of this. The worker-bees were suddenly exposed to the fact that they were utterly dependent and, therefore, vulnerable. Otherwise they would have been content to stay in the confines of the hive. Instead, they fled in great numbers. They were rudely acquainted with how utterly dependent they were on the well regulated, artificial environment of the hive once the communication, electrical, water and circulated-air systems went out. Those things that sustain life in the Twin Towers could no longer be depended on! The loss of these systems communicated to the worker-bees the inadequacies inherent in the economic design of the innermost hive they so faithfully serve the dictates of each day. Until then, they hadn't been forced to entertain the artifice of the design. In fear and panic, they tried to escape, thinking the hive might collapse, with them inside.

If the innermost hive that is the WTC doesn't store actual "honey," then what does it store? One answer might be "a whole lot of nothing;" however, this would be too flippant. It would be overlooking the obvious. Although the WTC doesn't store actual "honey" or sustenance on site, it does store a "rarefied honey." One can't taste or consume this rarefied honey, except perhaps metaphorically. It is stored in the honeycombed structure of the WTC, on paper and in the memory banks of computers. This rarefied honey is made up of transactions, receipts, promissory notes and things of that nature. It



stores abstract concepts that represent commodities of every conceivable kind.

The trade center is, in fact, based on metaphor. It trades in metaphors. It is a sophisticated system that processes metaphors. The metaphors are traded smoothly and quickly, so quickly the trade in metaphors is almost instantaneous, due to a well-developed communication system on the site of the WTC and elsewhere. The commodities "literally denoted" by these metaphors travel much more slowly through space and time to get to their assigned destinations. This is because the actual commodities take up much more volume. They travel along well-developed lines of transportation in vessels that are also voluminous and weighty, vessels that are susceptible to breakdowns, accidents, acts of God and, of course, terrorism.

In effect, the World Trade Center is engaged in the metaphorical activity of making sure that "honey" flows in a continuous, uninterrupted stream back to the multi-layered hive that is New York City and the United States of America. It is in constant communication with other centers devoted to similar activities, and usually these centers are located in rather large metropolitan areas in one country or another. The closer one is to the innermost hive, or ground-zero, the more dependent and vulnerable one is, should the lines of communication or transportation ever fail.

Let me explain what I mean.

The innermost hive that is the WTC is the "brain" responsible for the operation of the outer, surrounding hives. The importance of this innermost hive is attested to by the quickness and agility with which it responded when communications were temporarily cut off. The innermost hive that is the brain of the greater system of hives *must* make certain that rarefied resources are flowing uninterrupted back to the system of hives, resources like electricity, food, water, minerals, information, et cetera, et cetera. By being highly elastic it helps assure its survival, its viability. So when disaster struck, communications with the hive were rerouted. These lines of communication (which are actually rarefied lines of transportation) are of tremendous importance to the greater hive of New York City and the United States.

In the *Journal of Commerce*, which originates in the WTC, Doug Harper made this point dramatically clear in his article "When Bad Things Sometimes Happen to Good Computers." The "attack on the WTC has highlighted the need for disaster recovery plans in major business and trading centers. The Association for Computing Machinery suggests that contingency plans should aim for the minimization of business interruptions, the limitation of damage and disruption, the establishment of alternate means of operations, and the provision of rapid service restorations and the minimization of economic impact. Other considerations include system testing and the development of adequate information backups and *security controls*."

The italics are mine. Although reserved as a kind of afterthought in the article, security controls are much more pervasive than is perhaps suggested. Security controls exist at every level and in every dimension of the WTC, from elaborate electronic controls conducting surveillance to make sure “healthy” computing systems aren’t invaded by viruses, to the security guard at the door. After flexibility and elasticity in the “nerve center” of the hive, security is the most important feature keeping the lines of communication open and working properly.

As I have already stated, lines of communication are really just ephemeral lines of transportation. What is good for lines of communication, we find, is also good for lines of transportation, which can also be attacked in order to disrupt the flow of “honey” back to the hive. In our endeavor to keep this from happening, we have established security systems to minimize the economic impact. These security systems consist of the army, navy and air force, as well as those of lesser nations which act as handmaidens to the United States. If the price of oil is jeopardized by an infidel in Iraq, we send in the armed forces. If our sugar supply is jeopardized in Guatemala or some other tin-pot dictatorship, we sell more arms to those loyal “democratic” forces to keep down the peasants who are responsible for growing and cutting the raw cane but who derive little money, let alone sustenance, from doing so.

In short, our armed forces, both covert and overt, serve our economic policies. Also, by selling arms to those who serve our interests in Third World countries, we make a handsome profit off the hardware. If, in Canada, the government doesn’t make the country’s natural resources sufficiently accessible, we simply suggest to the business community up there that we will take our money and run. We will shut down our branch plants, move them to Mexico and effectively starve Canadians out of the game, for their beehive economic design is even more vulnerable than our own.

The objective, in this game, is to form a circle of economic invincibility to make certain that the flow of “honey” back to the hive is continuous and can’t be out-flanked.

How has this absurd situation come about? If we take a look at the economic ideas that this fragile and highly vulnerable economic model is based on, we can quickly fathom how things have gotten so ridiculous. In the late 1700s, Adam Smith formulated a theory of supply and demand based on the concept of self-interest or “the desire for betterment.” Self-interest, according to Smith, not only determines the flow of commodities from one place to another but also the price of those commodities. The market value of an item is determined by self-interest, what one person is willing to sell it for and what another person is willing to buy it for.

This, according to Robert L. Heilbroner in *The Making of Economic Society*, ultimately drives a society to increase its riches. The tendency of a society is "to encourage a steady rise in the productivity of its labor, so that over time, the same number of working people could turn out a steadily larger output."

But why?

"The answer, according to Smith, was the gain in productiveness that was to be had by achieving an ever-finer division of labor." That is, people would become more specialized over time; they would become interchangeable parts in the capitalist design.

"But," says Heilbroner, "how does...business expansion result in a higher division of labor?"

"The answer is very neat. The main road to profit consists in equipping workmen with the necessary machinery that Smith mentions in his description of [a] pin factory, for it is this machinery that will increase their productivity. Thus, the path to growth lies in what Smith called *accumulation*, or in more modern terminology, in the process of *capital investment*. As capitalists seek money, they invest in machines and equipment. As a result of the machines and equipment, their men can produce more. Because they produce more, society's output grows."<sup>23</sup>

It is important to see that the greatest amount of *accumulation* has taken place in towns, cities and huge metropolitan areas — that is, the "hives" I have been talking about. Historically, most pin factories and manufacturing plants have been located in densely populated areas. The result has been the creation of transportation routes that result in natural resources such as water, food, minerals, petroleum products, lumber and electricity flowing from outlying areas in the countryside into these densely populated areas where human beings proliferate like rats and then, in turn, compete for their fair share of goods — due, of course, to self-interest.

The "invisible hand" called competition has, according to this system, maximized the wealth of nations through optimal allocation of resources, both human and natural. The design has succeeded so well, metropolitan areas have become little more than vast, elaborate systems of shelves on which to put people with more or less specialized, redundant skills. The ultimate expression of this economic design is epitomized by the World Trade Center.

Intentionally, or perhaps unintentionally, we have created an economic system that is, to use an analogy, attempting to feed the world's population (increasingly located in metropolitan areas) out of backyard gardens in the countryside. So far, by abusing the earth with chemicals, stripping it in a fashion that is unsustainable and enslaving others for our own economic gain, we have managed to

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<sup>23</sup> *The Making of Economic Society*, Robert L. Heilbroner, Prentice-Hall, 1985

perform the feat of keeping up with the demand for resources in these densely populated centers.

This situation isn't likely to reverse itself. The tendency is for people in metropolitan areas to receive higher wages and salaries than their counterparts in the countryside, with the result that more and more people keep moving to such centers. Also, in such centers, self-interest dictates a gaudy display of consumption beyond what is necessary to sustain each and every one of us. With each new, useless product we create a demand for, we increase the flow of resources out of the countryside into metropolitan areas where people are less than sensitive to the destruction being carried out to meet their needs. Obviously, the problem is one of *accumulation*, whether in the domestic sense or the global sense.

The lines of transportation hauling resources from the countryside into large metropolitan areas are the most vulnerable links in this economic design. If they get severed, the "honey" flowing back to the hive is cut off. The transportation of goods which allow millions of human beings to survive is disrupted, for greater or lesser lengths of time. In cases of sudden, overwhelming scarcity, people usually revert to barbarism of the worst kind. They take up arms in an attempt to procure sustenance. They rove like packs of rabid animals. Social disintegration quickly ensues. Chaos prevails. The only way to handle this sort of situation is through force of arms taken up by the national guard or the army. That is why armies are deployed, or contracted, to make certain that the lines of transportation back to the hive of North America remain open.

In effect, the economic design I have just sketched is grid-locking us in patterns of behavior that, in the long run, are not healthy for us or the world. As the Worldwatch Institute points out, this economic design for things began to max out in the late '80s, when per capita consumption peaked and then began to decline. "The 1980s may have been the last decade in which humankind could anticipate a future of ever-increasing productivity on all fronts. By one measure after another, the boom we have experienced since mid-century is coming to an end."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the world is wearing out. We have expanded arable land to the max. We are exhausting its resources in an attempt to steadily increase output, and yet we cling stubbornly to the same old economic design of things, giving it a new PR spin by calling it "global economics."

Let me make what I am getting at a little clearer by relating something my father pointed out to me back when I was a boy growing up in the United States. My father, an amateur naturalist, pointed out something rather fascinating about the rabbit population in Southwest Wyoming. At the high-point in the population cycle, one

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<sup>24</sup> *Worldwatch*, Vol. 6, No.4, 1993, Lester R. Brown

couldn't walk through the sagebrush, look behind a boulder or down in a crevice and not see a rabbit. Then, the next year, one couldn't find a rabbit if one's life depended on it!

There are a couple of rather important reasons for this abundance-scarcity cycle. At the peak of the cycle the rabbits are so numerous they put a lot of stress on the food resources. Also, an algae-like growth deleterious to rabbit health gathers on the fur and the rabbits, not known for great hygienic practices, spread the disease among themselves. That is, they foul their personal and social environment – as we humans are in the habit of doing in large metropolitan areas.

My father told me that any species that can't control its population growth, or the subsequent impact it has on the environment, will eventually have limitations placed on it by nature. Nature brings out-of-balance situations back into balance, not out of vindictiveness or anything like that, but simply because nature is an organism that seeks to keep things in balance. Contrary to what Heilbroner and other economists maintain, nature observes a kind of economy. Indeed, nature probably gave rise to some of our notions of economy – for instance, those that have to do with scarcity and demand. But nature's economy ultimately seeks to keep things in balance, rather than increasing productivity.

We human beings are reaching the high-point in our cycle. The population explosion we are directly responsible for, and the havoc we are consequently wreaking upon the environment, are quickly reaching the limitation point. Remember, any species that cannot perfect the art of self-discipline will ultimately have limitations placed on it by nature. Nature brings out-of-balance populations back into balance.

Out-of-control populations are unhealthy. To use a handy metaphor, they are cancerous to the whole of the organization – in this case, the earth. They create such disruption they jeopardize the whole of nature and, in the end, that isn't allowed to happen. We can either continue in the same old traditional ways, choosing to live in ignorance of the effects our ever-increasing population in metropolitan areas is having on the earth, and so have nature bring us back into balance along the lines of those rabbits in Southwest Wyoming, or we can choose to change our behavior. We can choose to limit the deleterious effects we are having on the earth.

Can we do this? I'm not too sure we can. The obstacle we are facing is all too human. We are a species that refuses to be enlightened. We prefer to live in ignorance of the situation, keeping our noses to the economic grind stone in order to get, get, get, and to beget, beget, beget, rather than achieving the next level of awareness which would automatically oblige us to act responsibly by observing restraint in every facet of our self-interested lives.

To survive as a species that isn't going to suffer a catastrophe similar to those rabbits in Southwest Wyoming, we will have to voluntarily place limitations on ourselves. We will have to expand our rather narrow self-interest to include the self-interest of others, as well as that of nature. Our economic design will have to be brought into line with the original economic design on this planet.

What are the chances of this happening?

Not very good, I reckon. Here in the First World we decline to come to terms with our lust, avarice, jealousy, envy, covetousness, aggression and violence — those things in ourselves that serve our narrow-minded self-interest. Indeed, our financial community promotes all of the above. It insists on us serving those qualities in ourselves in order to eradicate global debt and to increase the gross domestic product. That is, by serving our rapacious appetites we create economic growth.

The concept of continued growth, promoted primarily in metropolitan areas, is flawed and false. It depends on making us more dependent, not less dependent. That way everything from food to toilet flush can then be sold to us. In the end, we will become little more than large infants sucking perpetually at the teat of the economy.

However, in the final analysis, this will create, in addition to greater dependency, greater vulnerability, particularly in densely populated areas.

To change this scenario, we will have to deal with those attributes in ourselves which we are promoting for financial gain. As it stands right now, we are casting ballots for a future catastrophe with each dollar we spend in an effort to get ahead, in an effort to "improve" our standard of living here in North America where we consume some forty percent of the world's resources while subjecting others to degradation by economically enslaving them.

At the beginning of this article, I proposed to unfold the metaphor of the World Trade Center in greater and more literal detail to discover why it was used as a target by terrorists. I wanted to discover whether it was a passive victim in the assault, or a more active participant in its fate.

I am suggesting here that the WTC is a monument that stands for the degradation of the world and of various populations. When one erects a monument to degradation and injustice, one shouldn't be surprised when others take exception to it, when others attempt to destroy it. That is because the monument wasn't erected with the betterment of all sentient beings in mind, only the betterment of a few. The act of terrorism that took place on February 26, 1993 should warn us that the economic design we are promoting is less than viable.

To verify what I am saying, simply open your eyes and take a look at the obvious. Take a look at the metaphors we subscribe to on

**a daily basis. Those metaphors have more to do with hoarding and building fortifications than anything else.**

JOHN DUMBRILLE has won several short fiction awards. He lives in East Vancouver with his wife Michelle and daughters Rebecca and Orissa.

## My Father's Sign

John Dumbrille

THE MACHINE rumbled on. My brother and I covered our ears as we followed Dad out of his three-bedroom stucco bungalow, and stepped past the big oak that separated his place from the neighbour's. A sturdy fence of two-by-fours surrounded its trunk. My father pointed to the maple beyond it.

"A fat lot of good that'll do," he shouted. Six rough planks of varying lengths were loosely attached at its base. We approached an East Indian operating a backhoe. He was smashing rocks, digging a new foundation.

Dad's face looked like it used to: fresh, laced with old-school toughness. It's a toughness that Wally and I feared and despised growing up, a toughness that both of us nimbly disinherited. "Pills," Dad used to tell us when he had us alone. Sometimes he would illustrate by pointing to his crotch. "Pills are what you boys need."

By the looks of things, we'll never pack testicles like the old man's. Wally seems to have resigned himself to bachelorhood and his building superintendent's job in Richmond; since my divorce last year, whatever ballsiness I used to muster is gone now, maybe for good. So I doubt Wally or I will ever have what it takes to knock down the kind of salary our father had. And I doubt we'll ever be



able to buy a house in Vancouver, at least not while Dad is alive. We know it, and Dad knows it.

We stood in front of the noisy backhoe and my brother barked at the operator. "Where's the foreman?"

The operator turned down the idle on his machine, just as a shout startled us, from behind. We turned to see a Chinese Canadian in his late forties.

"Mr. Cowan. How can I help you?" His face and his speech were clear and refined.

"These hours of yours may be legal *technically*, Norman, but if you push it..." Dad wheezed. "It'll end in litigation." His upper lip stiffened, as bits of Scottish brogue chipped into his speech. "Have you no respect, you people?"

Norman pulled on his chin. "May I ask what time you get up in the morning?"

"Eight thirty." My father's answer was resolute, although I have never known him to sleep past six fifteen.

Norman took in Wally and me. "Maybe we could start a bit later," he offered.

Wally's long forehead was creased, as it often is. As the older brother, he always carried more than his share of worries. "Fair enough," he offered, "but what about compensation for the noise and inconvenience?"

The backhoe started up again, and Norman smiled, clenching his jaw. He measured his words before speaking. "I'll have to make some calls," he said.

We walked Dad back to the house, where he made some calls of his own.

About twenty years ago my father, along with a colleague of his at MacMillan Bloedel, fought City Hall to get No-Entry streets here in Mount Pleasant. They won, making the area less busy and probably safer, but it always struck me as a grim irony that a fiery Scot like my father would be the champion of something called 'traffic calming.'

Dad put down the phone. He chuckled without humour. "Earplugs. Earplugs is what City Hall wants me to wear." He pulled out his handkerchief and coughed.

Later in the week, he called me at work. "Well," he drawled, "they came in at eight fifteen, instead of seven thirty. That's progress, I guess."

"How was your sleep?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"The asthma?"

"Not too bad."

"I wish you'd do what Doctor Ross told you."

"Brian," he growled, "I made my decision. Sounds like you're ready to give up the ghost on me. Anyway, no room for two in your little place."

"I called the Better Business Bureau, and they can't help either," I added.

"Ya? Well, they didn't see what those clowns did today." Dad sucked on his gums and swallowed, aware that he was holding my attention. "Rolled them cedars like they were having a good old time. I guess trees don't mean much to these people."

The next day, the city inspector closed the site and fined the developer. Wally and Dad were jubilant. "Plus they'll have to plant new trees in their place," Wally enthused. "That's hitting them where it hurts, eh Dad?"

"Yes, by Jesus," said my father. "Still, we better check and see where they plant the new ones. Or if the ones they put in are even alive." He grinned. "Oldest trick in the book."

By week's end the crew was back, banging up the walls on the first floor. As I stepped onto the sidewalk, I admired the swift, economical way the men swung their hammers.

"Sorry about the noise." Norman was holding a slim cellular phone. He smiled boyishly. "Just trying to do my job."

"I know," I said. My voice was thin. "And we're just trying to do what's best for our father."

"And what's best for some trees, I hear." Norman's face smiled again.

The next day, Dad watched two men pouring something down the maple tree next door. When the police arrived, Norman politely told the officer that my father was mistaken. The officer found nothing suspicious, but he took care to tell my Dad, privately, that he would make a note for City Hall.

Dad's had us over for dinner of chicken, potato and frozen carrots. Like most of his cooking, it was a Spartan reminder of my mother's fare, but with little of the taste. Dad's skin looked like rice paper. We ate, and Wally pulled out a statement Doctor Ross had written about how the project next door was affecting Dad's health. We hatched a new plan.

The three of us worked out the copy, and I had the lettering done at work. It was a big sign, at least four by six feet.

The development on the lot next door is in complete disregard for the well-being of the human and natural environment of this neighbourhood. Our father, who lives in this house, is seventy-eight years old and suffers from asthma and emphysema. (See attached notice.) The developers continue to ignore his condition; they have also deliberately destroyed trees that they are legally required to

protect. According to City Council and the Better Business Bureau, there is nothing that can be done. But they are wrong. By signing the petition you can help stop the spread of development like this, development that threatens the health and integrity of our community.

W. and B. Cowan

Wally and I set the sign on the grass beside two metal stakes. Dad admired it like it was the Magna Carta. Slowly, his fingertips grazed the vinyl lettering. He turned to Wally and said, "See what you can do when you get a decent job?"

Wally's neck thickened. He swept a lock of hair over his forehead.

"What are you talking about?" I demanded. "Where do you think the stakes came from, for Christ's sake."

Dad clicked his tongue. "Swear at your father, would ya?"

Wally and I took a sledgehammer to the stakes and drove them deep into the lawn. We wired the sign to the stakes, then hung a vinyl-covered clipboard to the side, ready for signatures. Then Wally told Dad and me there was some business at his building to take care of.

"Problems with the plumbing again?" Dad offered, too eagerly.

"No, Dad." Wally got into his Tercel and drove off.

In just under three months, only ten people signed our petition. Sometimes a mother pushing a stroller would pause to read it; others out for a walk might stop in front of it as their dog took a discreet leak on the lawn. "And these neighbours, they're no better," Dad told me one day, as he cast a filthy look at the Taiwanese students' house across the road. I imagine the sign provoked a good deal of discussion, at the very least. Last week, after a few letters from City Hall, threatening to fine my father for his 'oversized, non-authorized sign,' we finally took the thing down.

When I visited him this afternoon, Dad was passing his rake over a day's worth of fallen leaves. Men were busy laying sod next door. The house looks formidable, maybe three times the size of Dad's place. The maple that we think they poisoned looks droopy all right, but we won't know until spring if it's dead. The bulldozed trees have yet to be replaced.

"How's your cough?" I asked.

"No worse, no better."

"Sleeping any better?"

"Oh, I get few winks." His voice trailed off as he looked away. I saw someone as familiar as my own self, someone that I knew as I knew weariness. We breathed together for a moment, then Dad followed me into the kitchen where I went to work on the dishes. We talked about getting him meals-on-wheels, something he has been considering for the past few visits.

"I suppose I could give it a try," Dad conceded.

Before I left, we stood on the porch and watched a gardening service worker across the road. He had on a pair of lime green earmuffs. A leaf blower was strapped to his back, and the engine screamed as he swept the blower tube back and forth. Dad rolled his eyes at me.

We said good-bye and I walked to my car. It was getting dark. The lamp from the hallway was lighting up Dad's feathery crown. I gave the horn three jaunty honks and pulled away. My father switched the porch light on and off, on and off.

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## Barbaric, Mystical, Bored

Hillel Wright

Dwarf: And your creation...has it a title?

Artist: What for? What good are titles?

Dwarf: Think of me as an art lover, not as an officer.

Artist: Oh, all right...Title: Barbaric, Mystical, Bored.

Dwarf: You have given our century its name.

Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*

HOLGAR LARSEN felt the lull in the gale.

"There's no goddamn way I'm hangin' around here no longer," he was thinking. "What the hell...?" Engines had started. Two big Scania diesels. They were running them up to temperature now. "It's them two goddamn Finns," he was thinking, "Luoma and Juhala."

Sol Juhala's *Polar Star* was the first boat out of the cove. The big Scania throbbed confidently, as the big bluff bow of the *Star* shouldered the North Pacific swells, waiting for the right wave to make her turn downwind toward Ucluelet and the market. Sam Luoma flashed him briefly with his spotlight. *Pale Fire*, just a bit smaller than *Polar Star*, but no less powerful, squared into the swells.

Holgar Larsen tied off the wheel with a loop of halibut ganglion over a spoke, put the boat in slow reverse, and went forward to cast off from the mooring buoy. The radios were crackling on all three boats. Storm warnings were still up. But there was a lull in a late summer Nor'wester, and you had to take risks to take advantages in

this game. Larsen fine-tuned the sideband and picked up Luoma and Juhala muttering to each other in Finnish...and in code as well. Unless his Finnish was getting rustier.

"What's the big deal?" Holgar was thinking. "We're all just out in the goddamn gale, runnin' to market 'cause tomorrow's gonna be too goddamn rough to fish. And the rest o' them goddamn bastards, lyin' in their bunks in Pedlar's Cove...next week they'll all be cryin' in their beers in the hotel pub, how the big bad storm made them miss the first day of the big sockeye run. To hell with them!"



"Holgar Larsen, oh yeah, I remember him alright."

Seven or eight salmon fishermen, West Coast troller crews, sat around a big table at a hotel pub. Fisheries had arbitrarily cut off sockeye fishing. Most of them had done well on the valuable sockeye while the fishery was open, and money and beer flowed noisily in the dark, smoky pub.

"Open the goddamn door!" someone shouted.

The open door let in a rush of bright yellow sunshine, which cut through the dark and smoke like a sharp scythe through the late summer grass. It was a shame not to be out fishing on a day like this.

"One time, on the old *Louise*, I fouled a gurdy," the first fisherman continued. "Lost about thirty fathoms of wire and a cannonball, too. He had those old mechanical gurdies...anyway, he came after me with a gaffhook. Wound up busting it over the gurdies. Lost the hook, too. 'Goddamn son of a bitch!' he shouts at me. Anyway, I nearly shit my pants. Tough bastard. Crazy. Scare the piss out of anybody."



Holgar Larsen had had hydraulic gurdies for years now. The best. Same thing with his electronics. And his deck gear. The best and best cared for of any boat his size in the fleet. He had the best boom winch and anchor winch. The best anchor with an all-chain anchor line. *Albatross* could go anywhere and stay anywhere, and with her big new 8 cylinder Hundestadt diesel, keep up with anyone.

Yet mostly, Holgar Larsen fished alone. Not that he hadn't, through the years, tried fishing in a group, and more recently, after turning fifty, employing a deckhand. Of course, Holgar Larsen had been a deckhand himself, in Norway from childhood, and nineteen years in the George's Bank cod trawl fishery. Saving money all the while to come west and buy his own boat. His first troller, the old *Louise*. At forty feet she was a big workboat for her day, no hydraulics, no LORAN, no radar, certainly no SatNav or computer. She had a

good sounder for the times though, an old paper recorder, good for 400 fathoms. And the old Big Phone. You could talk to the boys in California on that one. Couldn't hear beyond fifty miles with the mickey mouse phones with all the gossipy channels they all use nowadays. He still kept the old AM radiophone stashed away in a box under his seat.



"Nobody was meaner or tougher than old Rob McQueen," Wiley Moon was saying. "He drove that big steel dragger of his all the way from Scotland. Drinkin' coffee and smokin' cigarettes nonstop all the way."

"Yeah, and a big drunk when he gets to port," a voice shouted from another table.

"Hey, Wiley! Yer shot!" Marvin Charlie shouted, from the pool table.



Holgar Larsen took a sip from his big half-filled mug of coffee and lit up a cigarette. "Well, I'm gonna hafta run with this goddamn gale all right," he was thinking. "The radar must be warmed up by now." He moved to the radar screen and fine-tuned it. *Albatross* rolled and pitched, wallowed and shook, but the big steel hull, assisted by the electronic auto-pilot, kept her course.

The auto-pilot, or *Iron Mike*, as fishermen called it, was all the deckhand Holgar Larsen needed. Not that he'd leave the wheelhouse like some solo skippers, leaving the pilot to steer the boat while the skipper lay dead-to-the-world in his bunk. No, Larsen stayed in the wheelhouse, scanning the radar for shipping, tuning in on the various radios — sidebands and VHF's — drinking coffee and smoking his American cigarettes. "Deckhand! A waste of time and money. Never found one yet worth his salt. Hell, if a guy wants to fish that bad, let him learn on his own boat. Can't afford some bozo makin' mistakes on mine. And these women you see today — these girls! Who do they think they're kiddin'? Fishin's a man's game. The old-timers were right to keep 'em off the ships. Nothing' but trouble." Not even the big red Chinook salmon lying frozen in the hold could thaw Holgar Larsen's icy countenance into a smile.

*Albatross* ran swiftly before the gale. White-topped greenies boarded astern, but broke up on the hard steel decks, bulwarks, and hatches — even the cockpit had a big steel cover — and washed harmlessly out the big grated scuppers back to the sea. She was a good sea boat, *Albatross*, sea worthy and sea kindly, and sat in the big swells like her namesakes, the big, goofy-looking sea birds who

could be seen out the portholes paddling peacefully in the swells, like mallards on a country slough.

Holgar Larsen sat peacefully in *Albatross'* cabin watching the red-orange light on the auto-pilot's compass repeater, indicating the ship's course. EastSouthEast. He scanned the radar. There they were, two blips on the radar screen, up ahead on the two mile ring. "Hard drivers, those two goddamn Finns," Holgar was thinking. The Hundestadt's reassuring hum throbbed beneath his feet, muffled by lead sheet, pressed fiberglass, sheets of epoxy-laminated plywood, and a thick layer of boat carpet. Purple. The royal colour. *Albatross* held a good downwind course. Holgar Larsen was a stern king in his wild domain.



Wiley Moon sat looking at his namesake in Pedlar's Cove. He watched its reflection in the gust-rippled water of the cove, watched clouds rush by, ragged and strewn, torn edges glowing cobalt and lavender, around, past and over the moon. The radio weather report called for Northwest gales for at least another day, gales 55 knots to storm force winds of 65 knots and gusting seas of 15 to 20 feet, fishing impossible for a forty footer like *Vagabond*. The raft of trollers tugged against the mooring line of the inside boat. *Vagabond* was on the outside.

"We might as well get a good night's sleep," skipper Frank Bean was saying. "Who was that leaving the cove?"

"First the *Polar Star* and *Pale Fire*, then the *Albatross*," Wiley answered.

"Oh yeah. Well, we'll let the hi-liners run in the gale." The trolling pole halyards slapped the mast, the stabilizer cables hummed and sang in the gusts. "Sounds like another harbour day tomorrow," Bean said. "Might as well change the oil in the morning. She's just about due."



Holgar Larsen was in port, off-loading his fish, getting his freezer ready for the anticipated big sockeye run. Luoma and Juhala had beat him to the Northern Sea Foods dock, and he'd had to cool his heels in the freezer hold while they bullshitted and settled up with the buyers, who knew that few boats were likely to show up out of the rising storm. He finally eased the *Albatross* up to the unloading dock.

"When're you guys gonna hire more help?" he said to Don Williams, the fish buyer.

"When you quit goin' t' sea 'n' come 'n' work for me," Williams joshed him.



"I work for you already," Holgar said.

"Have you got the fish-hold plugged, Holgar?" Williams asked.

"Sure, with the goddamn pinks," Holgar told him. Pink salmon were worth far less than red coho, sockeye or chinook. "Thirty days. Thirty tons."

"Well, I hear sockeye's gonna open t'morra'," Williams suggested.

"Sure, just like them goddamn Fishery boys, right in the teeth of a bloody storm."

"Well, the tourists will be happy anyway... looks like lots of sunshine."

"They'll be happy if the wind don't blow their goddamn tents right off the beach!"

"Yeah...well...let's get those pinks weighed up, eh? Got a few smiles too, I see...."



The sun was shining in Pedlar's Cove as well. The wind was howling outside, gusting across Checleset Bay, screaming down the North Pacific Ocean, over the salmon shoals, over the slopes of the continental shelf.

It was the afternoon of the third storm-bound day, and the fishermen on the trollers rafted up to the mooring buoys inside the cove were getting restless.

Aboard *Vagabond*, Wiley Moon and skipper Frank Bean were having another fresh cuppa coffee. Caffeine psychosis was beginning to set in. Wiley had already scrubbed the boat, inside and out, and read an entire paperback, *Go-Boy*, an autobiography about a prison escape artist. Frank had changed the engine oil and inventoried the galley supplies. Now they were sitting at the galley settee, talking.

"Years ago, when all those hippies were camped down on Long Beach, before it became a National Park...do you remember that?" Frank asked.

"Sure I remember," Wiley answered, "I was there. And it was more like a village...or a small town. We all lived in driftwood houses with the cracks covered in plastic to keep out the rain. The big beach fires burned for months at a time, right through the pouring rain, they were so big and hot. They created their own dry zones."

"I remember those fires," said Frank. "I could see them from out on the grounds. I always used to dream about quitting the working grind, fishing month after month, year after year, and just go and live on the beach. I envied them...you too, I guess," Frank concluded.

"But I envied you, Frank," Wiley replied. "I used to watch the running lights of the trollers at night, maybe yours, and thinking, 'That's the life for me.'"

Just then, the gunfire began. Bored crews had begun shooting at targets. First beer cans, then seagulls. As the afternoon wore on, the gunfire persisted, and as more beer was consumed, the marksmanship deteriorated. Wiley had just started to skin some blue sculpin fillets he'd been saving for dinner when a pitiful noise assaulted his ears. Glancing to starboard, he could see where a wounded gull lay screaming in the water near the troller *Purple Haze*, surrounded by dead gulls, its own feathers, and an assortment of beer cans and cigarette butts.

"That's enough!" said Wiley Moon, to no one in particular.

He threw the skiff in the water, jumped in and rowed to the *Purple Haze*. Jack Sloane, the young skipper, stared at Wiley down the barrel of his .22. Wiley stared up at him, then plucked the suffering gull out of the water and threw it onto the deck of *Purple Haze*.

"There's your dinner," he said to Sloane. "Kill it!"

Sloane stared hard back at Moon. Then he grabbed the hapless gull, twisted its head off, and threw the body in the water near the skiff. Wiley Moon rotated the skiff and rowed away, seine boat style, face forward, standing. Before he had time to think, something whistled past his ear. Looking ahead in the water, he saw what it was. Sloane had thrown the gull's head at him.

Frank Bean helped Wiley haul the skiff back aboard and lash it to the boom.

"Thanks," Wiley said.

"You're crazy," Frank answered, sadly shaking his head.

Wiley Moon just smiled. There was nothing else he could do.

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## OPTIONS

Greta Kilpatrick

THE OLD woman floated on her back. Her arms and legs stuck out like broomsticks at awkward angles to her body. She felt at peace awash in the warm sea waters of The Spanish Banks. Her thoughts drifted to that time long ago when the Spanish fleet first arrived off the shores of British Columbia and gave this pristine wild beach its name.

Well, you couldn't call it pristine and wild now, she thought. Looking back at the long stretch of beach, she could barely see the sand. Hundreds of people were swarming over it, young people in minuscule swim suits, old people in more conventional outfits. There were cyclists, roller bladers, joggers, skate boarders and strollers, all elbowing for a share of the golden sands. Hungry hordes swamped the fish and chip stand. Dogs strained to get loose from their leashes. Hot buttered popcorn vendors called out their wares and itinerant musicians strummed softly on guitars. Behind the fish and chip stand, a lively game of volleyball was in progress. Under the weeping willows separating the beach from the street, people made love, or read books; mothers fed babies and people sought refuge from the blazing sun.

The old woman squinted at the cloudless sky. Gulls swept by, screeching. The raucous noise of a motorboat drifted faintly over the

water. Kites sailed high aloft, pushed by a gentle westerly breeze, large and small kites of every color and shape, all twirling happily up in the sky.

Her eyes stung from the salt water, her mouth felt dry and her ancient black wool bathing suit irritated her sunburned skin. "What the hell am I doing here?" she said out loud. "What am I going to do and why in damnation am I doing it?"

Her name was Elanora. She had always loved the sound of her name. Elanora Boychuk she was christened. Her last name had really annoyed her. It just didn't fit with Elanora. So when she married, not only was she madly in love with David, but she was happy to change her name to La Mar. Elanora La Mar, now didn't those two names flow together like music.

Elanora and David had met at the graduation of the class of '42. She had seen Miss Markham, her science teacher, standing by a tall boy. He towered over her. Miss Markham noticed Elanora standing by the door and called out, "Elanor, come join us."

Elanora walked slowly over to the little group and looked up into warm brown eyes, black curly hair and a warm welcoming smile.

"Elanor, meet our football hero, David La Mar." Miss Markham introduced them. "Too bad he is leaving for college just as you join our school. You're both so interested in science. David, this is Elanor Boychuk."

Elanora winced. Why did everybody pronounce her first name wrong and emphasize her last one. "My name is El-a-no-ra," she said, looking up at him.

He enveloped her small hand in his big one and grinned down at her. "My name is Dav-id. David La Mar."

She had just turned seventeen, and David was nineteen. Now she was a scrawny old thing. Hard to believe she had once been a golden blonde with deep blue eyes and a skin like ivory silk. Now her hands were covered with liver spots, her skin dried out like a wrinkled fig. Her teeth were her best feature, but unfortunately they were not original. Lots of people said they were amazed when they discovered the teeth were dentures. But Elanora was proud of her ability to think clearly and logically. Not many my age can say that, she thought smugly.

So, if I am so damn logical and clear thinking, what is my problem? she thought. What am I getting out of my so-called golden years? Why aren't I serene and happy and all that pap that you hear about aging? Why am I here, floating around like a scaly log? She vaguely remembered making an important decision this morning, one she had spent hours agonizing over. What was it?

It was certainly a major decision. She had made plans carefully and logically. Her tidy little apartment was left as if she had gone out for a few hours. The place was small and cozy and the windows over-

looked a neighborhood park. Little kids dug in the sandbox. In the evening lovers lingered on the benches. Dogs and cats ran helter-skelter through the grass. She had her own patio and was close to all the amenities. So it couldn't be her living conditions that prompted the drastic decision she had made this morning. Was it only this morning? she marveled. That decision must have been in the back of her mind for a long time.

Over and over she reviewed her decision. Was she doing the right thing? Had she covered her purpose? How would it affect her family?

The breeze was stronger now and was pulling her well away from shore. Her head ached, arms and legs ached and her heart ached. She was miserable. Where was all the brave resolution of this morning? Were there enough false clues left behind?

Her favorite casserole sat in the fridge, all ready to go into the oven. Tuna and celery with noodles, she thought regretfully. The radio was left playing softly. Elanora had a theory that with music playing a thief would be less likely to break in. Last night she had asked the landlord to fix the drippy tap in the bathroom, today. And, oh yes, she had asked the old gossip down the hall to come and play crib this evening. Wouldn't those two be surprised? Phylis especially would have something juicy to gossip about.

The water was getting cold. Wild. Soon her options would be gone and she would have no say in today's outcome. No doubt about it, this would be considered an accidental drowning. Her body began to shiver; she turned over and began to swim. What did she really and truly want to do? She had allowed the current to take her way out into the bay.

So many happy memories, she thought, her mind drifting. David on their wedding day, tall and slim, big hands and feet, warm brown eyes.

"Ellie," her mother had said just as she was about to walk down the aisle. "Ellie, you are a lucky girl to be marrying such an easygoing man as David."

Elanora remembered turning and staring at her mother. "What an extraordinary thing to say," she said coolly. "You know, mother, I'm the practical and collected part of this team."

Her mother had pursed her lips, shaken her head and walked away down the aisle, with the usher, to her place in the church.

David, she had to admit, had always been there for her, like the night the twins were born and all those nights they sat up together through the children's sicknesses. Then there were the teen years and all the arguments and heartaches that come with them. Finally the weddings, the grandchildren, the one tragic divorce that seemed to tear the entire family apart. She had lost her temper a few times, but after all she was almost always right. That was the main thing she and David fought about.

"Why don't you use your head and curb that acid tongue of yours?" David would say when she was telling all and sundry what she thought was good for them.

She had an answer for that argument. "Why don't you listen to me? I'm giving you a good logical solution to your problem. Why don't you listen?"

Little niggling thoughts intruded into her reflections of the past. She had thought this thing out very carefully and decided on the solution to her problem. She seemed to have lost her zest for life. Some mornings she didn't even want to get out of bed. The family didn't come around much and her friends had such irritating habits. Actually, what friends? She wasn't on speaking terms with many of them. After David died they melted away. Oh well, good riddance. They were simply a bunch of morons anyway.

She wasn't important to anybody anymore. Actually, she realized with stunning clarity, that this was the crux of her present dilemma. She had always come first with David. He was the main reason for her happiness. Everybody should have somebody they come first with. Nobody cared to listen to her freely-given advice. The neighbors were snobs. Even her position as chair of the Friday Night Debating Society was being challenged by that uppity Cecelia Bard. Her name should be Silly Broad. Just because she had a degree in English literature, she thought she could run a meeting better than El-a-nor-a La Mar.

It would be easier to let the tide carry her out to sea than to struggle and try to make it back to shore. But maybe she hadn't left enough clues. She could hear David's voice quite distinctly. "Elanora, you nut, still playing to the grandstand. Why didn't you go on the stage instead of marrying so young?"

She had an answer for that. "David La Mar, if you're so smart, how come you went and left your wife to cope all alone?"

Elanora was so riled up by thinking about David's probable response, she swallowed a mouthful of sea water. Sputtering and gasping for breath, she shook her fist in the air and vowed she would show them all just what Elanora La Mar was made of.

She was absolutely certain that the clues she had left were faultless. She thought about the casserole waiting to go into the oven, the slice of watermelon and the egg and onion sandwich waiting for her by the warm, cozy beach towel. That old gossip, Phylis, coming for cards this evening and that miserable landlord who would come to fix the taps. She almost told him to stuff it, but then she decided it would be another clue.

What's that infernal racket, that buzzing all around me?

"Hey there, old woman," a voice called. "What are you doing? Are you all right? Did you lose your mind, swimming out here by your-

self? I've seen some nutty old dames in my time as a lifeguard, but you take the cake."

"Mind your own damn business," Elanora said. She was livid with rage. That damn young upstart. She could swim rings around him, and who did he think he was, anyway, telling her what to do. "Get the hell out of my way, you idiot. You should get back to your station and take care of the loonies there. I'll have you know, I'm a marathon swimmer."

With a disgusted wave of his hand, the young lifeguard turned his craft around and headed for shore. Elanora was left alone with her thoughts, memories and intentions.

She had become really tired by now. Must have been in the water an hour. That was a long time for a woman of seventy-five. Now what was she thinking about when that moron interrupted her thought processes? Listen to me, I'm dithering like those silly old geese I live near. She was trying to decide if this thing she was in the middle of was the thing she wanted to do. Had she thought it all through clearly? Had the clues she had left clearly indicated she was in full possession of her faculties and that this would be an accidental drowning?

Hey, wait, she thought. Those old people at the Senior Centre, would they be sniggering and saying that old Ellie finally bit off more than she could chew? The very idea enraged her. She could feel her blood pressure soaring. So, Elanora, she thought, make up your mind. What will it be? Have I really lost all my zest for life? I must be important to somebody.

Seventy-five, of course, I'll be seventy-five this Friday. The twins are giving me a party and the whole damn family and everybody are invited. How could I have forgotten that? This puts a different complexion on things. Well, I could postpone this grand gesture for a couple of weeks. No sense in wasting all that food, not to mention the gifts I'd be getting. Those penny-pinching seniors would have to open up their purse strings for such an important event. And don't forget the Debating Society, they would be at the mercy of that Silly Broad. Her mouth twitched and she smiled. Her two youngest grandchildren were going to stay with her this weekend. They loved staying with her, god only knows why. It was the one time that she thought living was worthwhile. The kids teased her, just like David used to do. They listened to her stories about the past and they made her feel important.

She surely had not lost her zest for life. How about that visit on the weekend with those teenagers? How would they manage without her advice? How about when she sat on the park bench in the hot sun and dispensed her wit and wisdom with her old cronies from the Centre? She was fond of ice cream cones. They were cheap and easy to chew. She began to giggle at the idea of chewing on an ice cream cone and swallowed some more of the blasted salt water.

Gasping and beating the water in a rage, she swore loudly. For God's sake, here she was wallowing around the waters of Spanish Banks and swallowing, groaning and remembering the past. There was living to do today and tomorrow. There was more to life than remembering. I'm a silly idiot and a fool, she decided. Wasn't that what David always said? But he only said that to tease her. He loved teasing her.

She thrashed around in the water. The water was definitely colder now. The waves were higher and she was slowing down. I can't think clearly, she thought. But wait a minute. That is what she boasted about, her ability to think clearly and logically. So think, she told herself. This is about options. A person is entitled to a change of heart. She took a long look at the turbulent water ahead of her, shook her head defiantly, turned and made for the now distant shore.

The current pulled at her tired old legs. She really was a long way from the beach, the comforting warm towel, the sandwich and thermos of coffee.

What was that? She distinctly heard David's voice. "Come on Elanora," he said. "You know damn well you were only fooling when you started this escapade. So get a move on, old girl, you never walked away from a challenge in your whole life." David sounded so near. It was wonderful to hear his caring voice. "Get yourself onto that beach," he said. "Get home and get busy with all the things you should be doing instead of wasting my time and yours out here on the briny."

She felt like telling him off. What did he know about how she felt? He left her to deal with all these problems, but she was too tired to argue, especially with a ghost. She pressed her lips together hard and resolutely made for the shore.

Slower and slower, gasping like a exhausted whale, fighting the cold water and the tide, she dogpaddled on. She was incapable of swimming any other way now. Inch by inch and gasp by gasp until, with a final desperate stroke, her feet touched bottom. She staggered up onto the sand, fell down on her knees, regained her feet and slowly made her way to her beach towel. Coughing and sighing, she thought of all the obligations and problems waiting for her. Another one of David's sayings popped into her head. "Options," he would say. "We all have options."

Elanora chuckled. "Well, David," she murmured, "I've just exercised one of my options."

Gathering up her possessions, Elanora made off down the beach to the bus stop, her lunch forgotten. She wasn't hungry right now, anyway. The young lifeguard gazed after her, shaking his head. Elanora smiled as she walked almost jauntily down the street. Her head was filled with visions of her forthcoming birthday party, the visit of



the grandchildren and all the advice she could dispense to everybody.

ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of thirteen books. The latest include *The Soul You Call Your Own*, *Chasing After Carnivals*, *The House of Samsara*, *You Know Me Better Than That* and *Those Who Eat at My Table*. He and Margrith Schraner co-curate the home-based *New Orphic Gallery*.

## The Priest Fainted

Ernest Hekkanen

OF ALL the items on the menu, *The Priest Fainted* was the heaviest, richest meal that Lloyd Michaels could have ordered. Served in a deep dish with a stringy layer of melted mozzarella on top, it consisted of egg plant, onions, red peppers, mushrooms and lots of garlic, sautéed liberally in olive oil and then baked briefly in an oven. Apparently, from what he had read in the menu, *The Priest Fainted* had originated in medieval times — in a monastery, of all places. It had been cooked in honor of a visiting priest, probably a man of fairly high standing in the church. According to the tale, the priest had fainted on hearing how much extravirgin olive oil had been used to prepare the dish. Lloyd rather doubted that last claim. More likely, the priest had fainted due to the light-headedness induced by having digested so much rich food.

By the time Lloyd finished eating *The Priest Fainted*, in addition to a plate of pasta ordered on the side, he was full to the point of feeling quite uncomfortable. And yet, to top off the meal, he began to entertain the thought of having some dessert, either some St. Honore Cake or Cassata Ice Cream. He had trouble deciding which.

Lloyd went to the Gianni Ristorante with one purpose in mind, and that was to laden himself with so much food he would feel, on leaving the restaurant, as if he were literally waddling down the

sidewalk. Despite the frequency with which he gorged himself, he was not a terribly obese man. Of medium-height, he was round of finger and large of girth, but his flesh didn't hang from him. His fancy didn't spread over the seat of the chair or sag down over the sides. He was what some people might refer to as rotund. Or portly. At least he liked to think so.

Although food didn't really satisfy Lloyd's hunger, the physical act of eating gave him quite a bit of delight. The act of putting food in his mouth – very rich food, in particular – was something he could absorb himself in for short periods of time. He could abandon himself to the activity; he could wrap his entire being up in it and so forget about the other complications of life, but he never came away from the table feeling very satisfied, not really. It was rather like having sex. One could become quite engrossed in the activity while in mid-performance, but afterward one was likely to say, "So what. Why did I do that? Was I spitting into the wind just for the hell of it?"

Lloyd decided that a compromise was in order. He would order some St. Honore Cake with a little Cassata on the side. He placed his order with the dark, plump Italian girl with the pencil-thin mustache.

"Oh yes, and some cognac," he told her, as she turned to go.

"Cognac?"

"Please."

Lloyd glanced around the restaurant. There were only a few customers in the Gianni Ristorante. It was a Tuesday evening, rather early in the week, and people were still recovering from the debaucheries of the weekend. He allowed his attention to be arrested by the book he had placed face-down on the chair beside him. The cover was rather lurid, depicting a pair of nylon-clad legs standing in high-heels, breasts positioned where the midriff should have been, with a bowler hat atop a peg-like neck. *Sex and Insight* dealt with the deviant sexual behavior of men of genius. He picked up the book and turned to the page that he had dog-eared. He was reading about the Marquis de Sade, who had become so enormously fat he could hardly walk. The author seemed to think that de Sade, on being deprived of sex, had tried to make up for it with food.

Lloyd looked up from the page, pondering what he had just read. He didn't think de Sade's problem was anything like his own. Only occasionally did he eat so much he came away from the table feeling as if he had gorged himself to the point of incapacity. Usually his bouts of over-eating were triggered by flying-dreams he had the night before. Seated in his favorite armchair, he would soar down city streets clogged with vehicles, narrowly missing power lines and corners of tall buildings. He would fly through the dark at breakneck speed until he was far beyond the constraints of the metropolis. The dark sky would look as empty as the inside of a witch's cauldron, with some stars scattered across it for effect. Then he would land on

the very tippity-top of a mountain and there, in his lounge chair, he would contemplate the vastness of things. At that point he would wake up with a jolt, his body drenched in stale-smelling sweat.

Finally, the St. Honore Cake, Cassata and cognac arrived. He consumed them in a deliberate fashion, taking small bites, forcing himself to swallow each one; for there was very little room in his stomach now. That was the truly wonderful part of the meal, when he had to labor in order to consume each bite of dessert. He wanted to feel heavy, as though pinned by gravity to the earth. The mere thought of rising from the chair sent pains of protest down through his legs.

"I rather doubt if I'll be tormented by any flying dreams tonight," he told himself. "This meal should weigh me down. I'm eating not only for myself, but for all of humankind. May the gods recognize that. May they acknowledge that. I'm doing my part to fight anorexia, starvation and hunger without end. Amen!"

Lloyd's little prayer had attracted the attention of a couple seated several tables away. Judging from their expressions, they considered him to be one of those individuals who had come unhinged from reality. He bestowed on them a gracious smile, as though granting a benediction.

"*Bon appetit*," he said, lifting the small glass of cognac. "Enjoy your supper. No, that is too prosaic for a wonderful couple like you. May your meal expunge any existential doubt that might reside in the darkness of your souls. To you, dear lady and dear gentleman. May you eat with relish."

The couple looked away from him as he gulped the cognac. By now, he was feeling extraordinarily stuffed. Like a blimp. No, like a monstrously stuffed Thanksgiving turkey. He waved his Visa card at the waitress as she hurried past him, her arms lined with pasta-filled plates, signaling that he had finished his meal and was now wishing to vacate the premises. Moments later she came back to get his card. She took it to the reception desk and returned a short while later. He signed the invoice with a flourish, dotting the *i* with a hard tap of the ball-point pen.

"One last request," he told the waitress. "May I use your telephone – to make a local call?"

"Certainly. Just come to the reception desk."

"Thank you. You are the epitome of graciousness, my dear. I have rewarded you with a handsome tip."

"Thank you," she said, glancing at the invoice, "Mr. Michaels."

"You are quite welcome."

Mustering his strength, Lloyd pushed himself up from the table, put the paperback book in his suit-jacket pocket and waddled to the reception desk. The waitress pushed the telephone across the counter top. He picked up the receiver and dialed.

Paul answered in his usual curt manner. "Yeah, who is it?"

"Lloyd."

"Whaddya want?"

"A few minutes spent with the lovely Sharon. Could that be arranged?"

"It's kind of late, don't you think?"

Lloyd glanced at his wristwatch. It was barely nine twenty-five, hardly late at all. He figured Sharon must be with another customer.

"It's hardly what I would call the witching hour," he remarked. "I'm willing to wait my turn, if need be."

"How about dropping by in twenty minutes?"

"Twenty minutes it will be, my good man."

The line went dead. Giving the receiver a curious look, Lloyd dropped it in the cradle of the phone.

"Thank you very much," he said.

"No problem. Come again."

"Indeed, I will. Yes, indeed, I will. Many more times, in fact."

"Have a nice evening."

Lloyd winced at the reply, thinking how prosaic, how unimaginative it was. At the coat rack beside the door, he donned his overcoat, pulled his umbrella out of the stand and bravely headed out into the chilly autumn night. The heavy rain of earlier that evening had ceased. Commercial Drive was its usual energetic self. Young bohemian types were strolling the sidewalks, displaying frightfully cut hairdos or locks matted or hanging in tendrils, tattooed skin, rings or studs piercing eyebrows, noses and lips, bodies clad in leather or wool, wearing dysfunctional attitudes with a kind of overweening pride.

Lloyd walked up the street past Joe's Cafe where the local intelligentsia sat over coffees, planning the next revolution, no doubt. They were youthful. Full of delusions. They might in all likelihood be students of his at the university, the one atop Burnaby Mountain, where Lloyd tried, with lamentable success, to introduce them to Blake, Milton and Coleridge.

"It's such a shame that we have devolved to this," he muttered. The utterance was completely spontaneous. "Such a long fall from such a dramatic height. Oh, well, such is life."

Several blocks up the street, he went into a corner grocery store to buy an orange. Back out on the sidewalk, he hung the umbrella from his left forearm and proceeded to peel the orange, watching an exquisitely-clad gaggle of customers heading into the L'Imperio.

"Next week I shall eat there," he told himself, tossing the peel in the gutter and putting a section of the orange into his mouth. He mashed the orange until it was little more than pulp and spat the pulp into the gutter, wishing only to cleanse his palate, not to nourish himself. By dawdling here and there on the Drive, he would be able to time his arrival at Sharon's abode almost perfectly.



The concrete steps that scaled the hillside to the house were extremely dark. Lloyd tripped on going up them, landing roughly on his right hand and tearing the skin on his palm.

"Damn it," he swore. "Why don't they put a light out here?"

Pulling himself upright, he tried to examine his palm in the dark. The nearest streetlight was so distant and the rays so feeble, he could barely see his hand. Taking greater care, he climbed the rest of the stairs and veered diagonally across the lawn to the door at the side of the house. His palm was sore. When he clenched his fist to knock on the door, the pressure of his fingernails caused a stab of pain.

"Yes, who is it?" Sharon said on the other side of the door, trying to sound vaguely seductive.

"Lloyd," he said in a low voice, not wanting to disturb the landlord who lived upstairs from Sharon and Paul.

She opened the door to receive him. He stepped inside, casting a glance around the room to see if Paul were present. Paul was a drug addict, a hyper-tense individual with jerky movements. This evening he was nowhere to be seen. Nor was the couple's young daughter. They had obviously gone out, to make things more comfortable for Sharon and her client.

"I fell on the concrete steps," he said, showing Sharon his injured palm. The skin on the ball of his hand had been roughed up. Blood was seeping to the surface. "Do you have any peroxide? Any bandages?"

"It looks pretty bad," she said.

He was mildly flattered by her observation. It made him feel vaguely heroic. It also made him feel awkward, for the wound was a trifling one, really, and under normal circumstances she wasn't the sort of person he would allow himself to be flattered by. Indeed, he would have shown her very little regard at all — out in public.

Sharon was not what he would have called terribly attractive. Of medium-height, she was on the hefty side, with a bulging midriff barely contained by a tight-fitting, red tank top and large, flabby buttocks clad in a pair of skimpy red panties. But he found her alluring — in a primal, grotesque fashion. He had for her the sort of desire that early man must have experienced on viewing a fertility object like the Venus of Willendorf.

Sharon went into the bathroom. Moments later she returned with a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and a bandage. "Come over here by the sink," she said. "I'll clean it out for you."

"That would be very kind of you."

The kitchen was not a real kitchen. It was a nook in one corner of the living room, with a stove, sink and Formica-top table. She turned

on the light above the sink. He held his hand out for her to attend to. She poured hydrogen peroxide on the wound and swabbed it around with a ball of cotton, causing the injury to sting. Lloyd felt himself getting aroused.

"There, that should do it," she told him. "We'll put the bandage on after it dries."

"I haven't been treated like this since I was a youngster," he confessed.

"You better not make a habit of this, otherwise I'll have to charge you extra."

"Do any of your clients ask you to play nurse?"

"Only one. An old codger. I go over to his house — in West Point Grey."

"My, the things you have to do to make a living," he said.

"It comes with the profession," she replied. "Maybe we should get started. Do you want the regular?"

"Please."

"In bed or on the chair?"

"The chair, please."

Lloyd put the Band-Aid on the table, beside a jar of Empress strawberry jam. He removed his shoes and trousers, neatly folding the trousers and putting them out of harm's way on the table. He dropped his boxer shorts down around his ankles and then, with the toes of his right foot, raised them so he could grab them with his left hand. Slipping his boxer shorts into the pocket of his overcoat, he shoved his feet back into his shoes and put first one foot and then the other on the seat of the chair, bending to tie the laces. He was barely able to reach the laces with his round, pudgy fingers. He was truly very full. Uncomfortably so. When he finished tying his shoes, he pulled up the tails of his overcoat so he would be able to feel the hard, cold surface of the wooden chair, then he sat down and spread his knees as wide as they would go, so Sharon could kneel between them.

His prick was only half-hard. She wrinkled her nose, pretending amusement. "You haven't got much there, Lloyd."

"Falling on the steps made me lose my focus, I'm afraid."

"Sure, blame it on your little hurty," she said.

"Perhaps you could warm me up. Give my testicles some of your magnificent manipulations. Minister to them with your supernatural powers."

"Are you going to start spouting all sorts of gibberish again?"

Lloyd was mildly offended. "Are you referring to Milton, my dear?"

"Whatever his name is, yeah."

She kneaded his testicles. Rotated his balls in their leathery sack. His penis responded by getting firm.

"No, I think tonight I'll simply concentrate on the feeling. How about giving me a little head now?"

She slid the head of his penis into her mouth and began to suck on it. They had performed the rite a myriad of times. She backed up on all fours, growling, gripping his penis with her teeth and shaking her head like a dog that was playing with an old rag.

"Mmmm, that's good. Very good. Really tussle with it now," he told her.

She shook her head more vigorously, growling, pretending she was about to yank his cock right off. He could genuinely refer to his penis as a cock now, because it was thickening, getting nice and hard.

"You're such a good bitch, such a well-trained bitch. Really go for it now. Give me a good working-over."

Kneeling between his thighs again, she grasped his cock in both hands and began to suck with real purpose. He cupped the back of her head, guiding her with gentle pressure. A light push meant that he wanted her to slow down, a light pull meant that he wanted her to speed up. After ten minutes of that kind of play, he pulled her head forward, indicating that he wanted her to shift into fifth gear.

"God, you're so good. You go at it with such gusto. Get me to where I have to go."

He began to suck at the wound on his palm. The taste of his blood seemed to heighten his sexual pleasure. He began to move his ass on the hard wooden chair. The chair protested by creaking quite frightfully. He sucked harder at his wound; the taste of his blood was so salty, so sweet. Sharon sucked harder on his cock. He was getting close, very close now. The pleasure had become a burning sensation between penis and anus. He moved his ass more frantically on the chair.

"I'm nearly there. Nearly there. Go down on me now."

Sharon sank so far down on his cock she induced a gag reflex that brought him to climax. The pulsations transported him. He let out a sigh of pleasure. It was followed by a belch redolent of his meal at the Gianni Ristorante. His eyes rolled up into their sockets and his eyelids began to flutter, like a man seized by a convulsion.

Moments later, Lloyd became aware of Sharon retching into the kitchen sink. She cleared her throat, spat mucus down the drain, then rinsed her mouth with water. Lloyd looked down at his cock. It was shrinking rather rapidly, becoming a mere willy, a mere boy's penis. Semen clung to his belly and public hair. Already he was feeling the usual disappointment that followed orgasm. He felt like echoing the song sung by Peggy Lee — *Is That All There Is? Well, if that's all there is....*

Untying and removing his shoes, Lloyd reached for his trousers, unfolded them methodically, stuck first one foot and then the other into the pantlegs, put on his shoes, tied them, then rose from the



chair, pulling his trousers up over his buttocks and zipping the fly shut. He took his billfold out of his right rear pocket, put a hundred dollar bill on the table and headed toward the door, forgetting all about the Band-Aid.

Gripping the knob, he turned to look at Sharon. She was wiping her mouth on a towel.

"As always, you were magnificent. Sublime. I felt like a veritable pastry."



Lloyd went through the archway of the brick building, let himself in with his electronic key and took the elevator up to the fourth floor. He unlocked the door to his apartment and shut it behind him, twisting the knob that shot the bolt into the jamb. His suite was exactly as he had left it earlier in the evening. The lamp beside his armchair gave off a dull glow. Classical music was playing on the CD machine, what sounded like Malher's Symphony Number Two, the one called *Resurrection*.

Removing his overcoat, he hung it in the closet beside the door. "My little darlings must be hungry," he said, padding in stocking feet down the hall. "Are you hungry? Have you missed daddy terribly?"

He smiled down at the white rats in the deep glass cage. Some of them stood on hind legs to greet the bowl of green pellets that he set in the sawdust on the bottom. The wiser ones fled from him. He watched the white rats gather around the bowl, then with a movement that was awfully quick for a man of his size, he grabbed one of the rats. He could feel the rat's rapidly beating heart. The fear communicated itself to his injured palm.

"My little friend. Calm yourself. Life inevitably results in death. We must all pass through that porthole. So calm yourself. There is no reason to fear what cannot be avoided, now, is there?"

He took the rat over to the cage that contained the boa constrictor. He unlocked the hatch on top, dropped the rat inside the cage and sat down on the sofa to observe what would happen. As soon as the rat alighted on the sawdust, it jumped as if it had landed on a red-hot burner. It ran around the cage in a panic, trying to find an escape route. The boa constrictor observed it with sleepy disinterest. When the boa's disinterest had induced a state of calm in the rat, it struck quickly and definitively. The rat disappeared with a series of pulsations down the snake's gullet. The spindly tail was the last to go. The sight of it hanging out of the snake's mouth slightly disgusted Lloyd.

Later that night, Lloyd awakened from a dream he often had after indulging in a monstrous meal. It was a slightly horrifying dream. Several unfamiliar assailants had grabbed him. They were cramming

a long metal bar down his esophagus. The tip of it was causing a great deal of distress in his lower bowel. On completing their work, his assailants let him go. He proceeded to walk down the sidewalk, looking up past tall buildings at the night sky, the long bar projecting from his mouth up into the air.

Coming to the corner, he stumbled as he stepped down from the curb and, no longer able to keep the bar erect, it fell with a great clang on the pavement, the opposite end plunging into a hole and hoisting him awkwardly into the air, where he flailed quite helplessly, rather like a skewered octopus.

Lloyd became aware that he was staring with fixed eyes at the ceiling of his room, lit by a red neon sign across the street. Only then did he experience the full weight of being alive. Alone and alive.