The MYRKIN PAPERS

by

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This book is set in Century Schoolbook, a type face designed by L. B. Benton in 1915 and derived from one cast in the 1890's especially for *The Century Magazine*. It is a clear, fine letter having traditional characteristics, its legibility making it popular with schoolbook publishers. The titles are set in Garamond, a classic type face based on letter forms first cast in the 16th century in France by Claude Garamond.

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NOTE

Many of the essays here were printed earlier in a slightly nicer form in the SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, THE WASHINGTON TEAMSTER, *and the* KRAB PROGRAM GUIDE. *A few appeared in* PUGET SOUNDINGS, THE NORTH CENTRAL OUTLOOK, *and the* VANCOUVER SUN. *None, however, appeared in the* HUMPTULIPS DAILY EXPRESS. *None at all.*

THE MYRKIN PAPERS

INTRODUCTION

I GOT A FUNNY FEELING about the power of radio once—a thousand years ago in another country. I was on a journey, one of those cyclopaedic journeys kids dream up in order to torture their parents, or themselves, or their American-ness. I was looking for something: and I am damned if I can remember what it was.

It started in Frankfurt, where I got a nice new shiny Blaupunkt radio installed in my car. It was a beautiful radio, with lots of nice buttons, and a single shiny red eye that lit up to let me know that the world was crowding my dial. There was AM for static, FM for white noise, and the Long Wave band for cryptic messages from the BBC.

I went into a dark corner Frankfurt bar to celebrate my new radio and my new car. I remember (vaguely) drinking an inordinate amount of icy clear schnapps intermixed with draughts of warm dark beer. I re-

member a foggy mind and a foggy night through the dark windows. I remember an old man with a potato face huddled in the corner of the bar. I remember him mumbling, and I thought he was talking to me. I turned my head, smiled, said something in lousy German. Hands across the sea.

"*Juden,*" he said. He said a great number of other things, other words, but "*Juden*" he said most of all. He didn't smile. "*Juden,*" he said. I knew it was time to leave Germany, even though it was 1961 and there was nothing to fear.

"There's nothing to fear," I told myself, and drove south and west. Running from Frankfurt to Neunkirchen, from there to the burning valley of the Saar, the hot black no-man's land that still—Common Market or no—gashes between France and Germany.

"There is nothing to fear," I said, as I raced south from Saarbrucken, down through Macon and Lyon and Avignon—down towards the sun and light. It was a time of great, aggravating isolation—and my sole riding companion showed a single red eye, and spoke to me in many languages and many musics.

I began to warm, to feel warmer and safer, when, in Dijon, I heard the voice of Radio Diffusion Francaise. The voice was feminine and husky—and spoke to me at seven in the morning, when the mustard-colored sun grew up over the streets of Dijon. "Beethoven," she said: and I heard a trio by Beetho-

ven. "Rameau," she said: and the harpsichord music played around my ear. "Handel," she whispered: and a cantata of Handel sped me towards Nimes.

After the Pyranees, I passed into the broadcasting garbage heap of Spain. "Buy," screamed the radio in garish (and incredibly low fidelity) Spanish. "Now," screamed the accents of Barcelona, Alicante, Granada. "Cheap, buy now," screamed the voice as I raced toward the pillars of Hercules, ran to the strange territory of North Africa.

I want to tell you something funny about radio—about one of the evenings of my life which is frozen in my head. Like Wordsworth, I close my eyes and see it all painted on the inside of my eyelid.

Five of us were gathered in Casablanca for the trip across the Atlantic, back to the bang-and-whimper we call America. Our ship, or purported ship, was operated by the Yugoslav government as a cheap freighter, with just room enough for twelve passengers. It was mid-winter, so there were but five of us, and the liner had sunk somewhere into the maw of the Mediterranean. "It will tardy two weeks," said the ticket agent.

The five of us took the car into the mysteries of North Africa. I have no end of stories to tell you about Meknès and Fez, about Marrakech and Tangier. Stories about French colonial culture beginning to decay (but not quite), and Arabic culture begin-

ning to reaffirm itself (but not quite), and the dark twisty streets of the *medinas*. I have a great deal to tell you . . .

. . . but not yet. What I really want to tell you about is one afternoon. When I got the feeling for communication, and the culture gap, and history, and the gape of time, and all that sort of stuff.

We are heading west from Fez. The five of us—suspended at eighty miles an hour on that straight and true asphalt highway. The French *colons* had left behind a great number of dams and power stations and highways. Highways only beginning to fall apart under the forces of self-determination.

The sun is setting. I have the sun visor down. The sun—turned fat and red—stains my face, the faces of all of us. On both sides of the road, the culture of Morocco barely moves. Shepherds in their *djellabahs* stand at the side of the road. One of them may be holding a rope to a burro. One of them may stand beside a hunched and veiled wife, with a giant load of sticks on her back. They don't move. The sun stains them and the land crimson, and they don't move.

It is Ramadan. The ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Fasting, abstinence, appeals to Whoever it is who is brooding over Islam. From the radio pours the voice of a man chanting; a single voice moving slowly, randomly, through a strange scale, singing

to some strange eye watching the crimson land, the crimson peasants, a crimson car racing along a black strip of magic over an ancient land.

The voice was to continue for nine days. But what I remember most is the five of us, whirring past the moveless figures, hooded figures brooding at the roadside with the sad song of a man and his god filling our ears. Suspended in time, suspended from any land, any culture: we, along with the melancholy culture of that melancholy country. Streaking west with the moveless sound of prayers pouring out of the single red eye, trying to tell us something we can only barely comprehend, only barely know.

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF PERSONA

We put KRAB (FM) on the air somewhere back in the dark dismal days of winter 1962. There was Gary Margason, and Jeremy Lansman, and me, and a wheezing old Collins transmitter which was, in age, if not experience, barely our junior. I remember no end of technical problems endemic to a new broadcast station—and I remember most especially the wet mist of Seattle beating the back of my neck with appalling regularity.

We put out a program guide which was typed up on an old Royal. It was printed up in the back room of our houseboat. I can remember, all too often, waking up before dawn, listening to the thrum and bump of our two hundred dollar Multilith. I could see Gary leaned over that awful machine—or rather, I could see his shadow, for hung on the end of the printing machine was a single naked lightbulb which cast him giant against the wall of the houseboat. I could hear him curse as the paper jammed, bubbling up around the rollers, crushing his hope for an early conclusion to the whole mess. The ka-lunk of the guides being printed would often mix with the roar of my dreams.

By January 1963, we were bored with a simple listing of

all the great programs being played by one of the four listener-supported broadcast stations in the country. That was when I started writing anonymous essays to be printed in the guide—essays, appearing on those smeary, foolscap pages, to give our subscribers some idea of where the station came from, where it could go.

All I had written before this was a neo-Joycean novel which was rejected by some of the best publishers in America, and some two thousand poems. The latter I had the pleasure of burning to death in Rincón de la Victoria. I remember seeing the ashes curl away in the early spring winds which wound up from the general direction of Gibraltar, winds taking all this neo-Dylan Thomas rubbish to its proper and watery grave. Days later, one of the miniature adults of that village brought me the remains: a half-burned poem, a mystic, mythical paean to death—one of those tributes I had felt we poets should grind out to something we can (and never shall) understand.

I started out to tell you something about our persona. *When I started writing the essays for the KRAB guide, I stole the first person plural from* The New Yorker. *A perfect way to protect oneself from the theatre of the ego: "We smiled. We sat in the sun. We died."*

It worked for awhile, even though we had to struggle to avoid the comedy implicit in the form which made it sound like the meanderings of twins joined at the hip ("We got into bed . . .") in an orgy ("We slipped off her gown and got into bed . . ."). It was and is a convenient form for those afraid of their craft, and of self-exposure. It took me almost four years to get over that. I finally did. Got rid of us, that is. I am now me—more or less.

However, we, I mean I, am, are, stuck with some essays from that zoo back then. I worked manfully one night to

change all of us to me, to freeze the multiple selves back into a single, contradictory, worried I, conjoined at the soul. It didn't work.

It may be familiarity. Or it may be that gestalt *thing. For anyone writing anything more complex or interesting than a religious tract must allow ideas, words, and feelings to run into each other, get mixed up in each other. The first word on the page should have some sort of a love-affair going with the last.*

So I'm damned if I can get rid of that crew of rapscallions who were doing all that writing for me back then. In the years since, I've managed to assimilate, kill, or make love to most all of them—but we were very important to each other at that dim nervous time in early 1963, and I'll be damned again if the editor me, sitting here now, biting my cuticles, trying to restructure all the old gang, is going to be very successful in getting rid of them.

There were and are too many of us. Our language (in that archaic, royal form) was as honest and as true as could be. I will have to let the old greybeards stand—stand together at that time back then when the new winter was so dark and the wind and rain batted against the backs of our necks.

THE MYRKIN PAPERS

PART I

1

THERE WAS A TIME when we wanted (very seriously) to explain the *aesthetic* of radio—to describe what it is that makes people go so foolish and so broke in order to get involved in radio.

It was a few years ago, and KRAB was but a dull glimmer in the back of our minds (all potential, no kinetic) and, in a letter to one of the co-founders, after a long description of the structure of the station, and the approach, we tried to explain what we thought the aesthetic of radio should be:

". . . we might pick a tall building in the city proper and stick an antenna on top; the advantages of this are obvious—no line charges to the transmitter, no separate charges for studios in one place and tower in another, immediate accessibility to transmitter in case of trouble, and that great smelly driving hum of the transmitter, right in view, so that each moment you *know* that your scurrilous words are

flooding the countryside, bouncing off hills and trees, ramming headlong into cows and people (they don't even feel the run of the words), filtering in somewhere, through a wall, or down the chimney, or struggling (last electron flagging) through the iron struts, into that radio, into that tiny coil of heat that drifts off the back, with the lights: white, ostentatious in front; red, deep, mysterious as the sun-in-my-eyes from the tall mossy tubes behind—and the voice comes flagging in, first jumbled in a mass of megacycles too big for the tiny tubes, then filtered—through rheostat and condenser, through resistor and coil, ground the grid, cool the coil, tote that Wheatstone Bridge, until it comes now, sizzling down the plate here, fluttering over the grid (tiny fingers the voice, like rain on water) draining energy from the universe that tumbles on like a dark night all around the one gleaming eye of the radio (and the smile of the dial, all those numbers as upright as teeth), slipping to pushing and pulling moments in the never-still push-pull circuit, sidling up at last the arches and hams of the loudspeaker, bubbling around the fat condenser, with the two tiny hairs weeping out, being drained of all the scurrilous currents and extrusions of kilowatt, megacycle, ohm, converted at last into a single reed, a single thread of power, that bubbles through the wires (heating them instantly, hands and the thigh), to tumble and burn through

the coil, sweeping in countless thousand thousand circles (not getting dizzy, not for one instant), a fine wire-my-nerve coil suspended delicately, like a star, between the giant fingers of the magnet (soft the currents: woman fingers) and then it comes, the first insensate vibration, the first shaking of the tender cone, then the burst, the bubbling forth, the rage of violent shake and tumble, the earthquake that stretches the coil to the depths, pulls the cone to the heart of this dark hot circle of light and bubbling charge, and then, as suddenly, when the core is stretched to the final break and tear, the final ruin, as quickly and quietly, the release comes, the tender paper cone (undamaged, only slightly trembling in the warm knowledge pushed past it) falters a moment, and then rights itself in silence."

July, 1963

2

WE ARE OFTEN REFRESHED by what pops out of our typewriter—especially when we are trying to say something different, but the concept we once managed to phrase was pleasing to us: that is, that the great mass of people die before they are twenty and spend their happiest hours delivering tired words to expound tired thoughts; that the greatest joy of most Americans comes when they can take off their ties and scratch their bellies and try their wits against the panel of "What's My Line?" That their greatest conflict is not over whether we should disarm and risk aggression or stay armed and risk accidently blowing ourselves up — it is whether they should heat up the Frozen Creamed Hamburger Patties in the Electric-Whizz Stove now, or wait and watch "The Beverly Hillbillies" on an empty stomach.

Of course it ain't the fault of the television station

owners—the choice as we see it has always been to lead or to follow. If one leads, if one crams onto the television screen even some of the miracles of which the medium is capable, one just don't get so rich so quick . . . was it Cato who said: "To lead is an expensive proposition; almost as expensive as being last." If one follows, if one crams onto the screen exactly what the rating services say gets the widest audience, one gets an average *18% annual return* on the invested dollar (Minow's figures, not ours). It's all tied up with how quick you want to be rich.

One of our favorite images came in another poorer land, on another poorer continent. We haunted the muddy back streets, and on one—particularly noxious, particularly scenic—we came upon a withered hag in a cane chair with a batch of turkeys. And she was sitting forward, no teeth and all grim determination, cramming some grainy slop down the throat of an unresisting turkey. We asked, in our polite *tourese*, what it was all about, and she craned her head back like a vulture and told us that turkeys "don't eat too good" and to make them fat for market, one must stuff the craw full three times a day. Certainly a dull way to spend the day, we thought, but the old lady looked as if she could take it, and the turkey, if not exactly thrilled, had that glazed stuff-me-if-you-care appearance about it.

God knows, perhaps our brethren all across this

rich land are better off being stuffed in the eye with this cornucopia of TV blah rather than running out and picketing and starting revolutions or inventing brain gas. But whenever we pass by those multitudes of houses where the curtains are open and the lights are off except for one—that arid, grey-blue light that flickers over the still-warm, humped-over corpses—whenever we see that dark scene, we get that same feeling as when we go past a bar in the morning, or into an all-night movie just before dawn: a feeling of decay, and desolation, and dying.

February, 1964

3

"SEVENTY PERCENT of the time—when I tune to KRAB, I get silence," says one of our faithful volunteers. "I expect dissent, or electronic music, or arguments. Not silence. Why is there always nothing there?"

The answer, of course, is that there is never really nothing: for silence on radio is something—an added bonus, a spot of dew on the rose. Most of the time we are broadcasting something, no matter how unintelligible; it's just that KRAB cultivates a leisurely approach to radio which is designed to drive our occasional listener to distraction.

We like to think of silence as our own form of dissent; if we don't have a little bit of silence in an evening, we get worried. Cato said that if you fool the world into believing that you are thinking quietly, "then the battle of wits is soon done." So we cultivate silence.

We also try to cultivate other things besides disgruntled listeners. For instance, we try to foment a feeling of dissent, of aesthetic pleasure, of delight in the unknown. One of our faithful listeners who gets more than silence constantly grumps about the *outré* programs that he has to put up with on KRAB. "By the way," we tell him as casually as possible, secretly watching his face, "we're going to program a festival of music of India this week-end . . . twelve hours of tabla, and shahnai, and vina, and sitar music. Twelve hours." We sit silently and then he gives the requisite we-are-doomed look and opines that we are working hard, very hard, to alienate the last of our *minute* audience. "If you are terribly lucky," he says, "you might have all of five listeners this weekend: you, your music director, the two people down the block who get you mysteriously on their television set, and the one Indian in town who has an FM set. Why do you hate your listeners so?"

Actually, we must admit that listeners can be a burden sometimes. To quote from one of our recent essays: "If someone were to prove to us that we had many listeners, we would have to go respectable to reflect properly the image others had of us; we could no longer be a cracked mirror for ourselves but instead would become an influential, dull, and totally transparent glass pane for others."

Our method for relieving ourselves of too many

listeners is confusion: an hour or two of electronic music, followed by a commentary from the political left, followed by a talk from the political right, then an interview on Nubian Monuments, then a dramatic performance of *Medecin Malgré Lui* in French, a program of Chin and P'ipa Music, concluded with a reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* in Sanskrit. "What are you? Some kind of nut?" One of our listeners calls, gravelly voice and all outrage. "Are you just showing off? Trying to humiliate us bourgeoise?" (He pronounces it *burr*-gee-ose.) He's trying to pull our leg, but he's half-serious; we're trying to pull his leg, but we are half-serious. We play his game.

"There is a great deal of recorded music, and drama, and poetry from other cultures that is worth hearing," we say, "you may not appreciate it, but perhaps there is someone in town who appreciates good Sanskrit." We think of one of our listeners who was out there the night we played Gogol's *The Overcoat* in Russian. "I don't understand a word of Russian," he said, "but I listened, and it made sense—it really did." He may have been drunk, or was hungry for sensations—but it made sense to him; that's all anyone can ask.

Of course we get to that point—every broadcaster must—that point when you know that there is no one out there listening—no one at all. The wind is coming up, blowing the rain against the back door,

and the cold is creeping in; and you know that there is no ear where your signals go: not Victoria, not Sequim, not Olympia, not West Seattle—no one is listening.

But radio is built on hope and potentiality. When we play the gamelan music from Sunda, or Shundeika, or *The Poem of Saadi* sung by Golpsyegani in Segah—we just hope that there is someone there, the quiet someone who never calls up nor writes—someone hearing it for just this instant and perhaps being moved by it, changed by it. We live in a sensual age, an age and a culture that sets sensation and experience almost as high as making money—and we are a product of that culture. KRAB: broadcasting to all the sybarites out there.

When Bradley wrote about the tragedies of Shakespeare, he felt that the tragic force lay in the enormous waste: that some man-king-noble such as Hamlet or Lear would have to be destroyed in order to set the universe right again. It is only somewhat less tragic that the communication media in this country should be such a waste—an extraordinarily complex and fine method of reaching a mass audience dedicated to the principle only of entertainment, only of diversion.

Think of it: in the whole of the United States, there are some 700 television stations, some 5,000 broadcast stations. Marvelously complex apparati,

all those kilowatts, those gleaming facilities: gushing out *Ozzie and Harriet* or *What's My Line* or *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Think of all the enormous effort. It is as if God went to all the trouble to create the earth—with its seas and forests and deserts—and then peopled it with worms. Television with its plethora of talented camera men, and directors, and writers—working enormously so that we can see Jackie Gleason take a pratfall on the stage.

And radio: we have a friend whose hobby is DX-ing. That means sitting on the floor all night in front of the radio—and when the proper benedictions are said to the great ether-god—he hears broadcast stations from all over the country . . . WWL in New Orleans, WCKY in Cincinnati, WSB in Atlanta, WABC in New York. He delights in the voice travelling three thousand miles to be delivered into his radio, into his ear.

We are more critical: we listen not for distance but for content. And we hear the same in every city. Ricky Nelson in Boston and Seattle, Arthur Godfrey in New York and San Diego, The Singing Nun in Philadelphia and Miami, Fabian in Charlotte and Chicago and Denver and Winston-Salem. We know there is so much going on in each of these cities—and we wonder why we are not allowed to hear the thousand voices of a thousand cities—sociologists from Chicago, blues singers from Atlanta, jazz mu-

sicians from New York, political cranks from Washington, poets in San Francisco, contemporary musicians from Boston.

There is a price for the sameness that litters our radio dial—it is the loss of potentiality, the waste when an unusual idea, or a rare poem, or a strange piece of music is *not* communicated. It is the waste of saying the finances of the broadcast station owner are more important than the communication of the richness of ideas the human mind is capable of producing.

April, 1964

4

KRAB was plunked down, almost by chance, in a part of Seattle where lawns are treated almost as lovingly as Motherhood, Chastity, and the TV set. There is no small concern with the dishevelled appearance of our building, the all-hours comings and goings of dishevelled program participants and our dishevelled engineer's weekly journeys up the pole to bang on the antenna and look at the view.

The only redeeming features of the locale are Julie's Cafe (where we get our daily cup of coffee and weekly lecture on our unkempt appearance) and —pardon the name—the Speed-ee Mart (where we get our daily bottle of beer and box of Animal Crackers).

It was during our trip for the beer that we passed the old lady in the wheel-chair, sunning herself and reading her check-book, and she said "help." One

never knows what to do, in this age of bombs and violence, when someone says "help," so we stopped and smiled slightly and pretended we had stopped to think an Important Thought, and she said "Help. I'm being held against my will. Call the police. It's my family: I have an apartment, but they won't let me free, and help, I have $13,000 in the bank, and I'm a prisoner, and all I want to do is be alone in my apartment. Help."

Well, her sister or daughter or warden ran out and told us to go away and wheeled her into the house, and we thought "You think you got troubles, kiddo: we're all trapped in the world of our own making, help, and something should be done, something simply should be done. We've got our own prison, and some people call it freedom, and others call it mankind, and some even call it nothing, but help anyway."

Last Sunday morning we went down to the Hyatt House to do an interview. One of our volunteers had called and said "Hey . . . do you know Norman Rockwell is here? Are you going to get an interview?" And we thought: "This'll be fun: we've been waiting for a long time to ask someone about those wholesome Thanksgiving Scenes on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*," so we called up and found out he was wrong. It wasn't Thanksgiving at all. It was Storm Troopers and Concentration Camps and Jew-

ish Traitors—a somewhat different Rockwell, to say the least.

In better times, we would have given up the interview and just thought for awhile about over-romanticised Motherhood and Naziism and drawn some parallels and slept late on Sunday; but it was bright and cheerful that Sunday morning so we went on down and interviewed this other Rockwell: sat in his prison the Motel room for awhile and talked about all sorts of garish things that some men can cook up and recorded it all, then went away and thought "Help. There must be something significant, something significant in all this." There wasn't, of course; only a devilish stomach-ache.

We couldn't help but think, after it was all over, about the old woman and her checkbook and that nice prison with its manicured lawn, and that other guy, the one who gave us the stomach-ache, and his prison with all the traitors: the conspiracy trapping him, caging him in, and him lashing out against the world.

We have said before that all men create their prisons, and we guess we prefer ours: somewhat dirty and ill-kept, but aesthetic anyway, with beautiful bars called Truth and those nice chains called freedom-of-expression to caress; yeah, we like our jail just fine, but with all those others, we can't avoid calling help now and then. June, 1964

5

ONE TIME, a long time ago, we were involved in sitting at a desk in Manhattan. Sometimes, rarely, someone would stop to talk to us, but mostly we sat and smoked cigarettes, wrote strange persuasive notes to ourselves, and thought on the chance of a more benign future when we could be somewhere else less torrid. That was a summer of mild discontent and we remember reading a great deal of Henry Miller.

One night, say maybe at ten, a huge Negro in a tee-shirt and blue jeans stopped before our desk. "Imuhpaykiluhfrushikiga" he said and grinned shyly. God he was big. We put down *Tropic of Cancer* and said 'Hunh?" rather impolitely and he said in a gentle whisper: "I'm a paid killer from Chicago and I just got into town."

We know that it takes time for two strangers to communicate at all, and we thought we were having

trouble with our ear machine on top of it all; but to set the heart to rest he leaned forward and repeated the message. We leaned back a bit and fiddled with the book-binding and considered the basic problem: not many people on the street outside, the shop next door closed, no alarm button underfoot. What to do? There's always the Chandler approach: "I'm a paid killer from Secaucus, myself." How about: "Have you read any good books lately? . . ." Always a sure-fire conversation-stopper. Or maybe we could point out the door, saying, "Isn't that woman's blouse on fire?" then duck under the desk.

Finally we solved the problem with our best face-of-disaster method: we did nothing; just sat there. We were, however, cool enough to nod a bit and smile our so-you're-a-paid-killer-from-Chicago smile and return to our Henry Miller book and read the same damn sentence over about twenty times. When we got rid of our twitch and were able to look up, he was drifting out the door but left a neat little switch-blade on the desk. A present; a peace offering, maybe; a sign of real intent. Who knows?

So what does this event mean in the big machine of our days chugging on? We don't know: perhaps it was a sign, a visitation from heaven, the big brown eye in the sky opening up on us, dilating all around us. The only person we remember from Chicago was Jim Hurwith who could grow a black beard at age

fourteen, get served in any bar, and who loaned us his Math notes. Maybe we forgot to return them: maybe after so many years, there was a law of the Chicago jungle that demanded vengeance for unreturned Math notes.

In our war against the walls that broadcasters build between themselves and their listeners, we have often invited subscribers and their friends to come by the station. Listeners have taken unusual advantage of this chance. A local poet called one night and offered to come by and poke the announcer in the snoot "because he read poetry so badly." Another visitor came by early in the morning and stayed until late in the evening, so inarticulate that he said little. We thought he might be involved in a sit-in, but he left without a word and has never returned. Another came by to show us a letter she had written to the Pope ("although I know he only reads Latin") and one to Somerset Maugham ("he has so much money I want a little").

But on days when our metabolism is low and the world is in such a dull rush, we sit quietly, expecting Our Man From Chicago to drift in the door, to take us up on our offer: to grin shyly, to scare the hell out of us, and leave a little knife as a calling-card.

April, 1965

6

OF COURSE, if Beethoven were living today, he would be a bit different. He would have been psychoanalyzed by age twenty-five, and we can see him now: an aging, somewhat cranky but nonetheless loveable pianist, appearing twice monthly on the Jack Paar show. He would grumble a bit about his nephew, turn down his transistorized hearing aid, and rip off a good Chopin sonata before the commercial. The audience would love him and his testy ways.

Our main complaint with this society is what it does with creativity; the American way seems to be to take all the good ideas and cram them into a huge terrible maw, a steel mouth; behind the shining teeth one can hear the gnashing and grinding and sparks; the processed result is a mountain of torn papers, discarded television tubes, tin cans and broken shoes, jammed between slick covers and

called *The Readers' Digest.*

We have a fondness for originality: it should be mounted in gold and worn as a pendant around the neck—even though a truly creative person might think it to be the shape and same general weight of an albatross. We admire, for instance, the idea of a commentator who deplored the coldness of talking into the microphone: "I don't like talking to myself," he said; "why don't you put a gigantic mural in your studio—a mural with a thousand faces; maybe one of those snow-scenes of Peter Brueghel the Elder; even Picasso's *Guernica*: I don't care, anything; just so long as I'm talking to someone besides a dead microphone."

It's like when we got Natalie to paint "KRAB" on our fence for us; she said, "How shall I do this?" and we said, "Hell, anything; something to stop people from barging in on KISW down the street looking for a panel on Adultery." She said, "I'll paint it so it looks like a dirty word some kid scrawled on the fence." We thought that was fine but it didn't matter anyway because if it looks like a dirty word, it was done by a Baroque child.

We like it when people have the energy to be creative about eternal things, such as one of our visitors who, for some reason, began to speak about death and God. "Death isn't just lying there in the dirt for a billion years, staring at the stones," he said. "No,

what death is is a room: bare and dismal, no radio, no phonograph, no television, no window. A single light-bulb, a bed, a chair; and the floor, walls, and ceiling. You can't sleep, and there's no-one to talk to, so you sit there for the first two or three thousand years, thinking the same old thoughts until they are as dry and dessicated as weeds: you squeeze all the flavor and excitement and juice that you can from them. Boy, do they get dull. You recreate your life so often that you wonder at how you were able to keep from being bored while you were living.

"The next four or five thousand years, you try to think of nothing; you can't, of course: the room won't let you. So you go mad—or sort of mad. You begin to create. Multiple schizophrenia: you think of your brain in the uterus of the skull and it begins to people a world. Out of the blackness of nothing the brain creates the sun the water the moon and the verdant land. What a job: it's very tiring and you have to stop and rest awhile.

"You create a couple of people and put them through their paces and they're good: you even give them a little independence and maybe some absolute standards they call good and evil. You forget the room, and that bare light bulb; you forget your own miserable boring life; you get good at your new game and you create a family—then two or three, warring singing hating loving.

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"You get quite good at creating: you can handle the complexity of thousands then millions then billions of people; you infuse them with all sorts of pleasures to keep them from being bored (as you were): they learn to build cars and airplanes and freeways and missile silos and TV stations and birth-control pills. Their world gets so complex that sometimes you wonder if you can handle it all.

"And sometimes you toy with the idea of destroying the whole mess: it would be so easy; poof: a twitch of the finger and the whole brawling yelling squealing bunch is laid away. You are tempted: they too can be so boring; but then you think of sitting alone again, in the bare room again, with nothing but the drear blank mind again. You think of this, and you think of all the terrible beings that you've created: and you don't know exactly what you will do although, ultimately, you must, you will, do something—*something.*"

June, 1965

7

SEATTLE'S University District Businessmen's Boosting and Chowder Society has announced that August 9th will be Walt Disney day. Streets will be blocked off for a parade and there will be floats and balloons of all the loveable Disney characters. One of our friends made some crude comments about such activities living off the fad of the land, and wondered that the Babbitt Association didn't just as well give a parade in honor of Georgia-Pacific Corporation or Weyerhauser for daily rapes on the nation's forest lands.

An unnamed, heroic wag suggested that Disney's treasure-trove came from his innate ability to plumb the infinite American demand for treacle. When we found out about Disney Day, we must admit that we were swept with a gigantic wave of ennui, but it did start us to thinking about how he could have improved his financial position. We were, for instance,

dismayed that Disney was never commissioned to make the film version of *Lolita*. After the heart-rending death of Lolita's mother, Uncle Humbert—a kindly, white-haired scholar of the European school—takes fresh-faced, loveable Lo on a trip. She, and her fresh-faced, loveable collie (called, perhaps, Laddie) go on an action-packed trip through the highways and byways of Technicolor America with beloved Uncle Humbert providing an entertaining and instructive travelogue. The high point of the picture, of course, comes with Lo, Laddie, and Uncle Hum standing at the gates of Disneyland, prepared for a revelation of a new, better, and more colorful America.

Our main complaint with those making fortunes in children's television programs does not have to fall on Disney—who succeeded in bringing nature and that lore business to life; rather, it is with the bland and uninspired television programs which build ratings on the unprotesting corpses of children's imaginations: the late afternoon television fare of The Three Stooges, Brakeman Bill, J. P. Patches. Newton Minow, speaking before the Radio and Television Executives Society of New York, said: ". . . in the middle of the spectrum is the larger area of children's shows which neither help nor harm, which neither elevate nor debase, which neither lead nor mislead. These programs—and they are in the ma-

jority—stimulate neither sadistic tendencies nor intellectual curiosity. They arouse thoughts neither of mayhem nor of creativity. These are the time-waster shows; they are dull, gray, and insipid—like dishwater, just as tasteless, just as nourishing."

The blame lies equally with the television executives who choose the programs, and with the parents who tolerate the television set: children are simply plugged into the set the moment they come home from school, and left there with their meals and their unused toys until bed-time. We can hardly wait until the day when the Tele-Womb manufacturing company comes out with a child-sized, egg-shaped container. At birth children will be laid into the Tele-Womb, complete with Intra-Feed and Insta-Waste. All schooling and entertainment will be provided without interference from the parents: wrap-around sound and picture will be fed directly into the brain. The big moment, the major event of American life will be the Rebirth: at twenty-one the still-unseen child will, at last, be released from the egg: to scuttle around on wasted limbs, babble for a few minutes, peek through heavy-lidded eyes at the rapidly waning sun, and make the first preparations for engendering another family which—upon birth—can begin the cycle again.

August, 1965

8

LAST WEEK, as we were tripping over our own toes in an attempt to get on the air, a young juvenile came in the door of the studio and said, "I aint ever seen a radio station before." We counselled him that he wasn't seeing one now, and if he wanted to see a radio station he should go north a block to KISW: "That's Real Radio," we told him. He was back in a few minutes (white T-shirt, rose tattooed on his upper left forearm, cigarette dangling from his mordant lips): "They was closed. I ain't ever seen a real radio station before . . ." We remembered our early etiquette, and agreed to let him stand around for a while and get in our way (which he did: he and his damn blue-red tattoo) and finally he said: "What kinda music you play on the air?" One of Bach's Trio Sonatas was being broadcast at the time, and since we weren't quite up to describing one of our recent programs of Aboriginal Australian music,

or our P'ipa Concert of the South China Sea, we said: "That music" (referring to the Bach). He listened, head turned, a lumpy, T-shirted bird-of-prey listening for various worms in the ground (or in our heart) and then said: "I like that merry-go-round music pretty good." We did too, of course, and mordant youth and all of us rode around on some pink spotty horses after that. In a circle.

We should have saved him, of course: put him in a clear plastic box and transshipped him to New York to go foundation hunting with us. Our foundation report has twenty-five pages of essay, fifteen exhibits, pictures, charts, maps, and financial statements: but what it lacks is some personality, and if we were to tattoo "Give Him A Chance" on his furrowed brow and send him around as the living example of a straight, thick diet of television—why then we might be showered with coins instead of curses.

It is 2 a.m. Tomorrow we crawl into a plane which, they say, will take us to New York. We don't believe it, of course: when we see the wings of a jet wiggle during the final taxiing, we know damn well we are going to spend eternity on a cold stack of rocks somewhere between here and Butte, Montana. We also know that when we begin our chilly descent, dropping away from the aching blue all around us, we are going to think of that kid and his tattoo, or per-

haps of KRAB at four in the morning, with letters on the wall, beer bottles on the floor, and the cold beginning to creep in under the door. We'll think of that peculiar satiated feeling when we grind out another program guide. Or we'll think of the destructive burst, the pleasure that rushes up with the white noise that falls into a hundred or a thousand receivers when we turn off the station at eleven, or eleven-thirty, or twelve. All these fine-honed, infinitely pleasurable thoughts, pumping through our protesting, dying mind: and us knowing that if men were meant to fly, God would have brought them forth into the world with a propellor stuck through the nose, at least.

September, 1965

9

IN CASE ANY OF US might be worried, the United Press has set our minds at ease about the safety of military personnel and computers in case of nuclear attack—because they're all stuck in the ground somewhere in Colorado in a fourteen billion dollar installation which is enough cash to run KRAB in its present despicable state for seven thousand, two hundred and fifty-one years. With hot water; without all those infernal electric plugs which keep dropping out of the wall, putting us off the air.

But it's important to us that General Grey and all his colonels and majors will be safe because we were, you know, worried that they might get cooked up with the rest of us. You know: we might be getting drunk in the It'll Do Tavern, or camping near the Hoh reservation, or doing something dangerous in a haystack just outside Billings on a hot, sweet-

smelling April afternoon—and we can be comforted by the thought that General Grey can, with a simple poke of the finger, consign us to our Maker without a bother of the jingle on the telephone.

For the good general will be safe and warm in his rabbit hutch bored in the rock basalt just outside Aspen. And Captain Short, who just called the President so *he'd* be safe, will smile and nod say: "Well, sir—it was mighty close, mighty close." And he'll sigh, and they'll relax a bit, after a hard day making hard decisions; and they'll bite into their pre-frozen, bomb-proof dinners—and maybe sip some pre-bomb bourbon and maybe (if we are really lucky) will think about what we were back then when we were, back then.

And, over the hum of the air-conditioning system and the tic-tic of all those computers, there'll be no distracting noises from above because there won't be too many. Just the shifting of ashes and cockroaches.

I want to say this, love: it's just about time for the two of us to pack up and go to Colorado. What we'll do is go visit General Grey or Captain Short or the good Corporal Black on guard at the gate of this fine complex. And what we'll do is tell them that we are good loyal loving tax-paying Americans and we thought they might get sort of lonely there in their big drab hole. That we've thought they might appreciate a bit of company. Some boarders, say.

We'll say that since we had, in our dark past, contributed a bit to this beautiful deep rabbit hutch, and since we like cozy places anyway, why maybe we could rent a corner from them—or something like that. We won't take up too much room. All we need is some space for a trunk and a guitar and a little teeny camp-stove. Just a miniscule amount of space.

Because, see: we're very neat, and we could spread our air mattress behind a computer somewhere. We'd make no trouble at all—and, when things got blue (that sometimes happens, even to the military) we could pick out a few tunes on the guitar and sing and keep all the generals and captains and colonels happy remembering the old days.

And actually, although we don't want to make too much of it, we'd be happy to pay a little rent if it were necessary. Because we know that running all those lights and computers and paying all those salaries and storing all that water and food—Lord: it must be devilishly expensive. We'd be more than happy to contribute something like fifty dollars a month to the general upkeep.

Please—don't get us wrong: we'd be sorry about all the dust up there, and our families all gone, and the birds and trees and cities sort of frizzled; and the beach where we used to go swimming: all deserted, the sand turned to glass. And the school where we studied Chaucer and Byron and Hopkins all quiet

and falling apart. Hell, we'd miss the obnoxious rock-and-roll stations and the Beatles and even that guy next door, right next door to our house, the one who made those snorting and spitting noises all night long.

We'll miss it, God knows. But we figure that we'll be in another world: another world, where there are bright lights turned on all the time. We'll have to get used to that. The sun, never going down. And the bright hard cold nights—without a billion stars. We'll have to get used to that.

And, presumably (since we'll be living with them forever, or *almost* forever) we'll have to get used to a few military people. And their ways. You know: saluting, and getting up at six in the morning, and eating at regular times. We've never much cared for that — you understand — but, under the circumstances, I figure we can adjust to most anything, anything at all. Even getting up at six.

February, 1966

10

"RADIO, COLLEGES, LOVE. It's the same everywhere . . ." One of our commentators speaking *ex cathedra, ex microphone*: "Gresham's Law applies everywhere—good money driving out the bad. Universities lose good people, Washington, D.C., antagonizing the intellectuals, Las Vegas has no more silver dollars. The computer scholars come in—replacing those who felt that the act of teaching was and is an art. Stalin follows Trotsky, Hitler follows the Weimar Republic, and Disney does 'Winnie the Pooh.' "

"He's right," we think: "KRAB, and the radio stations like it. The first six months—the first thundering year. You race into the Czar's palace. You tear down the drapes, drop mud on the carpets, smash the fine-blown glass, slash the lewd, lovely, buxom nymphs in the hundred paintings. You proclaim a new justice, set up a new government, expose the

corruption of the old regime, and then . . . then . . . what do you do for an encore?"

Nothing. It's done for you. The pedants, and the professional mediocrities—those with one set idea, or creed, or dogma: those are the ones who ooze in after the herd has raced through the building, after the visionaries have come, set up a structure, gotten bored or fired, or squeezed out. The toad may be warty, and ugly, and slow-witted: but he gets the fly.

The professional educators, the advertising agencies, the effete—they have the patience and the dullness to win—to run all of our lives. Gresham's Law applied to art, and thought, and love.

And poets have it the worst, don't they? You start with Andrew Marvell and John Donne and what do you get now? Oscar Williams. Howard Moss. Robert Frost. Just when we need them the most, the poets go dead on us. Fat lot of good it does to write about the flowers tra-la and winters in Italy on the Via Fettucine and the sweet sad ache of love turned wan and aescetic. Fat lot of good it does to turn professorial and bore endless acres of freshmen and write turgid papers for MLA or PMLA and sprinkle footnotes around like ashes.

Fat lot of good it does to talk about the wry call of the wren, the hushed voice of the tit-willow while the younger generation can't even see a tree, much less a bird; but rather, ram through the hot spaces

of love—not in some sweet hay-mown field, but in the Firmaplast front seat of the old man's dual-carburetor Thunderbird; two squirming minds-of-youth watched over by the single thoughtless red period of the transistor Motorola. Sad poets, dying poets: dickering with rose-thorns at the first blush of spring, the purple haze of the sun-gone-down—while all around them the eyes of boredom and fear are peering out of the dark, peering into the fluorescent light of the suburban kitchen, where the mother of four wonders about that strange rustling in the cypress, up near the kitchen window . . .

Gutsy culture: that's what we need. Poets strong as truck-drivers, painters rough as ditch-diggers. Writers who refuse to step into the garden to listen to the sound of the fog, who know that all around them men are trapped in giant, windowless, colorless, humanless buildings—the structures of wired-in tangos, unblinking lights, unvarying temperature.

Writers who sense the rage of children who grew up with electrical umbilical cords — who went through their days plugged into radios that blare cruelly false messages, television sets that blink and spawn wooden-headed characters, marching through wooden stories—interspersed with madmen enraptured by armpits, or sparkling toilets, or frozen Chinese dinners. The world's falling to pieces all around us, and who's to see it, who's to cry?

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Gutsy culture—that's what we need. Sniffing the corpses of the dead, peering into the eyes of the blind, moaning for the mute. There must be someone who can write the epic of the junk-yard, the sonnet on power stations that glow through giant glass tubes, on the transmitter of television stations—where millions of kilowatts catapult words and images far out beyond the horizon, far beyond the comprehension of all of us. A Homer of the supermarket, a Milton of the steel-mill, a Chaucer of the power plant—that's what we need.

March, 1966

11

FOR THOSE OF US who like to torture ourselves by reading anything we can get our hands on, one of the strangest experiences is reading magazines like "Business Week," "Forbes," and "The Magazine of Wall Street." They manage to combine a nice, business-like hard-headedness with a charming sort of naivete; for example, "Forbes" recently presented a cover story entitled "Feeding the World's Hungry Millions: Billions for U. S. Industries." What sweet naivete; what pleasant, direct innocence.

Once, in a review of local music, we suggested that business support of the arts was suicide: "If I were a businessman with any sense, I wouldn't be caught dead paying out any of my hard-earned money for the arts. Why should I pay poets to attack my business ethics, novelists to attack my suburban morality, painters to portray lewd and repulsive prostitutes to shock me and pervert my children's minds; com-

posers who plague my ears with terrible neurotic screechings and groanings, and sculptors who think that it's art to portray a couple screwing right on the floor of the museum. And all the hangers-on: the fringies, the communists, the queers, the anarchists, the critics, and the dirty, isolated schizoids. What sensible, normal businessman would want *them* in the same city—much less squander money on them and make them prosper."

Can you imagine a Chamber of Commerce-Greater Seattle Reception for the Arts—"To Get and Keep Artists in Seattle Because Artists are Good for Business, and Business is Good for Artists." Can you see that party, and the writers and painters and dramatists we would invite to disabuse them of their cheerful Chamber of Commerce naivete? There'd be Ernest Hemingway, to bluster around, insult a few people, and get mournfully and magnificently drunk. And Lewis Carroll to make goo-goo eyes at some of the younger daughters of Greater Seattle, Inc. How about Edgar Allan Poe, to get sprawling-down drunk, and hide in his corner moaning at the pity of life. Oscar Wilde, of course, in his mauve, felt cape, to mince a bit, and make the Junior Chamber members terribly nervous. We'd have to invite Cocteau to disappear in the closet with Modigliani and their collection of needles and dope. We'd also invite Gerard Manley Hopkins to stoically suffer the pangs of guilt

at having any fun *at all,* and spend his time blearily peering out windows, looking around for the young boys. Theodore Dreiser—we couldn't ignore him: although he'd be good for absolutely no conversation —he'd just stand in the middle of the room and not even say hello. Jonathan Swift—he'd *have* to come all the way from the English madhouse, to lie on the floor and shriek and moan. Hart Crane, who'd get drunk in the first five minutes, and scare hell out of all the younger businessmen by inviting them upstairs with him. And the topper, the cap, the fillip to the whole party: Dylan Thomas, who'd come raging in, get riotously drunk, scream a few poems, insult the wives, fight with the husbands, and finally be hauled away by the cops, raging against the dying of the light.

What a nice party, and how nice that finally the businessmen will be disabused of their innocent notion that art and artists "attract top personnel to the area." Everything will be normal: businessmen will hate and fear the artists, drive them from town, and have the Washington State Legislature declare all artists deportable to Oregon. Artists will draw crude pictures of businessmen involved in all kinds of unimaginable acts, dramatists will have them say all kinds of unimaginable things, and the rest of us will sit and drink beer and enjoy the fight enormously.

June, 1966

12

RECENT RUMBLINGS from the natives north of the border indicate that British Columbia might be well on its way towards severing connections with the rest of Canada, and we would like to suggest that Washington state take advantage of what could become a most profitable situation.

We would be no more than timorous to suggest that the immediate annexation of British Columbia would represent to them and all of us the coup of a lifetime.

We all know that there are on the Washington-British Columbia border no few missiles aimed at the heart of the godless Communists, but given our recent no-win policy, a mere shift of aim of these missiles towards Ottawa or Toronto or Montreal—wherever the capital of Canada might be—should serve to gain Washington state a few million more acres and citizens, and the envy of every other

state of the union with the possible exception of Mississippi.

To think that we spend so much time dithering over the loss of another contract for the arms plant down on the Duwumps, when the rattle of a sabre, a sharp cough or two and maybe a long-winded declaration about "natural rights" and "just cause" can immediately join us to Alaska by the most convenient land route. All of us will be the better for this courageous action.

The citizens of British Columbia will find themselves embraced by the most good-hearted bunch of Babbitts west of Duluth and north of San Diego; our good governor will have a hundred new towns for conferences, thousands of new natural resources for complicated reports, and millions of new citizens to hide from; and the good prime minister of Canada (whatever is his name?) will be off the hook on all this talk of secession (". . . gentlemen, they have fired on Fort Mudge. We can hold out no longer . . .")

More importantly for those of us who look for the better life, even if to the north—we will be able to cultivate new tastes, new experiences.

We will be able to revel in the flavor of Wilkinson Blueberry Jam, Chiver's Blackberry Jelly—for those silly customs and immigration people who consider a journey across the border for better things an act of treason will be banished forever.

In the same way, those of us who find the state brewers solely interested in the chemistry of non-flavor will be able to import gallons of Golden Keg or Bass Ale.

And those of us who favor the Canadian willingness to broadcast long classical works, or hours of news and public affairs, or experimental films, will have a chance to sample the best the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation can offer. For a while.

For a while—for of course, a few minor Canadian customs will have to be altered to bring them more into the Twentieth Century.

The aforesaid Canadian Broadcasting Corporation will have to be phased out gradually for the introduction of the requisite rock-and-roll and Muzak broadcast stations to cover the whole province.

Television programs will have to be dandied up to break recalcitrant Canadians of their regrettable emphasis on panel and talk shows. A couple of daily Lucy programs will begin to inspire a taste for that important art form.

There will have to be radical changes in the whole law enforcement scheme.

For instance, visitors to Victoria may have noticed that they can park their cars before an expired parking meter for as long as an hour without getting a ticket, and sometimes a whole day without having their car removed.

Hopefully, Police Chief Ramon will be put in charge of the large cities of British Columbia to put an end to this piteous lack of tenacity on the part of law officials.

More serious is the apparent unwillingness of Canadians to use their resources properly. Tourists in Vancouver may notice a whole section of the city —called Stanley Park—full of trees, bushes, and paths. One of our first projects should be the improvement of communications in Vancouver by having the Washington State Highway Department build a freeway or two across the park.

One of our timber companies should be interested in logging the larger trees in Stanley Park—although the pickings might be a bit slim—and a few MacDonald Hamburger shops should serve to add some color and light to an otherwise drab wilderness.

Victoria might be more of a problem.

For some odd reason, Victorians seem somewhat attached to a giant bookend called the Empress Hotel.

It will be necessary to work swiftly after annexation. Through tax write-offs, we should be able to lure Seattle apartment builders to Victoria and—given their innate ability to plow mountains, trees, and older buildings to reasonable size—this very valuable area could be reclaimed and rebuilt in modern efficiency apartments with pink and yellow lanais and a far greater return on investment.

To assuage the few dissenters who might try to block such activity, stones from the old Empress Hotel could be plaqued and given to leading citizens of Victoria as a remembrance of golden days now fortunately past.

We would be the last to deny that there will be problems inherent in this accession of British Columbia to Washington state. British Columbia might resist our efforts to better their lives; but with a Bible in one hand, and the sword in the other, we should quickly convince them of their brighter future as Washingtonians and Americans.

August, 1966

13

HARRISON AND BOB and I were discussing the deplorable lack of *castrati* in contemporary American life, and its adverse effect on the Baroque Revival. Harrison explained that in the 18th Century, if you were young, male, with a reasonably good voice, your family could treat you to a quick snip and thus have you assured a life-long career singing Haydn, Gluck, or Mozart. Bob said that he wondered how many members of middle-class America would willingly subject their children to such fixing-up for the mere sake of a life-time of security. He thought a minute, and then said that (on the other hand) he refused to be prejudiced about the members of the middle class—that the lower class might be just as eager to assure such a simple future for their children. I said that there was too much talk as far as I was concerned, that NOW was the time for action, that all should recognize the

desperate need for counter-tenor *castrati*. Given the continuing American passion for baroque music, something had to be done at once. For instance: I suggested that VISTA and the newly created Federal Arts Council begin work at once, working hand-in-hand (as it were) to produce a bumper crop of *castrati* by 1970.

"The first step, obviously," I said, smiling, nodding, ". . . is to publish notice to all indigent families that there will be an immediate cash payment of $1,000 to any male child between nine and thirteen years of age, with reasonably good voice, not yet caught in the unfortunate embroilments of puberty, who will submit himself to the kind workings of the knife." I was enamored of my subject, and shushed the outbursts of yawns from my rapt audience. "VISTA workers will be delighted because of the availability of immediate cash for poverty-struck families—not to say the assurance of constant and lifelong employment to intelligent and needy boys who otherwise would be no more than a drag on the money market. The Council on the Arts will be enraptured because it will assure a constant flow of new talent into the hungry world of music, and each city and town in America will have the self-respect and glory that comes from having its own counter-tenor-in-residence.

"Music lovers who have long been discontented

with the falsetto warblings of Alfred Deller will see a burst of young singers into the baroque market who, for once, will be singing *au naturo*. Those pacifist groups who are dismayed by the drafting of our youngest flower into military service and the consequent loss of youthful blood on the bespattered fields and jungles of Viet Nam will see an easy exit for youth unwilling to go through the shame of having to testify about their most intimate beliefs or problems before a distinterested draft board—for certainly *castrati* will be offered a new classification (such as '0-0') which will absolve them from military service but certainly not from entertaining our fighting boys overseas in frequent concerts.

"And friends," I said—waxing incredibly eloquent, despite my audience's open-mouthed protestations of boredom: "not least of all—the birth control groups and lobbies will be entranced by this new and progressive step taken by our federal government to assure a quick end to our population explosion in that class of citizens who least need new members, much less new mouths to feed—I am here speaking of the ghetto class. You will agree that some sweet voiced boy in the wastes of Harlem, or Chicago, or Watts—up to this time—may never have heard of the music of Monteverdi, or Charpentier, or Piccinni: but, after the quick snip and a bit of training, not only will our ghetto waif have heard of such com-

posers, but they will have become an intimate part of his livelihood and future; nay, this once-rejected child of poverty will find himself swooned over by wealthy and pusillanimous matrons who (despite his lowly beginnings) adore his voice-of-a-bird, but know as well that any *tête-à-tête* will never disintegrate into unseemly activities which might distract the neighbors."

Bob and Harrison were reduced to complete silence —their modest ideas had been picked up by the master thief, who was running away in every direction with them, and who refused to relinquish the ball, as it were. "Think of the beneficent effect on our foreign affairs when the Peace Corps gets in on the idea: starving children in Peru, or Spain, or India—offered the opportunity to grow old absolved of the silliness that dogs the rest of us; children assured that—upon reaching a soft and fleshy maturity—they will have a life-long international career at the top.

"Go one step further: think of the profound effect on contemporary composers. Can you think of the changes that could occur, that must occur in this twelve-tone age faced with a flood of pristine voices. Aaron Copeland—surely that foremost of *avant garde* composers, will be the first to avail himself of the new sound; to compose, for instance, "Old Black Joe" for fifty-part chorus: all sweet-voiced youth released from the eternal bondage and poverty of darkest

Africa. And John Cage: can you imagine the new works which will flow from his pen—sonatas for counter-tenor, krumhorn, and bongo; or 'Cantata for Fifteen *Castrati* and Cymbals.'

"Gentlemen—singlehandedly we have solved the problem of over-population and war; we have solved the problem of the Great Society's lack of direction and contemporary music's lack of acceptance." I was ecstatic, ready to invent a hundred new possibilities for this new counter-tenor approach to poverty and art, but my enraptured audience was in other worlds, perhaps overwhelmed with the marvel of my ideas: their eyes glazed, their mouths open, their thoughts a million miles away in the dark cotton of the sub-conscious. We prophets must tolerate so much, so very much.

December, 1966

14

"I would bill myself as a poet, have it written on my passport as 'occupation,' were I to do this one thing: that is, spend twenty years in the composing of one sole poem, choosing only the most perfect words, fixing only the most crystalline ideas. Then I would hide the poem, in a safe, in a desk drawer, under the litterings of rats, under letters from aunts long dead—hide the poem from my own voyeuristic eyes for at least ten years. I would take it, then, pages yellowed, type smudged—I would exhume the poem and make maybe one, maybe two final and perfecting corrections. I would give myself a moment or two for reading the poem aloud to myself, give myself a minute to study the effect of this pure distilled flame on my own wretched soul, and, finally, I would take thirty seconds to burn the paper, the poem, to an ash. At that time, and only then, would I be a true poet, and ready to die . . ."

E. JING: The Sexual Symbolism of the Model T.

WE HAVE SAID BEFORE and no doubt will say again that Poetry, poor thing, has died, leaving behind (for our consideration) only a dry and bony carcass. For prose has

absorbed it, much as the hot, damp ground will absorb us all at the conclusion of this huffing and puffing called living.

The generosity of Joyce, who insisted that his prose was strong enough to embody poetry (and to prove it wrote verse as simpering and weak as any acne-packed, neo-Keatsian), gave us the first hints of the incipient dismissal of our friend of six hundred years. And (fortunately for the English language) the novelists Joyce Cary, J. P. Donleavy, Vladimir Nabokov and Lawrence Durrell, the short story writers Donald Barthelme and J. D. Salinger, the boxed-in New Yorker talents John Cheever and John Updike, even the sly pornographers like Henry Miller and Allen Ginsberg confirmed to us all that prose writers were the worst friends that poetry ever had.

And, unfortunately for us, the poets of the English language themselves were to kill that which the novelists could never do themselves. Eliot became the purveyor of the dark, cathedral school of verse; Pound became a cataloguer of ancient drama, oriental literature and the morning's mail; Yeats in his dotage turned to producing high-camp doggerel; William Empson turned to producing execrable puns; Stephen Spender quickly learned that lecturing was more profitable and far more entertaining than going through the agony of stuffing old ideas into older forms; Carl Sandburg learned soon enough that biog-

raphy was more engrossing and far more influential than craggy, angry poems; Dylan Thomas turned sodden actor on the stage, strutting and groaning until he was able to douse his brief candle and prove that the Welsh are far better readers than writers.

All the rest of the poor crew, the famous men we now must praise once they have passed on to their uncomfortable and unquiet graves—Patchen, Millay, Williams, Roethke—all of them committed their artform to early dotage by insisting on descriptions of moons and Junes and words and birds and streams and dreams. Ignoring, of course, for some blind, misshapen reason, the machines and trucks and bombs and craters and skyscrapers and asphalt-lined hamburger loves which managed to take over America while they, the poets, were presumably picking apart daffodils in state parks.

This is in no way the eternal final condemnation of all poetry. We are as rapt a lover of the verse form as ever; the rugged, lusty, sometimes crude, sometimes vicious writing of English literature before the twentieth century. We spend many of our happiest hours, mordantly drunk, mangling Chaucer in what we think is Original Middle English. Too, in crying over the winged chariots of Marvell, or giggling over the prickly Alexandrines of Pope, or moaning over the insufferable naivete of Don Juan.

O yes, and we spent hours unravelling the twisty

weeds and vines of Father Hopkins, and have come to dwell, with no regrets at all, on the harlequin wryness of the Edwardians. But after that fateful period, with the sad coming of the self-conscious, self-proclaimed "poet" "artist" "writer"—the stream goes dry, the rocks turn grey and flaky, the environ becomes parched and uninteresting. Poetry turns a poor aged grandfather—wonderful for the memories of continents conquered and heroic deeds performed years ago — but now just a slavering, slightly addled shadow of the great man who gave us an ideal around which to grow. A tragic falling.

The contemporary poet is a puzzled and lonely soldier, dithering around in an empty field, while the battle has moved to another field, another country. Poor poet, writing for one of the few good remaining magazines *(The Sixties, Choice)*, or maybe appearing occasionally in one of the City Light's publications, or being seen rarely in some vague journal emanating from West Germany or around Paris.

Poor poet, now as the dodo, like Oscar Williams, speaking *ex cathedra* from some chair of poetry at the University of Oklahoma City, or Sacramento State, or Bronx University—a shadow, reduced to the dismal role of scavenger by publishing memories of lives long past, or collating commas, semi-colons, periods in obscure, 1920's poets, or worst of all, reduced to the final scarecrow state of being an

anthologist.

It's gone, the form is dead, and you and I can find more poetry, more richness in the opening pages of a good Raymond Chandler novel than we can find in any anthology of Archibald MacLeish, or Karl Shapiro, or Gene Derwood (whoever she might be).

We must remind you that we come here not to kill poetry, but simply to report on the funeral. We watch this tragic procession with nothing but pity. We count off to ourselves the vastly changed art forms that have grown up to take over the proper function of poetry—character descriptions and the vast enjoyment of words (taken over by the novelists); singing, the rhythms, the frustrated anger (taken over by rock-and-roll); tight, sharp, pungent wit (taken over by cartoons, or one-liners, or even the advertising writer).

Poetry has had a long and seemly history, and we remember it with nothing but fondness, and are amazed that it lived as long as it did, and as potently as it did: from the crusty naivete of the Harley poems, through the outrageous giantisms of Donne and the Metaphysical poets; the viselike sonnets of Milton through the mystical mechanistic knots of Blake; the soft voices of Keats to the outrageous barbarities of Whitman. Then the sure sign of decline; the fixation on the past, the neo-ancients like Robert Graves and Richard Eberhardt, and finally the bland inanities of

Frost and Robert Penn Warren, the sweet (but useless) imitations of e e cummings and outrageous Ezra Pound.

A sad death: a useless death. The graceful magnolia tree has fallen, and although the pungent smell of it fills the air, it can hardly be confused with the heady perfume of blossoms.

February, 1967

15

THE COLD TAP in the bathroom has a case of the wheezies, refusing to shut off, feeding water onto the floor, into the yard, down the hill, cascading down Roosevelt Hill, drowning the radio station down the way, engorging our water bill. We look up a plumber in *The Outlook,* call the number, and the voice says: "This is your Portable Plumber."

We tell him about our various leaks and creeks, and he says he'll come plug us up some morning. "If we are asleep, wake us up . . ." we tell him, for we would hate to miss the chance to see a real portable plumber porting through the washroom. This invitation taps some fire in Portable Plumber's mind: "It's like this lady what told me (what *was* her name? Mrs. Crane. That's it—Mrs. Crane), wanted me to wake her up (he-he) and I crept right up to her bed and poured some water in her hand, cold water, you know. And she said 'Who's there?' And

I didn't say nothing (he-he), just poured some water down her back. She like to go through the ceiling . . ."

We won't deny we got a bit restive during this recitation, since we had some records cooking, and were plagued with visions of a college-age water fight raging through the transmitting room at seven a.m., with us dropping water-filled milk-cartons on plumber's truck, or bike, or whatever makes him portable —but he knew he had a good thing going, had the ball, the plumber's ball, and he ran with it all the way down the field:

"It's like Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," he said. (Pause — wonderment here, wind-up there) "I've been invited to speak in a hundred different churches, and I've got The Spirit. Reverend Mumble over in West Seattle: he had me come over and save his congregation. And, do you know, brother—after I got through he came over to me, the reverend did: he came over and told me that I had changed his life. He'd never heard nothing like that. I can do it. I've talked to congregations, washed them in the Blood of the Lamb, done it hundreds of times, with the Word, the only Word, the True Word. I can change your life, brother, because I'm washed. I can bring the spirit to you, brother . . ."

The record was over, we should have gone on to the air, but we hung onto the telephone, thinking about all the bills we owed, wondering about supper.

You know: busy thoughts like that. But what we were really thinking about, below it all, was "What's wrong with us. Is it the walk, or the sallow complexion, or the blood-shot eyes, or the whiskey voice? What is wrong with us that we should get evangelized so regularly and so often. With anyone: give them a moment or two of pleasantries, a smile, and bingo, comes the question: have you been saved; have you made the Decision; have you been Truly Washed?"

In this strange culture of ours, religion is sold as readily as Compoze, put a Tiger in your Heart, the Lord Duz All Wonders. On radio, television, in every street — as easy as Dial-A-Prayer, Instant God, a Prayer at the stop-light, Jesus in a Pill, a Decision for Christ as you brush your teeth, a hymn for the Savior as you make a killing on the market, a tear for the Prince of Peace as you zap another Cong. Reader's Digest Instant Salvation, The Passion in a jet, the word of reformation from a Portable Plumber.

It's obviously our own problem—this jack-in-the-box salvation. We will never be able to predict when it will pop up, springing out, snarling at us. The waiter, leaning over, just after serving the lamb chops *flambeé*, whispering in hapless ears, asking *the* question. Or the dentist (you with your mouth full of cotton and that little pipe pulling away all your excess saliva) saying "Has Christ come into

your life?" Or, maybe, at that certain moment, in that bed with that strange dark woman. Two strangers filled with the joy of the rage. You sigh, the two of you hold onto each other after the tornado, and there's this hot breath at your ear, the teeth (barely visible in the dark) leaning towards your ear lobe, the husky voice: "Tell me. Have you found the Savior?"

After awhile, we called Portable Plumber back on the telephone. We laughed nervously, told him that (somehow) we had fixed the cold tap problem, all by ourselves—that perhaps in some quiet unassuming way, there had been some guidance from the divine. We thanked him, hung up.

It's a lie, of course: the leaky faucet—it's worse than ever. Swamp-boots needed to change records. Rubber life-raft for checking the transmitter meters. Skin-diver suit a must if you've dropped something on the floor. Portable Plumber may have to come yet, in a tub. But damned if we are going to call him first. We have enough troubles without *that*.

March, 1967

THE MYRKIN PAPERS

PART II

1

A TRICYCLE DRIVES UP to the KRAB gate. The operator raises a dirty fist, throws something through the open front door. It bounces once. The tricycle, and the tricycle master move on, quickly, out of sight. Later, on the way to Julie's Cafe, I pick it up, the missile. It's an olive-drab toy soldier, of indeterminate race, religion, national origin. Olive-drab soldier suit, olive-drab bayonet, olive-drab skin. A one-inch-tall message from the Tricycle King. What's he trying to tell us?

Later, the Bobsey Twins drift in the door. Mouths full of lollypops, hands stickey with the red crystalline stuff. They peer at us through the double-paned glass. From hall to studio, four-eyeing the KRAB circus, the seven of us: drinking beer, typing program guides, scratching, laughing, talking. The Bobsey Twins sucker-faced, red tongues, pale eyes, watching us—and no doubt convinced that they are

watching television. They see us through that dim pane as they see the antics of Clarabell Cow, or the high life of Ed Sullivan, or the corpses of the Mekong Delta. They see us, and our mock-dramatic show—and their eyes never change, their lips work on steadily at the sweet substance of love. Nothing is moved. No emotion spills forth over all that sweetness.

It was accident that KRAB was littered down at this particular corner, in a neighborhood primarily bourgeois, suspicious. KRAB is that splotch of wine on the silken tie of the community, the blop of blood on otherwise white bucks. Suspicion and silence, and peering over the fence. Why don't they shave? Why are they always taking off their shoes? Has that guy *ever* had a bath?

No contact at all—only bare-eyes, until last week —when Mr. Garble comes over from next door. Seems to be receiving KRAB on his radio, his TV, and (from the way he talks) all over his plastic potted plant. His face is very red. A lightning bolt vein jaggers his forehead.

"Well," I say, "I can send over our Chief Engineer to de-RF your TV and radio. I don't know about the rest of the problems you're having." Mr. Garble starts, runs into the wall a bit. "Your engineer," he says: "Is that the fellow with the long hair? And the dirty feet?"

"O yes," I say, nodding and smiling: "But you don't have to worry a bit. He knows engineering like the back of his hand. He's *very* good."

The good Mr. Garble bangs out the door, and I can just barely hear his slurred words: "Don't bother to send *that* guy. He scares my wife . . ."

Is it just KRAB? Or are there bad spirits in the Seattle atmosphere. Down at the Athenian Lunch & Bar—four of us, talking, laughing, drinking our Labatt's Draft. Medusa the waitress comes up, bullies us a bit ("This ain't no meetin' place, ya know . . ."). And then, just before we can settle into each other's minds, Dionysius stumps up, in the disguise of a drunk Eskimo (puffy eyes, apple in right hand, loose withered butt in the other). "I'm the Superintendent of the Universe," he says.

"O Christ," I think. I slop way down at the table, pull my engineer's cap low over my eyes. Betty, across the table, scratches a few graffiti into the wood-work. Don, next to me, pulls the hair at the back of his head and takes a long gander at the boats coming in and out of the harbor. "I'm the Superintendent of the Universe," says the Eskimo, poking me, despite my sudden blindness; leaning close to me, breathing on me. I sag even further in the seat. "Do you know what I am going to do to you, buddy?" he says.

"I'll tell you, buddy," he says: "I'm going to stop

your railroad, buddy. I'm going to stop your train." And he shambles away, taking his bad breath and his universal purpose with him.

Well, God, maybe it's so. Given the trauma of it all—the dark lights growing up all around like dandelions, the unwanted missiles of cruel Tricycle Kings, the gamey eye of the man next door: given all that, maybe the Superintendent of the Universe does lope around the Athenian Lunch & Bar, bumping into the tables, stopping all those trains that try to go by without his specific and angry permission.

May, 1967

2

THE SUN IS DYING, impaling itself on Queen Anne Hill. Charles, Robert and I are perched, cormorants on the dock. There is silence. It is time, I think, for some profundity, for one of us to compare the dying of the day to the dying of mankind, to speak of the gray rocks awaiting us all.

A boat, a weathered boat, an antique boat drifts by; a fishing boat with a great deal of past, and little future. Harbinger of Mr. McFate himself, I think. I turn to the two:

"You see that boat," I say.

"Sure," Charlie says, "it's a Viet Cong spy mission. They've crept through the locks disguised as a Chinese Laundry ship.

"They're loaded to the gunwales with guns and dynamite and firecrackers. And in a moment, they are going to let fly—Pow! Shoot a leg off the Space Needle. The whole thing—revolving dining-room,

tourists and plastic self-images—will topple over.

"The city will be aghast; our symbol, our mirror, our ego will be gone; the war will have come to the continental United States—and the three of us can say that we were there, at the genesis."

"Funny that you should mention the war. The War," I repeat. In the dark, my audience shadowy and quiet, I feel like a story-teller in a Conrad novel —you know, Pease reaches over, taps his pipe out against the heel of his shoe. Treacle tics silently to himself in the darkness. My friends—for yes, dear reader: I can call them that—my friends lean closer. Dr. Belcher belches softly, under his breath. I never did like Belcher. Too d—d clever for his own good, I think. And all those belches: ugh.

"The war," I repeat. My audience is mesmerized. I have them in the palm of my hand: tics, twitches and all. "I have a dramatic solution for the whole bloody mess; a solution so radical that I am sure the President and his many advisers haven't thought of it at all."

My audience is alert, tense. Folgernon leans forward to examine my face, thinks better of it; leans back, topples in the water. He was sitting on my Ming Dynasty backless vase. Folgernon always was a twit; just like his mother, I think.

After we pull him out, I continue: "It'll be a present from Washington State—to the free world. It'll take

coordination, guts, and money. But it'll put us on the map, do wonders for our tourist trade."

"You know of the Washington State Highway Department, I trust." There is a murmur. Grippe sighs: "Not The Washington State Highway Department!" I silence him with the back of my bolo knife. He sighs again; is silent.

"You know the reputation of this department—how they have stood up smartly to outrageous criticism; how they have dealt with an anguished but misguided populace by cementing over property, homes, trees, dogs. With sheer guts and will power, they have won out against insurmountable odds.

"You have even heard the terrible rumor of a supposed plan for a six-hundred-foot-high Chinese Wall along 50th Street—starting at the Sound, cutting across the top of the University, parting the waters of Lake Washington and finally running out of steam somewhere around the wastes of Bellevue."

Crenshaw starts: I can hear sweat popping out of his glands. *He* remembers the wastes of Bellevue. I silence his glands with a wave of the hand.

"I needn't dwell on the rumors—the claims that the Highway Department is working hand-in-hand with the Seattle City Council to isolate the University, to put an end to the spread of the twin diseases (so dreaded by so many): Hipititus and The Hemp Blight. No! This is not so. This would imply that the

City Council hates the University area more than it does other parts of the city. I can tell you, it's not so . . .

"But this ugly rumor has borne fruit—for it has given me the solution to that trying war we are now waging in the jungles of Vietnam.

"We, the citizens of Washington State, can solve this desperate international problem. For we will simply donate the entire Washington State Highway Department, including Charles G. Prahl, E. I. (Bob) Roberts, and George Zahn, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff." There is a sigh. Or is it a bubble of laughter?

"The Highway Department, shipped to Vietnam, will immediately build a sixteen-lane freeway complete with interchanges, toll-booths and reversible lanes, from the Gulf to the Laotian border. Their press department will say something like "The new expressway will improve communications . . ." and indeed, it will be great for all the peasants and their oxen and ox-carts. If they can afford the $12 toll.

"But you know the real effect: If there are no slides or cracks, communication between North and South will be severed completely. The Viet Cong will be terrorized by this concrete snake stomping through their land. They may (dare I say it?) come not to cross it, but to worship it as a prehistoric, terrifying and ugly monster.

"Gentlemen: the war will be over. Mr. Prahl will

name the highway after himself (a new phrase: 'The Prahl solution to war'), George Zahn will be elected president of the free world, and Washington State will win the accolades of peace-loving mankind who will move here in droves. It is, you must agree, a fascinating solution to a difficult problem . . ."

July, 1967

3

JOHN CAGE used to say that the only reason he was not a whiz with figures is that he could never find them. This is like the plight of the black stars of the universe. Their specific gravity is so great that light cannot get up the wheeze to escape and be seen. The stars are there, as much as you and I are here—drinking our beer and smiling foolishly at each other—but the conditions of existence are such that they just can't do their starly tricks—like being seen. Poor stars: poor us.

Anyway, I wanted to tell you about the fact that I had done some research on the population growth of the Greyer Puget Sound basin. And with the cooperation of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Washington State Tourist Association, and that peculiar crick in my left knee—collating all these figures, I come up with a projected population of Western

Washington of two hundred million by late 1980. Or is it two billion? I never can be sure.

Now this may not bother you—but it drives me looney. For despite my craggy personality, I have come to have more than a passing affection for what's left of Washington State, and I think something should be done. I mean, can you imagine needing a shoe-horn to get into Green Lake, a governmental enabling order to drive downtown, a tall thin body to walk on the beaches? Can you imagine seven million screaming brawling raging children plugging up the area school systems? I can, and I am scared.

The villains are the migrants, of course—swarming in from the wastes of Boise and the garbage heaps and used car lots of California. Swarming in, and stepping on our nice tulips, and thinking that we should be glad to have more company.

The solution has to be more creative than just sending the good-natured Babbitts like Greater Seattle, Inc. or Welcome Washington down to Phoenix for an enforced twenty-year leave of absence. No, I think we should call in the state resources to plug the dike; or build it.

I think you are aware of my famous Prahl Plan for Physical Separation. This means building a twelve-lane ring-road about the basin—starting at the mouth of the Columbia, thence easterly and southerly to Skamania, thence in a generally nor-

therly direction along the peaks of the Cascade Range up to Hozomeen Mountain, thence westerly along the Canadian border (obliterating that dreadful town of Blaine) to the Straits of Georgia, thence in a generally westerly direction to the Sea of China.

This serves two purposes. It keeps the ubiquitous Washington State Highway Department busy for a few years and out of the hair of us city dwellers who have suffered so badly at its hands. And—as we well know from local experience—it creates a well-nigh impassible barrier all around Western Washington, keeping out any wet-back who may try to by-pass our newly created customs and immigration machinery.

For we will have an exquisite organization for keeping out immigrants. We will simply ask that the federal government loan us the entire United States Customs and Immigration Service for the duration of the crisis.

Techniques used by that august body at federal borders on the bearded, the dirty, or the poor will be extended to *ALL* prospective immigrants into the Puget Sound area. This means that anyone from out of state (this includes the grim reaches of Eastern Washington) will be subject to—indeed, will have to expect—search and seizure. Seventy-five page, minutely typed forms with questions like "Given the land-reform measures carried out in Bosnia near the end of the Seventeenth Century, how would you deal

with local agricultural freeholding structures (or strictures)?"

Any unseemly answers would result in long hot interviews, with elaborate inquiries into past political, social, or sexual habits. The Washington State Health Department would cooperate fully with the Immigration Service—stripping visitors for the purposes of extended inoculations for typhus, tetanus, and The Washington Rot. Needles will be blunt and unbearably long.

For those daring enough to enter the region, constant surveillance will be necessary. Meter-maids will be forever at hand (as now) to note and ticket for minor offenses, and visitors' cars not meeting rigid standards, licensing procedures, or parking regulations will be towed to Snohomish County (as now) and dismantled to search for booze, drugs or what-not. Cost to be borne by the visitor.

I may be wrong—but I think these steps will begin to delimit our serious population problem. Once again, thankfully, Seattle will sink into the sweet greyness of the early forties; days when our city fathers insisted (and wisely so) on silence, and movelessness, and a few quiet yawns. Hooray for the Dark Ages.

August, 1967

4

THEY SAY THAT it was the daily habit of Diogenes to appear in the marketplace of Athens, that very marketplace where the assembled vegetables may well have wilted from the force of ideas being expressed around them. But lately, and cryptically, Diogenes had taken to wearing a barrel during his visit.

Now his good friend Anonymous, who frequented the marketplace too, came up to him and said: "Is it true, Diogenes, as I have heard, that you have recently taken the vows of poverty that are so popular in this city?"

Diogenes shook his head; his voice was impressive and his demeanor serious—despite the obvious ridiculousness of his trying to act civilized while standing in an old barrel. "No," said the good Diogenes: "I have not taken the vows of poverty. It's just that, this week, I think I'm a pickle."

Now no one knows what happened to the wise prophet after that, but I am told that Anonymous fled to Fourteenth Century Europe, where he composed a great deal of music which is still attributed to him.

The reason I brought all this up, and you may wish to suggest that I did it for no reason at all, which I deny—the reason I brought all this up is that I would like to say that in front of modern art, I feel not like Diogenes, and certainly not like Anonymous, but rather like a pickle. In fact, I am surprised that Jasper Johns has not painted me and hung me, complete with all my confusion. And I will go on to say, so that the rest of you can paint me and hang me at your leisure, that just about all painting-sculpture-art being done today is an obvious and boorish fake.

For these dreadful artists have found our moral weakness—they have found the very rot in our backbone. That is (one), if it's art, it's got to be good, or at least important; and (two) if it's on a piece of canvas, hanging on a wall, in a frame, it just *has* to be art.

My friend Don, who likes all this foo-foo-raw far more than I, says that sooner than we think the supermarket and the art gallery are going to get married. What he means by that is that they are going to steal each other's techniques, and finally merge—so that, for one, every bit of packaging is going to be

suitable for hanging on the wall as art. The wrapper on the frozen beans, the cover on the TV dinner, the disjointed chicken package. It's already being done—or haven't you noticed Sgt. Pepper's picture on every kitchen, bedroom, or bathroom wall?

The artists have been working for a long time to try to fool us, and they almost succeeded. Making us think that Picasso was more than a delightful old charlatan; trying to convice us that Mondrian was better than a T-square, or that Jackson Pollack was something else than the first of the drip-dry gang; or maybe that Ad Reinhardt was painting all them black squares as if they weren't black—merely shades of black. Or even that Andy Warhol really thought cans to be artistic. But then we're back to the supermarket again, aren't we? Making it a giant art gallery—perhaps the best and freshest of American art collections.

For those of us with more than just a passing affection for art, we know that true artistry died with the last of the Impressionists, or at worst, with the Cubists. None of the three-dimensional freaks has ever matched an arm, or a leg, or a sweet rosy stomach by Renoir. None of the slash-and-whip school has ever been able to understand a single line of Matisse. None of these over-gorged sign painters has anything in his bag of tricks to touch Cezanne on a mountain-side village.

Let us accept and treasure these contemporary artists as good-natured fakes, scaring the bejesus out of juries, frightening newspaper critics into hang-dog acquiescence. "I don't understand it—so it must be good." And the public—dear, sweet, wide-eyed public—trying to accept all these lumps and bumps and violations of gentility and sensibility, and wondering if those haggard awful figures on those bizarre, hanging canvases are really supposed to be doing those awful things. Or is it just my eyes? Why did I leave my specs at home?

They've all been faked out—classically and beautifully. Just as all the residents of this area were fooled into thinking that there was or is a "Northwest School of Art." A concept that can only have had any pretense at meaning before the invention of the jet, or the television. Regionalism in art went out with brass hub-caps, when people learned how to travel. But the critics will try to propagate the myth—as they do the myth of a viable contemporary art. A starving dog will growl over even the driest, dullest bone.

Poor Diogenes, in that barrel. Having to be a pickle for a whole week. And us, with this incredible art—being faked out for so long. Aren't you glad I told you, though?

September, 1967

5

Málaga, Spain

THE TOURISTS ARE everywhere, dropping money like it was water on this parched, beautiful, and dusty country. And, as far as I can see, having no real personal involvement with the Spaniards whom they meet every day as waiters, or policemen, or tour guides. Tourists, not paying attention to who is attached to that hand making the bed, or bringing the rum; tourists, not getting involved in anything but the sun and the food and the booze. And certainly, without exception, not getting involved in the poverty. Any more than to turn up their noses when it obtrudes, from behind the hotel, or through the windows of the car. For poverty here —as anywhere else—stinks.

Tourists everywhere: looking through castles, poking around in cathedrals, being lead, rushed in mon-

ster snorting tour buses through caves, through vista roads, through great cavernous galleries. Tourists on the Gala Fun Night Tours—going to pre-selected clubs, where pre-selected gypsies go through their pre-selected flamenco rigmarole; where waiters know enough English to understand "whisky sour" or "gin and tonic" or "What's the bill?" Where they know enough not to show surprise at a twenty-five or fifty peseta tip—the amount of money that here, for most of the country, is still a working day's wage.

A working day's wage for some fourteen or sixteen year old, with dun-colored eyes, getting up at six, to be in the fields at seven. To work from then until two, and then from four to sun-down. For fifty pesetas, ninety cents a day. In some field within spitting distance of the nice clubs of Torremolinos, just above the gracious new apartment hotels of Rincón de la Victoria.

And all I could think about is that I would like to give some of these fly-bitten urchins a few words of English, and the knowledge of the better life, down there in Torre del Mar, at the edge of the sea. Where smart bar help of any age can get in on the easy money, the great golden stream, the wondrous foreign goose.

For no peasant child here is going to get help from his government, or his priest, or his family, even. There is no aid-to-dependent children, no government

surplus food store. The church and the government are almost one and the same, and the priests are the despair of sensitive Catholics in any other country. "The Spanish Church is a little backwards," they say. "Eighteenth Century, to say the least. Something will *have* to be done."

It will all right—for the priests look notoriously well-fed and well-dressed, even in those villages where the fastest transportation is a dumb burro, and the best meal is a piece of hard, glutinous bread dipped in brownish olive-oil. Something's got to give. And all those tourists coming in with all that money. Where do they get it? Can there be something better, somewhere else? Emigration is the answer. As the tourists come in, the poor get out. Some temporarily —to France, Germany, Switzerland. Some permanently, to Australia, to South America. Anything is better than staying, or fighting.

I would say that there is going to be no revolt—not for a long time, anyway. The Spanish sort of tore each other up between 1936 and 1939. They put a fair amount of high-class Spanish blood in the ground.

For like all Civil Wars—it was the bloodiest, the cruellest, and the most grotesque. It was not only the good guys versus the bad guys. It was son fighting father, neighbor against neighbor, rich against poor, Godless against Godly. All the bitterness of the years

—envy and jealousy, open season on those people who cheated your grandparents, or who insulted your daughter, or who stole your money. Killing for spite came into style and—if you are a Spaniard—you didn't miss the chance.

It's the same Spain that produced those madmen —Cortez, Balboa, de Soto; the same guys that knocked down a few indigenous Hispano-American cultures for a little gelt. Burned a few Indians, razed a few cities. "Where did you say the dough was, buddy? Look, I don't have all day, and I sure don't like this anymore than you do. Just tell me where the City of Gold is, and I'll put away my firebrands, and you can go home . . ."

Times have changed, haven't they? No more invasions; no more wars. Us good Spanish just nod our heads a few times, and the gold comes to us. O, we are being invaded—sure. A greedy horde, wanting cheap booze, and sunshine, and beds. But they pay for it, they pay for their invasion: and what can we say, when they keep raining us with these francs, and Deutschemarks, and dollars. There's nothing to say but *"Gracias."*

Fun and lights. Run on the beautiful beaches. Lie there in the sun and get dark like us. Rest awhile—have a *copita de vino,* or a little *paella,* maybe. Sure—give the waiter a dollar tip. *Gracias.* We'll take you to a nice club, tonight; nice pretty girls. And, *natural-*

mente, we won't bother you with stories of our starving, our poor, our huddled masses. *Ay claro* . . . you have troubles enough of your own.

September, 1967

6

THEY TELL ME that the twigs who are in control of the future are going to burrow under what's left of Seattle to install some electric trains. This will make us all give up our automobiles so that we can ride in a hole in the ground. Be a worm, a slug again. This is called rapid-transit.

Those who were around forty years ago (and I wasn't, so don't ask me) may recall the mentality of those who wanted to put us firmly in the lap of the Twentieth Century by ripping up all the cable cars, and trolley cars, and inter-urbans. Progress, as you may know, is a witch who appears to us in a comely mask, her well-corseted body groaning and straining against a tight red dress.

She is embraced, praised by everyone, loved passionately. And after she has done her damage, she rips off the mask and the corset, revealing all the scabies and fat and warts and chin-hair—and there

you are. Left with a whole bag of progress and precious little else.

Remember the trolley cars racing, sparks showering down Madison, swaying from side to side, rattle-clang, wheels spinning in rainy grooves, windows banging and clattering into the night coming on foggy feet; the first trolley of the morning, racing wildly, opened up all the way, getting up to twenty-five, maybe thirty—the wheels screaming in brightly polished grooves, racing down Capitol Hill. And the sparks rain down sweet lights on the roofs of darkness.

Remember the cable-cars, groaning up Queen Anne with their straight-back, yellow-straw seats. And us hanging off the uprights, out on either side, daring, hanging over the pavement racing by underneath us—moving straining up the grade, motorman twisting the clamp down tight so that we can't pop down the hill.

Remember the interurban running dangerously alone out in the wilds of the valley—racing charging down the rails wandering here and there (how *DO* we stay on the tracks?), shrieking from Seattle to Tacoma. And around us the bushes and trees and lonely houses whirling by, with us racing so fast the rain splats against the straight-up-and-down front windows, rain turning to huge gollops, and you hang onto the bars so you won't get thrown to the wood-

slatted floor.

Progress, and those nice engineer types (raised in shining aluminum wombs) told us that we could move out of the wilds of the nineteenth century into the wonders of the twentieth if we'd only get rid of those silly archaisms. The engineering mind, telling us how to grow a city, washing down whole hills with hoses, spawning concrete like it was precious jewels.

The engineering mind is so obtuse that we know there is only one solution, the famous Prometheus solution for their harsh and desiccated ideas. All engineers, those in training at the University, those practicing in Washington State—should give a month of their lives, one month only, to be chained to the pestiferous concrete legs of the Seattle Freeway, to spend a whole month in the dark and merciless caverns, meditating on the monstrosities of their profession. A whole month, so that they may ruminate, and learn, and never do likewise.

That takes care of the witless. How do we solve the problem of getting people from here to there? Six more freeways? Rapid-transit worm-dark coaches? Haven't we learned yet?

For the solution is like all solutions to all problems —so simple that no-one has thought of it yet. It is merely: rebuilding, from scratch, from nothing, the complete trolley-car, cable-car, interurban complex. Just recreate the whole beautiful mess.

Re-lay the tracks. String the wires. Re-manufacture (carefully, true to the elaborate grill-work, leaded windows of the nineteenth century) five hundred trolley cars, a dozen cable-cars, a few interurbans. What better way to discourage automobiles in the city—you know how trolley tracks ruin automobile tires.

And soon enough, trolley cars, all over the city, climbing every hill, scooting in the dark (the single eye bobbing down the street, reflected legs on the shiny tracks), racing down Yesler, or Madison, or Broadway. The glory of them all past bearing.

And soon enough, the transportation problems of the city will be solved. You and I will be hanging onto the sides of the open cable-cars, crawling up the steep sides of Queen Anne; or rattling through Madrona, rocking back and forth on our leather-straps. Rapid transit, indeed. Twenty miles an hour in an upright straw seat is fast enough for me, thank you very much.

October, 1967

7

MY MEMORY is such a windbag that I thought for sure that Armageddon represented some obscure battlefield from the first (or earliest) of our present series of wars. I had it pegged as another Ypres: some scenic pasture land in the north of France which our good grandparents, in their haste to end all wars, turned to a mess of trenches, barbed wire, and mudholes. And in their eagerness to possess it, shot and gassed each other interminably.

Bill Hanson set out to convince me that I was wrong and told me the story of the real Armageddon. Which, I may say, bears little relationship to the one I was planning. This is more or less the way he describes it:

The final war will be a surrogate war, which will take place not in New York, nor Moscow, nor Peking. No, it will represent the newly benign wastes of men's minds, and will thus take place in Northern Africa—

in the arid desert.

This will not be one of your lesser, or minor, wars. No: It will be great, one of the greatest, using all the wonderful tools of fire and light that man has created to make himself strong. The very instruments of love that he has fashioned—the bazooka, the flame-thrower, the bomb—will be grandly strewn over this blighted battlefield.

There will be a difference. For there will be no men involved. None, except those hidden a thousand feet below the surface of the baked lands, in the air-conditioned bunkers.

The whole tempest will consist of robot fighting robot. For mankind will have come to such a state of mechanical and engineering art that Good will fight Evil in the form of millions of robots. Mechanical joint will clang against mechanical joint; mechanical eye will peer into mechanical eye. The bombs and rockets will destroy only mechanical men with mechanical souls.

Far below, in the bunkers, men will peer through robot eyes; will curse and snarl and pray. For they will know that above them, on the barren lands above, the robots are fighting the Armageddon battle, and soon enough after the triumph, God will reach down to reward the righteous.

And the battle of the Wastes will rage until Good triumphs, and God will be watching—watching and

waiting, so that in the last moment, over the countless metal corpses of the Bad, men (waiting breathless in their bunkers) will see the Giant Arm sweep out of the blasting sun; the Arm of the Just Reward, swooping down, finally, to embrace the million Good robots; to sweep the mechanical saints to their just, albeit mechanical, reward. It will be a glorious day.

That is Armageddon — and with one of those strange mnemonic twitches where the brain-pan gets plugged into the wrong hole—I had confused it with The Apocalypse. Or, in simpler words—the Jellyfish Theory of Eternal Reward.

What I had thought was Armageddon was the day —tomorrow, or, at best, the day after tomorrow— when the Big Jellyfish drifts down from the sky. A sheer gossamer, the formal gown of the universe, a drifting jewel of serrated webs of color and softness. A fine down around us all.

This Master of the Above will come down without warning; and his million, million tentacles will run soft strings through the countless streets. And in those million arms, the Jellyfish King will gather to his jellyfish bosom the Chosen Few, the Truly Saved, the Masters of the Grey Eye of Forever.

The chosen few will not be you, and surely not me, but rather, all those million gnurrs who have surrounded us all our days. You know, the masses who never say anything good or wondrous, who never

growl at the postman, never kick the dog, and spend all the many evenings stretched forth from their lives watching television.

The great jellyfish soul will expand an umbrella to welcome his own. Millions will go to their jellyfish reward up there somewhere, in the milky space called jellyfish heaven. And you and I will dither around the now empty streets, vaguely wondering if something is wrong, wondering where all the figs have gone to, gone from our gnarled and somewhat craggy lives.

November, 1967

8

Warm Springs, Georgia

I NEVER SEEM TO GO on holiday without a Raymond Chandler book or two. "He was as great and important a writer as Hemingway or Fitzgerald or Nathanael West," I tell people, defensively; "and Phillip Marlowe is the greatest American Existential Hero since Tom Sawyer. Or would it be Miss Lonelyhearts?" The word Existential is one of those service items that always shut people up. Like "Life is . . ." or "You remember what Kierkegaard said about money, don't you?" Instant philosophy—in a can.

It's painfully quiet here, except for the crickets, or tree-frogs, or whatever, with their out-of-doors Muzak. I love it though. This is clay country of Northwest Georgia. The land where country folk are called "crackers" or "red-necks." Where the atmosphere is thick as butter and twice as sweet.

I often think that I should write a book on the atmosphere for would-be civil rights workers. I would tell them about Georgia: "The sweaty feeling in the palms of your hands has nothing to do with being followed on back-country roads by pick-up trucks. Rather, it's a condition of the air—a rich mixture of spring water, clay dust, and pine sap. It gives a soggy feeling to the clothing, makes long hair knotted and heavy to the comb. This is the Great Georgia Damp. . . ."

Franklin D. Roosevelt loved this clay country. And he built—or caused to be built—one of the greatest medical complexes in the world: the Warm Springs Foundation. In its day, this organization commanded some of the greatest talents in physical medicine, physical and occupational therapy. Warm Springs was no hospital—it was a hotel, in the French sense of the word; or a spa, a European watering place. Without the European nonsense of ninety ancient vultures crouching around the springs, complaining endlessly about their livers or kidneys.

Roosevelt came to Meriwether County, Georgia, when it was a run-down, depression-ridden pesthole. A place where lynchings of Negroes were as regular as the cotton crop; where the soil, with its high ferrous content, stained the low-down country shacks the color of blood.

I love this scraggly country—as Roosevelt and

Agee loved it. Yesterday, I drove from Lumpkin to Americus, and then to Albany, Ga. I stopped near the town of Parrott, in front of one of the rickety shacks that litter the country. Roof, strips of tin sheeting; sides, horizontal paper-thin slash-pine; windows, vacant eyes to the sides; doors, open to the front and back. The shack perched on rocks—rocks dug out of the thick red clay, piled five or six high—so the hut is a sick chicken, wobbling about on ratty legs.

It's the color that makes the whole so unified, so sad—the shack is unpainted and it gradually turns to the color of the ground; mud stains the bare pine planking on the sagging porch; everything comes married to the rusty, dusty soil; even the tin roof begins to oxidize, leaking color red into the eaves.

This is the country in which the Foundation was built. And to the poverty-struck Negroes, the poor whites, Georgia Hall must have risen as a beautiful white castle, floating on colonnades, as much a miracle of hope for the dirt-poor Georgians as a repository of cheer for the sick.

The Foundation has changed since I was here, partly due to the Salk vaccine which, overnight, made the primary purpose of the physical plant as dated as yesterday's scrambled eggs. But as well, the Foundation changed because of the death of Roosevelt.

For he had instilled in the place a kind of chaotic joy. The people he brought to run this castle were as

eccentric as some he used to run the country. And as for the country—it cultivated a kind of fiscal madness which drove the professional money raisers in the March of Dimes to near lunacy.

But you know these institutions which are concerned with the arts, or the ideals of man. They are always subject to dreadful strife and ultimately, I figure, the efficient and calculating must win out; the random, and chaotic, and amused, must lose.

The middle fifties saw some sort of a neo-Stalinist coup among the medical staff here. Prompt payment of bills became a mania, a public relations director came in—and those of us who used to entertain ourselves with smuggled moonshine or necking in deserted parts of the campus look with dismay at the pert and efficient Recreation Director.

But nothing will ever erase the physical beauty of the world here—a nice union of architecture and landscape. It's ten or ten-thirty at night now. The fecundity, the sharp smell of mineral waters. What did I say: the atmosphere as thick as butter? No, rather—it's thick as petals, white petals. Quickly dying, turning brown at our feet.

Earlier this evening I felt particularly dry. I drove over to the Pine Top Inn for some beer. Next to my car an old man, sitting, not in the driver's seat—what's it called?: the Death Seat. Head down, eyes closed. He's asleep or dead. Maybe another case for

Phillip Marlowe.

"Hey you," he calls me. A Georgia accent—soft as the air. "Hey, dahlin', will you kiss my han'?" Since I forgot to get my usual six-months haircut, the old boob can't resist. "Dahlin'. Come over here an' let me kiss your han'." Dirty old man. If Phillip Marlowe were only here—to let him have a belch of lead in the old pot belly. Zap! That'd shut him up. Old reprobate! Dahlin', indeed!

December, 1967

9

Washington, D.C.

I SUPPOSE WE ALL have these fantasies of being a Harrison Salisbury, or a James Reston, or a William L. Shirer. An interview with a famous or important political figure, a long one: lasting for days, maybe. Playing golf with the kings and prime ministers and presidents. And late at night, over *demitasse*, they, confident of your trustworthiness, lean forward to tell you the story, the story of what's *really* going on. Which you of course, good reporter that you are, never divulge. But it gives your writing an air of authority, of knowing far more than you tell. The fuzz on the peach, as it were.

My last day in Washington, I call Senator Magnuson's office, ask for an interview. One is set up at once for five p.m. My career as an inside reporter is beginning.

I arrive at least a half-hour early. I wonder if Reston is ever this nervous when he is led into the President's office. I doubt it. I start to sketch out some questions. Dillies. Like: "You and Johnson are products of the New Deal. And yet, don't you think that the Rooseveltian concept of unlimited bureaucracy has spawned a new type of injustice—where the individual is squeezed to death on the slow wheels of supposed justice?" Hot questions like that.

The Senator's reception room is hung with about 200 feet of high class, rough hewn, unpainted lumber —all carefully framed. I idly wonder if this is one of those creative, do-it-yourself galleries for frustrated art appreciators who can't figure out what's going on in painting now—if anything.

After an hour and a half, the raw planks seem emblazoned on my backside. "The Senator's still in committee," the secretary tells me. Or: "The Senator's going to check in at the floor," or "The Senator's on the floor now." It's like a hurricane report, and I find all the snipe-ideas are fleeing before the center. "You can go down and talk to him on the floor," the secretary tells me. But I know what that would mean to my in-depth interview, my searching questions, tackling this man who seems to inspire no end of wonder at his power, in this city of power. No thanks, I want more than ten seconds in a question-and-answer situation. I'll wait.

After two hours, the telephone rings. It's the Senator. "I'm all tied up on the floor." After all those stories, I have a quick irrational vision of some wild bear of a Gulliver, strung down on the beach of Lilliput. His voice gets a bit stentorian: "What was it you were going to interview me about, anyway?" he asks.

I cough a bit nervously. "Well, you know. I really can't say until I see you. You know."

That was the wrong thing to say; the bear sniffs something a little strange. The voice gets testy: "Well I'm not about to get involved in an interview when I don't know the questions. What was it you were going to ask?"

That really sets me off. I get all sweaty, cough again, "Well, actually," I say: "I wanted to talk about the New Deal."

"Whaat? The *what* Deal?" God, I wonder, does he think I'm trying to make some sort of a deal with him? "*What* new deal?" he demands. Maybe they come in the night and change names of these things. Maybe it's called the Old Deal now. Or the Un-Deal. I try to say something about Roosevelt, and the NRA, and all that sort of old timey excitement, back then; you know.

"Maybe you should come see me tomorrow," he says, shortly. "Maybe sometime tomorrow I can spend a minute or so with you while I'm down here on the floor." Me down there, for a minute or two, trying to

cut all those strings. The Miracle ninety-second Salisbury steak.

As I'm leaving, the press secretary goes along with me, tries to cheer me up with stories of a friend of his who lives in a chest respirator. "He's as happy as you or me is," he tells me, walking with me as far as the door. "He buys and sells commodities for a living. I ought to get he and the Senator together in a picture." He pronounces it "pichur." He eyes me a minute. "Say," he says, brightening up: "maybe we ought to get *you* and the Senator together in a pichur. That would be nice, wouldn't it? Tell you," he leans forward confidently: "Betcha he'd sign it too."

On the way back downtown, the taxi-driver generously lets me share a cab with three tourists from Florida. "Where can we eat tonight?" one of them, sitting next to me, asks the driver. "Ain't there no Manning's Cafeterias in Washington? They's all over Florida." She's about fifty, all in yellow: yellow droopy hat, yellow dress, yellow beads dangling to her knees, yellow teeth. She picks a yellow hangnail for awhile, then borrows a cigarette from me. "I don't care where you take us to eat," she tells the driver—"only don't take us where they cooks everything in garlic. They give us garlic on everything last night, on everything. And I tell you, all day long, I've had gazz. Awful gazz, all day long."

Yeah, I think: all day long. I want to lean over,

plant a wet, loving kiss on her yellow cheek. I know exactly what she means.

April, 1968

10

VISITORS ARE COMING to Washington State in unprecedented numbers and — some of them — caught up in a vision of The Better Life, are deciding to move here permanently. For the information of those planning such a move, I should like to explain the social, financial, and police requirements for immigration to the state.

First, a word about some of our statutes. In Washington, we have very strict laws about automobiles and automobile usage. We penalize heavily for speeding, illegal licensing of cars, and overtime parking. This is called "improving the tax base."

You may have noticed that if you have just arrived in Seattle and park a few minutes overtime at a meter, or in a No Parking area, your car will be towed to Cle Elum (a suburb of Seattle), dismantled and burned. You will then receive a "Notice of Violation" with a towing charge and fine of between $300 and

$500. This is necessary to keep our city streets clear of debris from other states, and to encourage visitors to respect our local laws.

Our speeding laws are also quite strict. If you are apprehended for going—say—35-miles-per-hour in a 30-mile-per-hour zone your name will be fed into our new "fifty-year violations memory bank" to check on your previous traffic record. Although prison sentences of over six months are rare for first offenses, it might interest you to know that the Seattle City Jail System compares favorably with those of Auburn, Savannah (Georgia), and Tijuana.

Our liquor and drug laws may appear to be somewhat onerous, but we Washingtonians are very concerned about our youth. Thus visitors who are underage and are caught drinking beer or wine, or adult visitors who provide alcohol to anyone under twenty-one, may expect to have their thumbs broken and spend some time in our model prison at Walla Walla. Those caught selling marijuana or other drugs to a minor are flogged, disembowelled, and burned at the stake. They are also liable to twenty years in prison.

As I say, these laws may appear harsh to the casual visitor, but we think that a clean state is a good state, and we have found that by strict laws we have been able to keep our youth hard-working and appreciative of their elders. Our police chief has recently pointed out that the per capita juvenile crime rate in Seattle

is somewhat below that of Marseilles, Tangier, and New York.

In case new arrivals may think that I am concentrating on only negative attitudes of our state, let me describe some of our landed immigrant programs. After you have just arrived from—say—Oregon or California, and after you have been fingerprinted, photographed and questioned at what we call our Public Safety Building, you are then free to join our Immigrant's Work Project.

One such mandatory project you may enjoy working on is the Green River Asphalt Program. In this, asphalt tar is spread by hand over the grass, trees, dogs, and small children in what we used to call the Green River Valley. We are proud of our progress toward defoliation of this area just south of Seattle, and know that you will benefit from working on one of the thirty shopping plaza projects going on there.

Another program which may interest you is the Boeing fly-plane project. Some of our new immigrants are frightened by the size and superficial coldness and efficiency of this, our biggest industry. For those of you who have never visited this colossus, it now lies athwart Seattle both to the north and the south. Spiritually, it is a part of the city, but in reality it has its own fire fighters, police and security officers, and tax structure.

You will benefit greatly from your year with Boe-

ing. After being tattooed and assigned to your desk, you may be given opportunities to spend large amounts of federal monies ("Research"), or design rivets and other complicated hardware ("Development"). You will also be allowed to contribute between 10 and 20 per cent of your wages to good works like United Good Neighbors, The Peace Bond Drives, and the Campfire Girls. Your advancement will depend on your enthusiasm for these Public Service efforts.

While you are working off your year of indenture, you may be interested in some of our local customs and amusements. One, called "War," is played out during weekends at the Hiram Chittenden Locks. To participate in this, you buy a "Pleasure Boat" which you keep in storage for nine months of the year. Then, during the summer, you become a "Weekend Sailor."

At the site of the war games, you enter a four-walled chamber which is then shut off from the bodies of water on either side. People on the boats, dressed in native costumes, gesture and call to each in colorful language, guide their boats into each other, consume great quantities of local poisons, throw up, and throw themselves in the water.

After immigrants reach full citizenship status, they are allowed to vote, drink in bars, and pet children and dogs. They may want to participate in some of our local treasure hunts called "Redevelopment"

or "Find the Stadium Site." In the latter, you buy an acre or so of property in the area where you think the new Seattle Monster Stadium is to be constructed. If your site is chosen, you hit the jackpot by winning a million dollars from King County, and are then allowed to retire forever to the comfortable wastes of Mukilteo.

April, 1968

11

I SUPPOSE, DESPITE what we do to vitiate it, that the spring is here. I feel no real rush of sap in my veins, but I assume that the distributor, or the carburetor, or whatever it is that pushes life into my tired blood is hard at work, and any clogging actions are merely temporary. Soon we will be doing the love and flowers game again.

When our spring comes, people in this area get some sort of wilderness mania. Do foolish things like, say, buying boats. For those of you considering such a plan, I want to warn you of the grave dangers facing you, the frightening future of a boat head.

Three years ago I bought what is laughingly called a Lake Union Dreamboat. This refers to any "displacement hull" vessel built in Seattle during the Middle Ages. A fine boat it was, and still is—what's left of it. In a moment of crude joy at the change of ownership, I dubbed it *The Honorable Admiral T.*

Head.

I decided to become a power boat man because of my, alas, innate inability to walk on a boat deck in more than a simple crouch. A sailboat freak must be prepared to develop prehensile toes for walking along at a decided angle. And he must be willing to become engrossed in the endless furling and unfurling of acres of sails. Wet sails, mouldy sails, sails flopping in eighty-knot breezes.

I preferred then, and prefer now, the excitement of a "gas screw" vessel. That means I take my smog with me wherever I go; and, as well, get the exhilarating feeling of having my engine go dead in a storm off—say—Point No Point.

I was actually converted to power boats by a sailing experience in the wilds of the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Gordon, boat captain, decided that the storm was not to last too long, and that we could make it from Port Townsend to Victoria before nightfall. That's what he thought.

Do I have to tell you about the seventy foot swells? One right after the other, each more revolting than the last; each capped by an angry foam. Do I have to tell you about the sickening wind getting stronger and stronger, paying no attention to my silent prayers to forget it and go off somewhere else: like, for instance, the Sea of China? "I can't move," I told another thunderstruck crew member as we were shipping water

everywhere, including over my already frozen feet. "I simply can't make any decisions; or, for that, even feel sorry for myself." He, pale with the demands of *mal de mer,* between exquisite retchings, told us that he had recurring visions of wharfs, heaving up close to us, waiting for us to tie our lines to them, and us getting off.

It was a dark day in nautical history, and that is why I decided on a power boat. "It'll be far safer," I thought. That's what I thought.

There *were* good times with *The Admiral T. Head.* There was one misty morning, running up close—within twenty feet—to the eastern shore of Texada Island. The trees at the crest of the island were hidden in clouds, and the surface of the island seemed to be given over to nothing civilized. The water was blue-green as my soul, and shocking cold, and we in our comfy boat were alone with the wry aloneness of nature.

Or how about the time we raced into the waves just outside Useless Bay? The straight thin prow slashed at the swells, throwing the foam and water off to each side in a rush, and all over the bow. It was like an exquisite dance.

Or that day in the cove of Prevost Island. No one around, in sight. We took the rubber life-raft (called *The Yellow Submarine* because of numerous and untraceable leaks) to the tiny beach. Dug up a bucket

of butter clams. The water washing around our ankles, and a rich fantasy of sea life there on the shore of this deserted world. I remember we cooked the clams just so—with white wine and butter, on the galley stove—until they popped open, tiny lives expired in a puff of sweet steam. We ate ourselves silly.

The bad times, too: the times that somehow seem a bit funnier now in the comfort of this warm house with someone cooking up a stew on a warm stove, all the accouterments of contemporary life (radio, Bach, heat, telephone ringing) around me. It makes me only amused at remembering.

The dark night, us pulling up to drop anchor, the dinghy rattling up against the stern, and the fine nylon line enmeshing firmly around the all-too-hungry propeller.

Or that time, just outside the bleakness of Kelsey Bay, when the wind and the waves were too much, just too much. I thought that if I saw another breaker again, I would lie down and die. "You take it," I said to a wondering crew. "I can't stand this silliness anymore." And I went below decks, curled up with some Golden Keg Beer and a book on recent (and complicated) decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. They took it, and got us to Alert Bay, our presumed destination. And I feigned elaborate disinterest.

Or how about the night, just outside Everett—you

remember the night, when the waves were all the way up to here, and the wind was one of the strongest. For that week, anyway. Delphine and David and I thought we would brave the crossing, even though the night was committed to grim darkness, and the swells made my head ache. We got half-way to Mukilteo, when the waves washed a line off the bow and—for a change—right around the propellor. I was fit to be tied.

We had a long and complicated radio dialogue with the Coast Guard with cryptic messages like "Mayday" and "Help." They were getting used to me by this time, since this was only my third naval disaster, and found us ho-hum clinging to each other with our life preservers on. "People last an average of thirty minutes in the Sound water," one of them told me later, after he had brushed off my kisses and prayers for eternal life. "It's the shock that gets them first. Cold: gets the old ticker." He asked if I wouldn't call the Coast Guard in advance of my next expedition. "Just so we can be prepared," he told me cheerfully.

No: despite spending taxpayers dollars on unlimited rescue calls, there is another reason I decided to give up all boating, except for rides on the USS America or something sensible like that.

Let's see if I can explain it all. It's very complicated; has to do with the great wilderness that sur-

rounds us. We were up near Gracroft Island, in a tiny cove of one of the thousand islands at the north end of Vancouver Island. The sun had just resigned, and the sky was turning itself from blue to blue-black to black. There was no wind. No voices were heard.

The island was as deserted: no, not deserted: crowded with second growth trees. Dark though. No inhabitants anywhere around. No other boats, no freeways, no jets. Just us alone with the biggest of nights.

The crew had rowed off in *The Yellow Submarine* to find some excitement around the other side of the island. I could hear their voices, disappearing in a cloud of shouts and echoes. I was alone on the sweet sad *Admiral T. Head,* filled with its ghosts and bilge. I was to fix supper.

In that moment of light-darkness, I leaned out of one of the slide-back windows, smoking a cigarette, drinking another beer. The water was so quiet, the island so quiet, I so quiet. I knew that if I leaned all the way over and stirred up the water, it would run luminous all over my hand. Northern waters—so different from the hot nectar of my native Florida—the northern waters so brutal and cold. There is a life here—but it's a brutal life.

Anyone who has stayed out in a boat overnight knows the funny feeling, when the sun goes down, and you are anchored—you think safely—in some

cove. You blink your eyes. The shore seems to be coming closer. The anchor can't be slipping, you think. You try to pick out a landmark. But the night pushes the shore at you, and you feel threatened.

Well, I knew that feeling, the creeping shore feeling, so I didn't pay any attention to it. What I did pay attention to was me being alone. At this deserted place. Me, and a big boat, and the cruel, sharp stars. The island, and the trees, and the water—all so uncaring. They didn't give a damn about me, and my fancy boat, and my beer—and the warm sweet parts of my variegated personality. They didn't care, hadn't cared, would never care.

"So," I thought, banging the window closed and turning on every kerosene lamp I could find and making rattling motions towards supper: "So—I'm alone. Well," I thought: "I knew that all along. Why is it so different, so spooky now?"

I don't know. I didn't find out that night; and for the whole of the time we stayed at that island, stealing its crab and fish and driftwood. Living off it, like it liked us.

I didn't find out then, nor in that long run we made home, us dirty, and sunburned, and feeling healthy with clean air and clean living and the tranquility of it all. I didn't find out then, nor do I know now. What did I see on that night when I was supposed to be cooking supper, but instead was hanging out that

window, wondering?

I don't know—whatever it was, it had some effect. *The Admiral T. Head* is going to be sold, and I shan't buy another boat—ever, I guess. For the life of me I can't figure out why.

June, 1968

12

REVIEWING THE BOOKS:

Mein Kampf by A. Hitler. This is obviously a manifesto of some sort written—according to the overly-effusive jacket notes—by an obscure Austrian corporal. This book is an example of so-called "Jail Literature" (it was written in jail) and, typical of such works, is overblown, apopleptic, and generally unreadable. If this young author can do no better than this, I should imagine that we would have to await maturity and a distinct improvement in style before he should concern us more.

Winnie The Pooh by A. A. Milne. This is what I would call a symbolic classic. It is an artfully and carefully worked retelling of one of the least understood periods in Christian history — namely, the recognition of the working man by the Catholic Church. Winnie-the-Pooh or "Pooh-Bear" (Pope Leo XIII) gets caught in the Heffalump Trap (Nineteenth

Century reactionary bourgeois thought) but is released through the efforts of Piglet (the encyclical Rerum Novarum) and Christopher Robin (Jesus Christ). Eeyore (the common working man) ironically remains unimpressed throughout. The whole takes place in 1891 (The Honey Jar). Author Milne deserves our most heartfelt thanks for his retelling of a complicated religious event in an apparently simple and childlike way.

Lady Chatterley's Lover by David Herbert Lawrence. The sports writer Ed Zern recently reviewed this book, pointing out that it is an amusing and often informative view of English countryside life shortly after the First World War. Unusual descriptions of landscape gardening techniques, the nooks and crannies of a typical English manor, and sometimes amusing hunting scenes are somewhat marred by the tedious appearance of a gamekeeper. I am personally unfamiliar with contemporary countryside work patterns but I would imagine that the gamekeeper's activities were not part of his job, and the author's insistence on focusing on this byplay detracts from an otherwise admirable view of gracious English living.

Little Black Sambo by Helen Bannerman. An interesting and expert treatment of the touching story of the emancipation of the Black. Disguised as a simple tale of an Afro-American (Sambo), it de-

scribes the early liberation of the mind (umbrella and shoes), despite the circuitous actions of the tigers (the post-Reconstruction South), the heavy-handed restraint of "Uncle Toms" (Black Jumbo) and the federal government (Black Mumbo). There is a final resolution in butter (the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation decision) which is then eaten with pancakes (the Birmingham bus-boycott) and syrup (Resurrection City). A clever study, which is only marred by the author's regretful inability to experiment with all the neo-Freudian symbolic techniques available to her.

King Lear by W. Shakespeare. This is one of those so-called "Theater of Cruelty" productions which are much the fad now. The language is painfully self-conscious and sometimes I caught myself napping during this treatment of the age-old story of children's ingratitude toward their parents. The various muggings, knifings, and eye-poppings may be popular with the sadomasochistic set, but I found the whole a tasteless bore. With the added insult of various double-entendre jokes by a character who calls himself The Fool, I feel this pseudo-Genetian play is not suitable for children nor for concerned adults.

Understanding Media by M. McLuhan. This is a strange novel indeed—and I had some trouble getting into it. The hero who is, if you will believe it, a light bulb, gets involved in the machinations of a nympho-

maniac (an infinitely repeatable printing press). Message, a God-like figure, seems to be manipulating or being manipulated by a Medium whose name escapes me at the moment. Things are constantly blowing "hot" and "cold" and I think someone gets murdered at the end, although it may only be the language. Good late night chiller-diller stuff.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Alice In Wonderland by L. Carroll. Being familiar with other works of Mr. Carroll (who writes under the pseudonym Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) this appears to be an in-depth study of recent changes in the binomial theory with some introductory notes on topology.

Dr. No by I. Fleming. An allegorical treatment of the present English monetary crisis (007) and France's reaction to suggestions for expanding the Common Market (Dr. No).

The Quotations of Mao-Tse. A further example of the "prison" school of writing. Stylistic difficulties and lack of discernible plot suggest that this author might find a useful place in another field of endeavor besides writing.

The Bible. A minor neo-Joycean classic, with a sympathetic retelling of the familiar story of the birth and development of man. The style is a bit jumpy and irregular, but I feel the author (not iden-

tified on the title page) might bear some watching if he attempts a second work.

June, 1968

13

SERGIO MENDES and his two teen queen singers are members of the Agony School of popular music. Their faces twist, their bodies twist, the music is squeezed out like juice from a recalcitrant lemon. "Going out of my head . . ." they sing, they shout, they shriek, and their faces are contorted with the effort of the songs of love.

It's a pain, since I got myself a seat on Row One so I could be right *there* at the magic moment of the crowning of the Seafair Queen. Right there: sitting on her lap, watching every facial contortion, watching every tear, hearing every bark of laughter.

The crowning of any Beauty Queen is the crowning of the American myth. A sweet nobody, from the dreary homes of Ft. Worth, or Rahway, or Auburn: suddenly catapulted into the bright world of lights.

We were deprived of the other royalty 200 years ago when the thirteen colonies tore away from Mother

England. And suddenly, there was no one there, no royal family, to be a touchstone of beauty and charm, and grace. So we had to create one: and what better way than the purblind luck of the child born beautiful. And here we are: in the domed gargoyle called Coliseum, waiting the consummation of the dream: our humble Lady of the Shopping Center given a crown and a reign.

Finally, for the impatient, the M.C. calls for silence, the Mendes amplifying machine (frazzling my ear) goes away, and we, the hungry audience of thousands, are told that we are gathered here "to choose the Seafair Queen of Seattle: the Pleasure Capital of the World." I knew he'd say it and he did; and for a brief moment I can forget all the gray days, the wretched liquor laws, the anguishing Puritan Ethic, I can think: I am in the Pleasure Capital of the World. With all these lights, with all this fun: It must be so.

They come down the half-mile aisle. Sixty of them: white dresses, red flowers, and teeth—my God, the teeth. No wonder the Prime Minister of Seafair is a dentist. Each of the teeth is introduced: "Presenting Janine Blotch of the Magnolia Improvement Club. Rachael Buzz of the Telephone Employees' Activity Council. Georgina Lint of the Naval Supply Center." A treasure-chest of straight-backed, bright-eyed, tooth-filled young sweethearts.

Jim Owens, hulking around in a bile-green uniform, finally tackles the innocent girl who is to be Queen. Expected excitement, expected laughter, expected tears. Up to the podium, and the crown laid on the innocent head by Joan Crawford, the face of all our yesterdays, under ten inches of rich, golden hair; face-powder a ghost-white. A queen hugged by the celebrities; kissed by the Seafair King staggering around under his huge red crown, kissing everyone in sight except Jim Owens and me. What a fine flapdoodle.

In the back of the Mancini Melody Complex sits a kid, sawing away on a cello. No more than twenty. He smirks through the whole thing, smirking at the jokes, smirking at the music, smirking as he plays. Surely he must know if this music, this ceremony, all this royalty, all this blotch of lights and carryings-on, is a shuck, a background to some incredible movie that we're acting out: not even knowing we are actors, seeking out the proper invisible music and *papier-mâché* ceremonies to carry us through our days. He knows. He'll tell me.

Later, at the Exhibition Hall, we slump around table No. 123. It's the Press Table. Just like there's a table for the royalty (Head Table), and one for the Negroes (Table No. 17), there's one for the disillusioned press: sloshing away all the champagne and wine they can before the party is over. "Seafair has

been going downhill for five years now," says the photographer from the *Times*, looking gloomy, trying to make me gloomy. "But the Seattle Tennis Club. Wow!" he says. "That's where the action is. I was there on assignment last week, and they had a real brawl. Wow! Ladies pulling each other's hair, men punching each other. That's where the life is: not here . . ." Maybe, I think, I should join the Seattle Tennis Club. Maybe I'm missing something.

At the table next to us sits Miss Seafair Queen two decades after. Sagging chaps, silver dress, trembling hands. Pours out wine. Spills wine. Pours out coffee. Spills coffee. Giggles. Has no Seafair Prince-of-Love to kiss her, save her from boredom. Maybe she should join the Seattle Tennis Club.

The new King is up at the microphone. Telling a long, long joke about golf, about his friends the Pendergasts, the Smiths, the Sullivans. He gets excited. He pulls at the microphone. It comes apart in his hands.

King Neptune the Dentist, a real Renaissance Man, comes and fixes the microphone. There is sound again. But it's too late. The King is discouraged. His punch-line has been ruined. He totters off without even finishing the story, leaving all of us hanging.

"It must be a joke," I think, at last: "this whole Seafair thing. But someone pulled out the cord, disconnected us. And we'll never hear the punch line,

the boff, the conclusion. There we are, stuck with a half-eaten joke, never to hear the last, the most important, the most meaningful conclusion. Maybe I'd better join the Seattle Tennis Club. Maybe they—in all their action, banging, punching—have found the answer. Maybe that's where it's at . . ."

August, 1968

14

Toba Inlet, B.C.

O LORD IT'S QUIET. Nothing but nothing. Nothing but a hundred thousand trees rubbing against each other in the wind. There was a wind once, but it stopped.

The water dibbles against the side of the boat. Someone up in the bow is playing "Go to Joan Glover/ And tell her I love her." on the recorder. For the 173rd time. But time has ceased. There is no time in Desolation Sound.

Toba Inlet is the northernmost arm of the whole Desolation complex. A real arm, stretching upwards for a few dozen miles and then crooking to point inland, eastward, into the incredible wilderness of North British Columbia.

An eternity ago, a few moments ago, Jon and I took the speedboat off to investigate the stump-end of Toba Inlet—where it runs into the mountains,

dribbles off into a marsh with creeks scattered like lightning up into the hills. The water here is green-yellow: it looks tropical, as if it had just poured out of some steaming jungle. When I first saw it, I had visions of mud-flats, hot-sun days, and me pole-fishing for croaker and sheephead in the thick, green-yellow waters of Florida.

But the moment I stick my hand over the side of the speedboat and into the water, I have to report to Jon (a scientist by trade) that we have stumbled on a new and important phenomena: that is, we are boating on water which has a temperature of close to Absolute Zero, but which refuses to freeze; which moves and acts like water should never move and act at such a temperature.

I count fourteen mountains hanging over this part of the inlet. Fourteen giants rearing back, lording over me, giving me a sense of futility in my life-long attempt to be The Man Mountain. Fourteen monsters, banging down to the water's edge, crowding me: so that to see the crests, I am forced to rear my head back, back so that the muscles in my back hurt and I know what I was before I was here.

The good Captain Vancouver named it Desolation Sound because there was no-one here, and nothing for him to perch on, to plant a flag on: there was no room for him and his flag in the virgin timber which sprouted forests at the ends of the water and climbed

the mountain backs to infinity.

And I guess it still is Desolation Sound: no Boatellas, no moorages, no Shoreside Burger Bars even. Only a tug-boat: a miniscule tug awaiting us at the head of Toba. And as soon as we drop anchor, it hitches up its load of logs and poops off Southwards, where life lies, where there is something besides nothing.

The sun goes away after awhile. The fourteen peaks gather a blanket of clouds for us. With a mournful leaning on the whistle (which cascades back fourteen times) the tug escapes. The sky turns grimy and smudged — rain comes to spatter the green-yellow waters.

We get chilled in the speedboat, and Jon and I head back to the big boat. All I want to do is to crawl down in the sweaty bowels of the ship, huddle in my warm bunk, read the book I fortuitously brought along: *Gulliver's Travels*. "I will read about Brobdingnag," I tell myself, shivering, "so I can get some perspective on all these giants watching us."

Later someone cooks up a few hundred butterclams. The ones we dug out of the warm and friendly shores of Prideaux Haven: yesterday, a few centuries ago—where the waters are warm, oysters litter the beaches like rocks, and there are nooks, beaches, coves, and islands for us to putter around in. Butter clams served in buckets, cooked a bare instant in

wine and garlic and parsley and butter: cooked just long enough until there is a Crack of Doom, and their tiny lives are expunged in a burst of fragrance.

I eat a few dozen, voraciously: and the broth trickles down my wrists, wetting the cuffs of my shirt. I don't care: I have forgotten the fourteen prophets of darkness outside: watching us, uncaring. I have forgotten—at least, I thought I did until Barbara, sitting at the table next to me, starts crying. "What's wrong, love?" I say, batting her on the back and balancing another juicy clam into the wellsprings of my mouth. "What'sa matter?"

But I know. I didn't have to ask. She tells me anyway: "It's those Christly mountains," she says, wetting the shoulder of my already wet orange Summer-Fun & Holiday knit shirt. "It's so cold. And there's no-one here but us. It's so cold . . ."

I bang her on the back some more. Give her a sip of my McEwans Ale. Tell her not to worry. That tomorrow—before any of us is awake—the boat will be heading back to the warm and friendly coves, to the south. I didn't have to ask her. What was wrong, I mean. When you face the Man Mountain, or when it faces you, you have to wonder, and ask. It's the only human thing left to do . . .

August, 1968

15

Prevost Island, B.C.

ELEVEN OF US have rented the good ship *Principia* and taken it into Canadian waters for a week. We clam, fish, listen to the sough of cold waters, putter around on deserted islands, eat giant feasts of mussel and fish, drink inordinate quantities of McEwan's Ale, wonder (but not too much) where we are going, and know—briefly—what life is like without the dark spirits of telephones, television sets, and all those dismal unpaid bills.

There is a newspaper. But of course. A ship's newspaper. How else are you going to keep up with the world? It's complete with editorials, weather forecasts, agony columns, feature stories, and headlines. Its name is *Irving's Poop*. It comes out each day promptly at three—unless the editor is shamefully drunk, sleeping or hiding out on an island somewhere:

FISHING ACTIVITIES COMMENCE!!!!!

Margason Already Ahead in 2nd Annual Dogfish Regatta

The Dogfish Regatta began officially yesterday afternoon when Mr. P. Havas, Mr. L. Milam, and Miss N. Keith took a boat out to James' Spit to troll, presumably for salmon. Miss Keith took the tiller and ran into rocks for awhile. Mr. Havas captured Mr. Milam's fishing line twice. Many strikes were reported, varying in size from twenty-five to two hundred pounds, and the pleasant adventure was consummated by Milam hooking a giant, purple, but friendly starfish. Although starfish are not normally counted as entries in The Regatta—because of the size of his catch, his dexterity in landing the creature, and his general attitude and deportment while under extreme stress (Havas had hooked him in the arm), it is assumed that Milam will receive a prize of some sort.

This morning, the Second Phase of the competition was joined as Mr. and Mrs. G. Margason and Mr. C. Jorgenson took a boat out to a nearby kelp bed to entangle the propellor, their lines, and each other in endless supplies of kelp. Although no strikes were reported, Mr. Margason did capture a Dungeness crab on his hook which was later described by Mrs. Margason as "larger than a match-box."

Later, the same crew returned to the kelp bed with

a crab pot—which was seeded with ripe herring, and parts of last night's corned beef. After an hour or so, the line was drawn up, revealing five good-sized crab. All members of the party repaired to the port side of the small boat to watch—resulting in a great deal of merriment, shipping of seawater, and ultimate retirement of four of the crab through a man-sized hole in the net.

Mr. Jorgenson later reported to the Poop that the crab scuttled away "because they refused to be caught by such a dough-headed bunch of fishermen."

TODAY'S WEATHER

(From the Prevost Island Geodetic and Marine Biological Weather Station): Fire and Ice, followed by the End of the World.

EDITORIAL PAGE

Too Fat, Charley!

President Charles De Gaulle's present policies with regards to the international monetary situation have been demonstrated once again, in case there were any doubts.

The *Poop* has often pointed out that this anti-American tenor (Hughes Cuenod) is manifesting a morbid, trenchant, anti-recidivism.

As far as the American Gold Crises goes, so goes the nation. In the past, President Johnson has often

suggested to this paper that we stand by our gunnels and throw out the baby with the bathroom.

The Last Crocus of Spring

We just saw our first bud. There's something about the spring season. Who can say about the planting of cucumbers, the stirring of grommets in the blood, the awakening of pimples on the faces of this nation's youth?

This newspaper has often expressed its unqualified support of Spring.

MARKET REPORT

Pig's bellies closed softer today in hectic trading at the commidity mart at Point Mudge. Rails were longer, and there was some stiffening of resistance in linens. Persimmons were down. "Another trading session like this," said J. McFeeler, the *Poop's* peep at Mudge, "and I'm jes' gonna hang it up. Yep," he said: "jes' hang it up."

CONCERT BY THE PRINCIPIA PRO MUSICA WINS HIGH PRAISE

First Presentation Has Them Rolling in the Aisles

Last evening, the Principia Pro Musica gave its premiere performance before a packed house. "Forcemeat," said Dr. J. Gallant, in an interview before the concert with Your Music Editor: "He who lies down with the dogs gets up with the fleas."

Also playing were Mrs. M. Davies and Mme. M. Margason. The former plays krumhorn and comb, the latter, Dynalite Recorder.

The lights were lowered, there was a hushed but expectant audience, and the following program was presented (eight times):

1. "O Music Sweet Music Your Praises We Sing" .....John Blow
2. "Geordie" .....Anon
3. "Adam Cotched Eve by the Furbelow" .....John Furr
4. Musique Concrete for Massed Choirs, Three Organs, Bullhorns, and Glass Harmonica. .....Karlheinz Stockhausen

ILLNESS STRIKES SHIP!!!

The participants in the Principia journey reported several strange maladies yesterday. Dr. G. Margason, the ship's Medico, informed your reporter merely that the sicknesses were "worthy of the greatest heads of science . . ."

For instance, Mr. G. Wingert has an illness which requires a minimum of 250 cc of Canadian Blue Label Scotch before coming into focus. Dr. Margason has identified Wingert's tightness around the chest, fever, and high pulse rate, as "Glaucoma."

Another malady swept the supper-table last night. Identified tentatively as "Psychic Bivalvism," it fol-

lowed hard on the eating of the Mussel Paella. The conversation consisted mainly of potential poisonings directly attributable to the eating of Northwest mussels in the summer (or wrong) season. It was said that the mussels should only be eaten in those months which end in "oth."

As no stomach pumps were immedately available from Lund, a game of Monopoly was joined as an alternative.

TODAY'S CHUCKLE

The common Dogfish is actually a Rhinocerous.

September, 1968

16

RORY COMES IN to tell us that there is a tidal wave coming. "You better sell your houseboat. There'll be an earthquake and tidal wave, slopping over the locks, bringing in a huge sperm whale who'll eat up all the houseboats." I think for awhile about natural disasters.

I start thinking about hurricanes, about hurricanes and me as a kid in Florida. The hurricanes come before dawn, always before dawn. You wake up at five or six, and the wind is blowing, the gray clouds are scudding low over the flatlands. The wind is tearing at the palm trees, and the palm fronds rip and chatter. It comes in surges, the wind does, and the palm fronds chatter like the trees are going to be pulled down. Only they aren't, they never come down, because they know, they know about the storms before they come, so they aren't pulled down.

I think about the double French doors, downstairs

—French doors with a thin strip, a weather stripping of copper, between the door and the door-frame. And when the wind starts to come in strong, the copper strip between the door and the jamb begins to wail, as if there were storm ghosts, wind ghosts downstairs, wailing. The wind makes the strips vibrate, starting low and then, when the wind gets stronger, getting higher and higher. There are three French doors, and there are three wailing ghosts, wailing in harmony, up and down the scale.

The water from the river in front, the gray-brown St. Johns River, begins to slop over the bulkhead, into the lawn. The waves slam up against the bulkhead, then the wind catches the spray, and drives it towards the house. And the water hyacinths are driven up over the bulkhead and lie scraggly all over the lawn, with their fat round green bulbous leaves, and purple flowers. There are hyacinths scattered on the lawn, and wood, and bits of trees, and Spanish moss, and sometimes dead birds.

If you want, you can go up to the attic. The attic always smells like ham hocks, the ham hocks they hung there during the war when they thought we might go hungry sometime; but then the rats got into the ham hocks, and soon there was nothing but the fat tallow smell, dripped on the floor, staining the attic floor, the grease mixed with the rat droppings.

Anyway, during the storm, you can go up into the attic, and the wind is blowing like bejesus, and you can hear the shingles rattling on the roof, the sharp roof just above your head; shingles rattling like they are going to fly off. And sometimes, you are up there, and the wind is batting against the house, and you can hear the trees agonizing outside, and one of the attic windows will bust open, banging against the walls. The window pops open, and the wind comes in, stirring up the bacon fat smell, and the rat-droppings; spitting rain and riverwater all over the floor. And soon, everything begins to move and rustle, like it was alive. The old clothes stir, the stored Christmas decorations begin to tinkle and bang, and the picture albums, up there, way up on the shelf, the albums begin to rustle and jitter—like the old family, stuck in them forever, are wanting to get out.

It spooks you a little bit, the storm coming like that, in the early morning, while you are still asleep, and the windows start rattling, and the doors fly open. The old man, you can hear him outside, hammering something closed, him in his slicker, which the wind whips around him, like he was a ghost. And then comes in, his face all red, and the rain dripping down his face like tears, and his hair tousled by the wind and rain, and he says "Jesus!"

And he dries his hair on one of the dishtowels, and bangs around the kitchen for awhile, trying to make

some coffee on the Sterno stove, because the power went out, went out a long time ago, when the power lines snapped in the wind, and great balls of blue-white fire fell down into the wet streets, filled with branches, the power fell down into the streets and now everything is dark . . .

. . . except the blue flame under the Sterno, on the rusty stove kept in the closet until the hurricane comes and starts to blow against the house, and agonize the trees; to rattle the windows and snuffle down the chimney, stirring last winter's ashes in the fireplace. And the three banshees, down there in the living room, begin to moan in the dark, and then the morning comes . . .

. . . the sky turns light, from gray-black to gray-gray, and the clouds scud over the house, like they were being chased, and rain plasters against the panes on the French doors. And then a branch starts to split from the camphor tree, out in front, on the edge of the river: we watch the branch beginning to go, you can see the white where the bark has parted, and the wood shows through, then the branch is turning slow-motion through the air, then landing on the ground, in all the water and Spanish moss and hyacinth plants—and it's still turning and moving, towards you, like it was going to come all the way up the porch, and scratch against the window, wanting to get let in; but it doesn't: it stops rolling, lop-

sided, in the water, and the leaves are still rattling on the broken limb, hanging on for dear life against the wind, as if the branch were going to go on living, as if the leaves were going to survive to see the sunshine, those glossy camphor leaves that you like to crunch in your mouth, and the flavor of camphor comes sharp and acrid in your mouth . . .

. . . only they are going to die, those leaves, on that broken branch. They are going to die—the leaves on that branch pulled from that tree by the river. And there you are, with your nose pressed to the pane, with the doors moaning all around you, and the moisture of your breath grows and retreats on the cold surface of the pane. You saw the branch rip off, in the wind, and come rolling towards you, and you thought "Poor branch. Poor leaves." And your old man is banging around in the kitchen, with the hammer in his hand, and then you can hear him go out the back door, to hammer some more things closed, against the wind; and when he opens the back door, the wind snatches it from his hand, and you can hear him say "Jeee-sus!" And you think "Poor branch. Poor leaves."

November, 1968

17

WHEN—AT LAST, after all these years of waiting—The Bomb finally went off, we were in school, in a math class. I remember the sharp electric-white light turning our shadows a frieze against the walls. For all I know, our shadows may be there yet—baked into the beige institutional paint.

We ran down the stairs, past the large arch window, which rises up three stories, beside the stairs, rises up to a soft arch. The panes were broken by the blast, and the pieces of glass jangled under our feet.

We were supposed to go to the basement whenever there was a disaster, but that dumb janitor—old Mr. Jamieson—had locked the basement door, had chained it closed. So what happened was that we banged down the steps, round and round from the second floor down to the first and then down to

where it was darker, the landing below. I remember that all the lights were out.

And when we got down to the base of the ruined window—which rose the full height of the school building—we found ourselves blocked from any further progress downstairs. So we milled around, bumping into the chained door, and each other. I suppose that we were so frightened we didn't know that we were making whimpering noises.

What I mean is that we were so unaware of our terror, that we didn't realize that we were bleating in agony, at the fear and uncertainty which hung over us all. I remember wishing that there had been someone there—anyone—to tell us what to do. Anyone, to calm us, after what had happened above us.

* * *

Someone is tap-tap-tapping at my door. I unwrap myself from the clouds of my sheets and dreams. It's IBM Man. Neater than a pin. Faster than a speeding computer. IBM Man, come to fix my ailing typewriter.

"What is wrong with it," I say, scratching a few fleas and yawning, "is the motor. The damn motor talks to me all the time, when I am trying to write. It's very distracting. It says 'lump-lump-lump.' That's all: just 'lump-lump-etc.' Now if you can either get it to shut up or say something else."

"Something else?" says IBM Man, clean-shaven, serious, attaché case full of tools at the ready.

"Yeah," I say: "Like 'blip-blip-blip.' Or maybe 'hum-hum.' That's a sound I could . . ."

But I see I've talked myself out of a friend. IBM Man turns and opens his attaché case and begins to tinker with the guts of my Selectric. "That's what people get," I think, "coming and waking me at some ungodly hour to fix my machinery . . ."

"You should grow a beard," I say to him, later—as he is putting away his surgical tools. "To freak them out at IBM."

"I'd like to," he says. He thinks for a minute. "They have a fellow at work with a moustache. They keep him down in the stock room." He thinks for a minute more. "If I grow a beard, I lose my job and my wife."

After he has gone, I think: "I can't do anything about his wife, but maybe I can about his company." With my friendly typewriter feeling better, I could write a letter to IBM, complimenting them on their repairmen—and then (just to balance it out) complaining about their facial policies. I could call them "an arrogant bunch of face-ists." That would scare them.

I turn the typewriter on. It says: "lump-lump-lump." I think: "IBM has a computer which can talk to me—if I have a mind to talk to it. They have another computer which can do 10,000 complicated

computations in a nano-second. But they can't get the goddam lumps out of their typewriters."

So I turn it off. Don't write any letters, really. Except in my mind. In my mind I write hundreds of them. To hundreds of people. They all go like this:

Dear President Johnson: I had this dream last night . . . Dear Chairman Mao: I thought I'd like to tell you about this, well, vision I had last night. About man dying . . . Dear Senator Jackson: Dear Charles DeGaulle: Dear Madam Gandhi: I thought you might be interested in this apocalyptic dream I had last night about me—in a classroom—and a bomb falling . . .

Dear Dean Rusk: Dear Mr. Kosygin: Dear Curtis LeMay: Dear Mr. Castro: I had a—ah—how can I describe it . . . I had this experience last night. And I want you to know about it. Because maybe if you and some of the other people who run the political side of this world knew how much you scared us, maybe you'd stop scaring us so much. I mean, we all just want to live, isn't that so? And be loved. Of course: that's all that you and I want out of the whole show: to live and have someone around to love us.

And I can't do much about your loving part, Mr. Rusk, Mr. Kosygin, Mr. LeMay, Mr. Castro. But I want to do something about my life. My life, and the lives of the people around me that I love so much. See: because I *like* living. A lot. And I want to keep

it—I want to stay around for a long time. Me and all my nice friends. What I don't want is one of you setting off this jack-in-the-box bomb that's flying around above us: I don't want that, do you see: because I like living so much; and I want you to like it, too . . . so we can keep on . . . do you see? . . .

November, 1968

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POLITICS

For most of us, politics is an impossible toy that bears neither logic nor reason. I always felt that one of the virtues of democracy is that the fools and charlatans will be elected to public office—and, because they can be bought or sold like fish, will leave the rest of us alone. The only times our country is in danger—true danger—is when some idealist finds himself in a position of power. Because they nurse beautiful ideals to their ambitious breasts—they will sacrifice you and me to those ideals without a qualm. More wars sprouted in this country during times of the saints than fools—Lincoln, Wilson, Roosevelt (the younger), and Kennedy managed to spill more blood, between them, than any Eisenhower or Harding or Tyler.

I mean the virtue of American democracy is that it fosters healthy mediocrity—and when a saint comes along to upset the balance, then we are in trouble. Since Grant got in power by fudging, indecision, and thievery—then his administration was marked by those characteristics—and we weren't called to unite under some foolish banner (marked "Excelsior") and fight for his ideals. Who could go to war for a thief, anyway.

My only chance to experiment with people's democracy came during the summer of 1968. My boarding house—the Jean-Paul Sartre Memorial No Exit Rooming House—was losing a bucket of money. I figured it was the manager's fault. He figured it was my fault. I figured that the best way out was to get him a job somewhere else—a job in which he wouldn't have to work, would draw a comfortable salary, and we could get together once a year and tell old drinking-stories about his ruinous regime as head of the rooming house.

We signed him up to run in the primary for Washington State Land Commissioner. The Apocrypha (probably made up by me) was that when we were driving down to Olympia during sign-up week, I asked Richard what he wanted to run for, he said "State Coroner." I pointed out that there was no State Coroner—so we settled on Land Commissioner.

That was it. Richard A. C. Greene appeared on the ballot on the 11th of September and—against a field of four other hapless candidates, and with no campaigning at all—won by 15,000 votes. I figured it had something to do with his name. He figured that the word of his gracious personality had gotten around through some mystical underground. Neither of us knew what to do next. He was in Hawaii at the time (he had got an appointment in Classics at the University of Hawaii on the 1st of September). What does a Land Commissioner do, anyway?

I called Richard to tell him that he had won the Republican nomination. There was a long pause. He said that he was flattered, but in order to avoid injecting "personalities" into the campaign, he would stay in Hawaii. I agreed to form a campaign committee to do the dirty work for him. I thought of the best talent to utilize for a man who—after all—is to take care of the dirt problem in the state, and called on Jon

Gallant, a geneticist at the University of Washington, Gene Johnston, an old newspaper writer and commentator on KRAB, and Herb Hannum, the only mystical architect I've ever met or heard of. Between the four of us, we fabricated a campaign.

We had seven weeks in which to get our candidate's name in front of the public. Since we weren't about to spend the $100,000 necessary to win public office, we decided on press releases—some whiff of freshness, as compared to all the gunk sent out by other, uh . . . REAL candidates.

Our first press release, written by Gene, went as follows:

'Richard A. C. Greene, Republican candidate for Land Commissioner, fired his opening salvo in what promises to be a ferocious campaign, demanding that the state of Idaho annex a large part of Eastern Washington, especially Spokane.

' "The so-called Inland Empire is a trackless waste contributing nothing to the Evergreen State but rattlesnakes and nitwits," Greene thundered from his headquarters in Honolulu. "I'd offer that sandpile to Idaho and if they didn't accept it, I'd invade. It's high time Washington had a foreign policy anyway."

'Greene, who knocked off four opponents in the G.O.P. primary with the ingenious strategy of leaving the country, levels no criticism at Democrat incumbent Bert Cole, who has no noticeable foreign policy. "Cole is simply too good a man for this job," opined Greene. "I'd like to see him move on to something more challenging." '

I took this release to a print shop, had two hundred copies made up, and sent them to every major radio station, television station, newspaper, and press service in the state—with a couple of extras to some national magazines. Not only was it printed entire in most newspapers, but the AP picked it up, and I had the funny experience of trailing across the

radio band at noontime hearing almost every radio station intoning the exact words of the release.

One of the things we figured out at this time was that the media—rather, the reporters and writers who work in what we call the media—are so bored by the usual election trash that litters their desks that they are willing to open, read, and write about any campaign that shows some life. For that reason, we figured that we could—in each of the six weeks remaining in the campaign—issue one release, or create some diversion—which should get Greene's name around the state, and perhaps around the country.

Our next challenge was the voters' pamphlet. Like most states in the West, Washington issues a booklet which lists the platforms of every candidate for every office—at minimal cost to the candidate. The circulation of this booklet is 1,200,000. I think it cost us $200 to put the platform into the pamphlet. This is what we used (Jon Gallant's handiwork):

PLATFORM

LAND USE: *Land should be used gently but firmly.*

WHIDBEY ISLAND: *Whidbey Island must be replaced.*

PUGET SOUND BRIDGE: *If it becomes necessary to build a bridge across Puget Sound, it should be a covered bridge because of the rain.*

STATE PARKS: *There should be an expanded system to place park lands within easy reach of every citizen. For the citizens of King County, I envision a wilderness area on the site of The Boeing Company.*

QUILCENE OYSTERS: *Baked at high heat with a little chive, parsley, garlic, and wine.*

LITTERING: *A litterbag at Bert Cole's private hunting lodge.*

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES: *Elimination of all catchpolls and tipstaffs.*

INDIAN FISHING RIGHTS: *Individual catches will be limited*

to four Indians. All those under five feet two inches must be thrown back.

GEODUCKS: *A Republican Land Commissioner to back up Governor Evans.*

IF ELECTED: *I shall be the sort of Land Commissioner who will go out fearlessly and commission the land.*

We tried to get the Voters' Pamphlet people to let us use a picture of Francis X. Bushman, posing as Richard Coeur de Lion, but the stodgy committee assured us that a picture taken within the last two years was necessary. This also eliminated our other idea of using a baby picture: Greene from twenty-five years ago, stretched out barebottom on a bear rug, or something like that.

No campaign is complete without a press conference and a rally. We determined to hold our press conference—not at the Olympic Hotel or at some fancy restaurant—but rather at the Blue Moon Tavern—which has been the hang-out for all the University of Washington radicals and dissidents for the last forty years. Gallant, Johnston, Hannum and I appeared promptly at two o'clock and found three television stations, four or five newspapers, and a national press service in attendance, plus about thirty bleary-eyed regulars.

Johnston answered the first question about Greene's political roots by pointing out that his Republican leanings "go back to Millard Fillmore by way of Rutherford B. Hayes." Gallant said that Greene was with us in spirit if not in body, and, indeed, insisted on being Captain of the team. "In fact," he said, "he insists on being addressed as Captain Greene at all times. He's his own man," he concluded, "unless anyone else will have him."

Johnston said that Greene was challenging incumbent Bert Cole to a wrestling match over Eastern Washington—and went on to state that Greene would welcome Cole in television

debate—in Hawaii. Hannum gave an extemporaneous speech on "Can the grass roots be greener, can the forests ever be truly virgin?" He contended that there was no end of misunderstanding about Greene's form of Republicanism—which was NOT "temperate Republicanism" and most especially not "tempered Republicanism"—but rather "temporary Republicanism."

How would the candidate win, asked one reporter. On his record, said Gallant. What's that, asked another reporter. Two arrests, no convictions, said Johnston.

Between this monumental press conference, and the giant rally—Greene extruded himself into the campaign. Spiro Agnew, then running for Vice President, appeared in Hawaii for a brief round, and somehow, Greene wangled a picture-taking session with him. What we got in the mail was an extremely fuzzy picture of Greene in his mustache shaking hands with what looked to be Spiro. The only clear image in the photograph was a smiling oriental-looking gentleman in the background.

I called Richard and asked him why the hell he sent us such a lousy picture. He explained that the photographer was an amateur from the University who was nervous enough anyway, but was rendered damn near paroxysmic by the secret service. Seems the SS didn't trust amateur photographers to be merely that—and while the camera was trained on Agnew, one of them held a pistol (cocked, loaded) at the poor photographer's head.

In any event, we had a picture—and Gene wrote up the following caption to go with it:

NICE TO MEET YOU, MR. UH

"One of these jolly men is Washington's Republican candidate for Land Commissioner, Richard A. C. Greene. The other is Spiro Agnew, GOP Vice-Presidential hopeful. Greene

is probably the one behind the moustache, though Agnew—fresh from his 'fat Jap' mot—may have borrowed it for the nonce. The setting is Honolulu, Greene's fall campaign headquarters. The others in the picture are not identified—although the gentleman smiling at the rear may or may not be a secret serviceman from Tokyo."

* * * *

The Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle was given, sometime in the 1920's, a bandstand. Forty-five years later, it looks garish and bleak. This was the setting for our grand rally. Johnston, when he began his speech, said "Welcome to the Warren G. Harding Memorial Bandstand and storage area," for indeed, in the base of it, chairs, tables, and presumably old animals are kept out of the way.

Apparently Harding, when he was still in form, made an appearance in Seattle sometime in 1925. Boy Scouts all over the country contributed pennies for this structure, so besides steps, platform, and plaques of Harding, there are two shiny brass statues of Boy Scouts, dressed in the 1925 Boy Scout style.

Once again the press was in full attendance. As well, there was the Great Excelsior Jazz Band (Dixieland) which played songs made up for the occasion including "What Does a Land Commissioner Do?" and "When Richard Greene Walks Down The Street (You know there's a man, can't be beat.")

Each of us gave a speech, of sorts. Gary Margason gave a speech on Greene's character. Byron Coney gave one on Richard Greene's mother ("she made all this possible"). Johnston explicated at length on comparisons between Harding, the Harding cabinet of thieves, Greene, and the rest of us. I think he billed me as Andrew Mellon. I gave one on the boys downstate who were fighting against Greene's own personal

initiative ("You'll have to write it in on the ballot: it calls for the amalgamation of Forks, Wn., and Pysht, Wn., into the single great city of Pysht-Forks").

Jon Gallant gave a long speech on Richard Greene's genes —concluding that they were superior to the incumbent's. And Herb Hannum gave an indescribable speech which rendered him hoarse for a week. I'm going to put out a record of the whole affair, so you can hear it for yourself.

The nicest thing about the Greene rally was that it was the final sequence in a truly silly campaign. I think they call it "peaking" among the professionals. It gave us a chance to watch the media—to see ourselves on television, watch the distortion process of news. TIME *magazine came and did an article on the campaign which reassured me, once again, that they can get facts wrong and—with little effort—kill the humor in any humorous enterprise. One of the local newspapers came out editorially against the candidate, suggesting that the joke was going too far. On the plus side, the* WALL STREET JOURNAL *did a front page article written by one of their reporters, Thomas B. Carter. It was a superb reporting job: as funny as the campaign itself: intelligent, witty, and (as with all the* WALL STREET JOURNAL *articles) extraordinarily well researched. Look it up.*

A lot of other things happened, but I can't remember them all now. I wish I could. Jon and I both tried to write up a story for a national magazine shortly after it was over—but, as he said, "It's like trying to eat a good meal twice." It simply wouldn't come. I kept all the clippings—but like all clippings, they begin to yellow and moulder, and soon enough the whole thing will be so distorted in our minds that we'll be arguing over the flimsy details of who said what, wrote what, and did what.

There are a couple of things I shan't forget, though—that's

why I'm writing them down now. One is election night. We took a room in the Olympic Hotel just down the hall from the suite of Governor Dan Evans. When one of his aides confidentially told us that the Governor had given his vote to Greene we thought for one terrible minute that our man might win. God, we thought: what will we do then?

But even the joke, the laugh, was a little weak when Greene lost by 800,000 votes. We had thought—maybe, hadn't we?—that the voters would be as amused as we were. That's what we thought. Wrong: they take their votes seriously. Sometimes, I guess, too seriously.

And most of all, I remember one other speech. A local clean-government group had called me up a week before election day, and had asked me (cum *Greene) to write up a talk for them.*

I had some inklings of the defeat that was coming up. After all, the campaign (on which we spent about $5,000) was more of a victory over the media than anything else. We had gotten the reporters, the press people—both nationally and locally—to take the joke, and carry it as far as they could. They did: they enjoyed it as much as we did; saw it as a mockery of the usual bullshit that comes out of political campaigns, and—for that reason—maybe a healthy thing.

But in the speech I wrote for CHECC, I was able to go somewhere that I couldn't during the whole campaign: that is, to say something serious about something that had been so silly for so long. Perhaps that is why it remains as my favorite memento mori *of the whole mess.*

DEAR FRIENDS AT CHECC: Richard A. C. Greene here — speaking to you from fall campaign headquarters in Honolulu. On the eve of my success at the polls, I salute you. Though

I may be sunburned and windswept, though the constant sunshine of my days may tend to distract me from the hard work of running for public office—still, I often think of you there in Seattle: clouds gathered overhead, skins pasty and mole-like, the grey winds of the north leaning down to chill the bone and darken the soul. I think of that: and my soft political heart goes out to you.

Three days from now, the voters of Washington State will go into the sanctified hole we call the voting booth to decide on many grave candidates and issues. There's not only Nixon and Muskie and O'Connell and Pelly and Greene. As well, there are all those intellectual decisions: the voters will be asked to be international economists on Initiative 32; they will be asked to be credit experts on Initiative 245; they will be asked to be scientific toxologists on Initiative 242.

In Washington State—unlike many states on the east coast—we show profound belief in the judgement of the voter: a belief which I am delighted to confirm. After all, they chose me from among four candidates—sensing, somehow, my ability and intelligence even though I waged what might be called a *Sitz-Kampaign*. As I stated after the primary election: "My faith in the integrity and wisdom of Mr. and Mrs. Average Washington Voter has been confirmed forever." And I thought to myself—as Pyrrhus

did in 280 B.C.: "Another victory like this, and we are done for."

You at CHECC have your own crises, your own Czech crises—and it has nothing to do with the Russians. It has to do with that sometimes sad, sometimes laughable, sometimes whimsical phenomena we call the American Voter. I claim the problem with the American Voter today is that he feels that he is being turned into a whore. He knows that he is bought and sold in huge blocks on television. He knows that candidates for public office get enormous quantities of money from some mysterious money-bag to buy—not radio time or television time—but *people*: he knows that, he, the voter, is being traded in what (I think) they call it cost-per-thousand. He has been bought like a prostitute: and, worst of all, doesn't even know who is buying him.

I once propounded the notion that not only is it dangerous to buy and sell voters—but it is even more dangerous to spend our time trying to get them into the voting booth. You know what I'm talking about: this: "Vote as you please, but please vote." Somehow we have the misguided idea that quantity is important to democracy.

I disagree—I have always preferred quality. And I think the voters who have to be dragged from the offices, pulled from their beds, yanked from their TV sets to get them to vote: those are the wrong ones to

be in the booth. If their motivation is so lousy, their knowledge of the candidates and issues must be equally as lousy; I'd just as soon see them stay in bed on election day.

Sometimes I think about that 15,000 vote plurality I received in the primary campaign for state land commissioner. This plurality—mind you—came not from King County, where I was living, where I lost; no, this surge of voter interest came from every county *except* King County. Since my primary campaigning consisted of me sitting in the Jean-Paul Sartre Memorial No Exit Rooming House, or teaching classes at the University of Washington—we can hardly say that the voters outside King County had some special insight into my wit and ability.

See what I tell you: Richard A. C. Greene became Republican nominee for the office of Washington State Land Commissioner not because of his pretty smile, nor because of his knowledge of Greek and Latin—but because all these people thought it their *duty* to vote. They didn't give a damn, really; I know, because that's why they got in the booth and fumbled around with all those unfamiliar names and finally said: "Land Commissioner. Hm. Greene. That sounds nice." They had been brainwashed by the thought of green lands, rolling on forever. Tricky business—these campaigns.

Well: I'm too far away for that now. Let's leave

all these sophist questions about The Issues and The Voters to some boorish graduate student at the University. That's what they are paid for—isn't it: those meaningless, tedious examinations for Truth.

For me, Truth lies on warm beaches. Like the good Existentialist candidate that I am, I shall repair to the waters of the Pacific on my new air-mattress which is a friendly companion indeed. Filled with a lot of hot air, perhaps, but the kind of hot air I value and enjoy.

As for you, there at CHECC: I send you my love. From Hawaii I greet you. Long may we wave.

November, 1968

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DEAR MISS LONELY HEARTS:

I've written a number of letters to you in the past 18 months, Miss Lonelyhearts: most of them silly, some even sarcastic. It's this thing I have, Miss L.: I just wasn't sure if you were real or not. Like Mike Mailway, or Dear Abby, or Eldridge Cleaver, or the American Dream—I thought you might not exist.

But, you know: after writing to you so regularly, I have become convinced of your existence. And, like Nathanael West said, I now believe you can purify, save, and glorify me. I have gotten the faith, love.

But that's not my problem, Miss L. Or at least the problem I want to communicate to you now. Faith and all that. No: I have to write you about something else—something that's beginning to bother me, make me gaunt with worry. It's . . . well . . . it's all these people who live on the earth. There are so many of

them. I never can remember whether it's 12 million or 72 billion, but the exact number is not important: it's just that there is a whole hunk of humans, and we are getting very crowded.

Now, understand, Miss L., everyone doesn't agree with me about that problem. Charles says the only problem he has is wet bandaids in the bathtub. And Rob claims that the only thing bothering him is that story about the atoms in us all: that if you remove all the spaces between the atoms of everyone on earth, why all of us could fit into half a teacup.

I like that: because it tells me that we aren't too much, after all. We humans. Not when you compare us to, say, the bulk of the sun which—no matter what we may think—is finally and irrecoverably larger than the dark pupil of your eye. But, forgive me, Miss Lonelyhearts—I stray from my problem.

What is bothering me, Miss L., is the fact that the trolley car is gone all funny and wrong—we, the world, you, me, all of us are on this streetcar called "Existence" which seems to have gotten on the wrong track. I get this feeling of us shrieking down the hill, lights blazing and bells ringing, and we can't stop until we end up in some desolate heap with nothing but ruins, and ashes, and night. I think of us there, all piled up.

What I am saying, Miss Lonelyhearts, is that I am worried—about these men. Men like myself. With

two arms, two legs, a head, and somewhere in that body, a warm spot for some other human being that they love. Men, just like me, who smile and nod and drink and sing and wonder. Men, just like me—with one exception: they are softly planning the dismal destruction of the world which they, as much as I, love to death. I can't figure it out.

I don't know, Miss L. I wouldn't have brought up this dreadful subject if it weren't for a vision I had this evening. This evening when I was sitting around the table with Charlie and Rob and Cammy and Jeremy and Meg. We were having a bit of the season cheer—a full bottle of warm cognac and a full complement of warm souls. The wind was sniffing around, outside the house, but it didn't bother us too much because we were warm and full of each other.

But this vision, this lonely vision I had. It came on me in a rush and I guess, with what everyone said later, I sort of spoiled the evening with it. That's a problem I have, Miss L.: I like telling people what's in my head.

Anyway I had this vision of the time—two, or twenty, or two hundred years hence: when all these men, with all their anger and grief, finally, after all the hemming and hawing, finally push all the buttons that are there waiting to be pushed. Push the buttons so that instantly dark shadows start flying everywhere, everywhere above this cell we call the world.

Everywhere—and for fifteen minutes, or an hour, there are giant, outrageous, horrendous blasts of light and darkness. The whole face of the earth, and your face, and my face, are ripped and scalded by . . . by a hundred million megatons of . . . of . . . you know . . .

And I saw that time, that time afterwards, when the dust had finally settled over the soundless hulks of buildings and cars and peoples burned, roasted, torn, twisted, crushed, destroyed. The hulks which we used to love or hate or ignore—now nothing but a receptacle for the hot ashes still flickering down every now and then.

I saw that time and I saw that night, somewhat like this night. When—except for the wind—everything was stilled, completely stilled. There was no me, nor you, nor Charlie, nor Meg, nor Rob, nor president, nor no-one. No cognac, no lights, no season cheer. Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

And there, over the whole sorry mess, was this star. One star—a star that seemed to be, well, brighter than the others. A star which grew up in the east, had this intensity—as if something new and rich and wonderful were coming, were coming down to deliver us all from evil, and darkness, and destruction, and . . .

. . . and: nothing. Nothing. The star shone brightly in the east—but shone on nothing but twisted build-

ings and wracked, dusty cities; the star shone brightly in the hollow eyes of countless homes, but they were empty and bleak. There was no me, Miss Lonelyhearts, nor you, Miss Lonelyhearts, nor no-one. The earth was silent—silent and dead.

Except for the wind. A sharp, moaning wind, playing for a moment in the ashes, banging the shutters of a deserted home, then, in ashes, dying.

Desperately,
LORENZO THE GAUNT
December, 1968

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CLIP 'N' SEND: (A summary of the weekly events in Seattle. Clip 'n' Send to our news-hungry boys overseas.)

Well boys, it's been another wonderful week in this most wonderful of cities. There's been a lot of bird news this week. Mrs. Agnes Flickinger, out in the doldrums of South Seattle, went out to her mailbox to get the daily supply of third class mail from the discount houses, and ended up with a very testy hawk on her extended arm.

Mrs. Flickinger, hard-pressed to explain this wing-beating maelstrom when all she really wanted was a note from Aunt Till, finally got hold of a steak (for the bird) and a telephone (for the Seattle Hawk Society or whatever it's called). A spokesman said:

"The best advice is to stand quietly if a hawk lands on your arm. But leather gauntlet gloves are highly

recommended." I don't know about recent sales of gauntlet gloves in this area, but I know that some of us are staying pretty far away from the mailbox until after sunset.

Al Schilling of the Olympic Hotel has another bird-brained idea. In a talk before the Seattle Visitors Bureau, he suggested that we all "Be A Friendly Native." What Al is working up to is that next summer there is to be a lemming migration into this area of some convention which should do wonders for the Olympic Hotel and Al Schilling but hardly for the rest of us who will have to spend our days shooing drunken Shriners out of our gladiolas while they ask for directions to the Space Needle.

To fight this menace, several of us have banded together to form an organization called "Be A Testy Native." Right now, we are putting together a Hate-Pak filled with buttons and slogans like "Do Shriners *ever* work like other people?" For those visitors who might be hardy enough to contemplate moving into the area permanently, we've prepared a five-minute lecture on Washington State's Tax Structure.

Speaking of the Olympia Gas Factory, Sex and Highways have been big down there this winter. Two bills which are particularly interesting to us homefolk are:

(1) The Legislator's Sex-Education Bill. Pushed by Spokane's Sen. Sam Guess, the measure provides

that no legislator shall be permitted to view sex-education films except after dark and in the basement of the Capitol. Some lawmakers expressed concern that they might be corrupted by such showings, but Guess said that they should prefer "to pull down the curtains rather than curse the darkness." Reporters will not be permitted to attend the shows.

(2) The Ring-Road Bill. Various legislators from Whatcom, Bucoda, and Pe Ell are concerned about Seattle's future and have proposed an eight-lane double-decker ring-road about the city in order to stunt its further growth. At latest report, the roadway (to be called the Charles Prahl Memorial Highway to commemorate the recently retired head of the Highway Department) will start at the state House of Representatives, bisect the Olympic Rainforest to the west, obliterate the town of Mukilteo to the north, run along the Medina waterfront to the east, and gently subside in a toll booth complex in the basement of the home of Rep. Al Leland (R-Redmond).

I read over this, and I think "Maybe there isn't any good news this week." Even outside Seattle, it's getting spooky—Jackie Gleason came out four-square against sin in Miami this week. Waving a pale hand over the Orange Bowl, red-eyeing 30,000 screaming Teenagers Against Obscenity, he had the temerity to croak: "These are my people." And then there was

the Pope, and some problem with his connections to the call-box of the Holy Ghost. And then there was . . .

. . . But enough. Let me tell you about a letter I got this week. And maybe you can hope you will get one as good.

Yesterday, I drew on my gauntlet gloves, donned my hawker's hat, and slipped out to my mailbox. Despite the flurry of wings and the nipping beaks, I managed to extract a letter and slam my way into the house. Now, sitting here with my cup of tea, slapping an occasional fly, I've read it again and again. God grant you such a letter.

It comes from some people I've fallen in with who finally said the hell with the city and the Shriners and went out to live in some shacks on the Skagit River. I've never been there, but I know there must be some geese and coots to talk to and I would guess that sometimes the deer slip up to the back door of the hut to nibble on the crumbs left out for the raccoons.

Anyway, they like it there, and they may stay there forever, because of the deer and the way the mist softens the river when you wake up: the sun coming flat-out across the panes early in the morning. They may stay there, but sometimes they write me to let me know that they aren't dead, and I want you to know what it was that they sent me this morning to snatch from the talons of the hawk:

When your friend was talking and you weren't listening but knew he was leaving and you didn't tell him.

not about the den of snakes you had been watching

but you wanted to talk about the same thing you couldn't say at breakfast

but he left the room, went out the door, I could hear him rowing, and its sound disappeared

Though he'd be back shortly, you felt it would be too short and you wouldn't talk about it, and then in the morning he'd be back

but you've forgotten what it's all about so you

look at him and wonder how you had ever felt so distant because you love him as your best friend—but you stumble and you're afraid he's watching, so you are again left alone and until you're lonely

you can't talk.

(That was all in scrawl, so I knew it must be Hansel. On the back, Charley had written this in bold capitals.)

WITH FOLDED HANDS I PRAY TO ALL THE BUDDHAS STATIONED IN ALL THE REGIONS AND LIKEWISE TO ALL THE BODHISATTVAS WHO ARE GREAT IN THEIR COMPASSION IN ALL MY LIVES WITHOUT BEGINNING, OR IN THIS LIFE NOW

WHATEVER EVIL I, POOR WRETCH, HAVE DONE OR CAUSED TO BE DONE OR HAVE APPROVED OF BLINDLY FURTHERING MY OWN HARM

ALL THESE OFFENCES I CONFESS AND FURTHER FEEL A BURNING SHAME FOR WHATEVER EVIL I, POOR WRETCH, HAVE DONE, OR HAVE APPROVED OF, BLINDLY FURTHERING MY OWN HARM

ALL THESE OFFENCES I CONFESS.

March, 1969

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Monroe, Washington

". . . I, for one, am pleased with the young men in these endeavors (Future Farmers of America). How critical our nation would be without their enthusiasm, intelligence and industriousness! Too seldom do we (as a general public) applaud and support their high ideals and integrity. All too often notice is mentioned of the crime, strife, hippies and other minorities instead of the majority of young people who are forward looking youth with plenty of Americanism . . ."

—Letter from a Supervisor of Agricultural Education to the *Monroe Monitor*, March 13th.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON: where are you? Sinclair Lewis: we need you. Theodore Dreiser: is there no-one to take your place? No-one to chronicle the sad keyhole life of Small Town America.

It's Sunday afternoon. I am walking down Main Street—what else? Past Ferdie's Barber Shop, past the faded pink billow of a sign over Milady's Frock

Shop. Past the Monroe Bakery, whose window, for some weird reason, is stacked with fifty-pound sacks of Turf Builder, littered with manure spreaders.

Why am I here? Why is anyone here? Why do people live in such social, mental, and psychological deprivation? There must be some reason for it. I pass a sign, the necessary sign, the inevitable sign, the mass-produced sign, hanging in every village between here and Bobo, Me. There must be thirty thousand of them—and they all say "Your Home Town Hardware." A little twitch of mass-produced, small-town pride.

I develop a powerful thirst, mentally weigh the relative advantages of The Rainbow Tavern and the Silver Dollar Tavern. I choose the latter, because of its proximity to the Savoy Hotel, a peeling, three-story number, with white sheets and papers blocking every window. "What goes on in there?" I wonder. "And why do all these people (2,049) live here? There must be some excuse."

The Silver Dollar bears little resemblance to its social and economic namesake. I take a few pulls of beer and study the *Monroe Monitor* to see if I can find the clue. Hardly.

Smiley comes in. I know it's Smiley, because there is a chorus of raucous laughter when he comes smirking through the door. Calls of "Hi, Smiley!" He lets himself down next to me and my puzzlement. "Thank

the Lord Smiley's here," I think: "Maybe he can tell me why people still live in Small Town America with signs that say 'Your Home Town Hardware' and high school productions of Finian's Rainbow. But no soap. Smiley gets a mug of beer, pulls out a copy of the *National Enquirer*, and immerses himself in a steamy article (with pictures) entitled "He Shared His Bed With Wife and Her Sister for Three Years." No hometown newspaper fan, this.

No, it's not until later that I finally figure why people put up with living in towns like Monroe. I'll tell you about it, and then maybe you can see for yourself.

You start at the front door of the Silver Dollar Tavern, and you head roughly east. You head out the Old Sultan Road, past the asphalt-lined shopping center with the phoney gingerbread-window bank. You head up past the guardrails of the Old Sultan Road (white cement softened with green-grey moss), past the Dutch-haircut barn (roof shingles softened with green-grey moss), on up the hill past the two acne-struck boys, sitting on the bridge railing, exchanging country jokes, barking with crude country laughter.

Go on past the cemetery with the sign which tells you, tells me, tells the dead long gone: "No Planting on Grave Space. No Artificial Flowers April to December." (And you and I and the dead must celebrate

the fact that the city fathers of Monroe preserve that last shred of decency, preserve our own sweet smelling heritage, forbid the Plastic Morning Glory, the PermaChrome Chrysanthemum . . .)

Go on, past that, past the dead and their three bare months of artificial daisies, up past the great mossy trees which you and I can hope will be allowed to stand for another year or so before the coming of some cruel Industrial Park. Go on up the hill past the trees, in the trees, between the trees, past the great hulks of green-brown-black trunks watered by the eternal tears of Snohomish springs, past all that to where, all of a sudden, you see . . .

. . . All of a sudden. The mountains. All of a sudden, the tavern and Smiley and his newspaper and the Savoy Hotel and the three months of plastic pansies are far behind you. There are the mountains, and the thin white old-men's-arms of clouds lean down just so, and the white of snow touches the clouds just so, a white snow so brilliant that it hurts your teeth. And the mountains blue-black-blue, stunning out of the fields, so black-blue-black that you want to cry with the hurt, and distance, and coldness of it.

They should have told me. The good people of Monroe. They should have said: "You go out the Old Sultan Road, past the ninth bend—right on the other side of Doc Tennyson's farm with the falling down

slat-sided barn. Yeah, past that for about a half-a-mile. Then you stop and look up . . ."

March, 1969

22

BACK IN MY YOUTH (which may have been only yesterday), families on the East Coast would board out their children while they sailed to Europe. It sounds funny to say "sail to Europe," when you consider the throb of the *Normandie* or the *Queen Mary* in those years before the late lamented Second World War. But that is what they called it: "Sailing to Europe."

Now, I want you to remember Europe in 1938. I never did see it myself. But my family's trusty 16mm. Kodak saw it and reported it to me. Switzerland and Italy and England and France and Holland. Didn't catch Germany. Not that year. Too much ranting and raving. Too many uniforms for a nice vacation. But did get to see (later, in the colder winter) tulips and wooden shoes and dikes and windmills. Just like the travel posters.

So the family boarded the towering hulk called the

Normandie, and my sister and I were boarded out for the summer somewhere in New Jersey, with the Andersons. God, I wish I could remember what they looked like. You would too, after you hear what I am going to tell you. But, bless me, all I can remember about Mr. Anderson is the rimless glasses, much like the ones I'm wearing. As for Mrs. Anderson . . .

. . . the false teeth. And me, in the downstairs bathroom, fascinated, mesmerized by the uppers in a jelly-glass of water, on the shelf. If you want to symbolize the mystery of the adult world for a seven-year-old child, use a pair of false uppers, resting securely, just a half-a-bite, just out of reach, on the downstairs bathroom shelf.

You and your giantism are a mystery to the five- or seven- or nine-year-old. Only they don't tell you. About your huge unwieldy furniture, the cavernous nature of your mouth when you laugh at inexplicable things, about the way you sleep so late so unnecessarily on Sunday. They don't comprehend, we don't comprehend. That's why we passed off the mystery of the Andersons for so long.

One day in a bright-hot, sun-washed summer in New Jersey, the lunch bell was rung for the fifteen summer-orphans. Only Robbie, black-haired and active, didn't hear it, didn't come. He wanted to hang, feet just missing the ground, another minute on the Jungle Gym. So Mr. Anderson pothered out to where

Robbie was hanging by his hands another minute on the Jungle Gym and told him something and Robbie continued to hang by his hands from the Jungle Gym for the whole lunch period with tears streaming from his large brown eyes. Robbie paid singular attention to the lunch-bell after that.

One morning, in that bright-washed summer in New Jersey, Ralph (taller than most) complained about the toast at breakfast. Claimed that Mrs. Anderson had burned the toast. Claimed that he didn't like burned toast. Every morning thereafter, Ralph ate breakfast standing up behind the pantry door, ate his breakfast of unbuttered burned toast. We heard no more complaints about burned toast from Ralph.

One noon, in that bright sun-rinsed sky-beautiful New Jersey summer, Mary climbed the stairs to the attic to study her math with Mrs. Anderson. In fact, Mary, a very bad student in math, climbed the stairs every noon to study math in the attic with Mrs. Anderson. And every day, we heard the impact of Mrs. Anderson's teaching, being a very hard-bottomed slipper. "Ow, ow, ow," Mary would cry, resisting her math. And every afternoon, in that bright summer, Mary would creep down from her hard math lesson, and we would gather around her to tell her how she sounded, as the words were being pounded in. "Ow, ow, ow," we would tell her.

One day, in that beautiful sun-dashed summer in New Jersey . . . One day. O, there's more, too much more. And sometimes, when you and I are sitting toe-to-toe in the Athenian Cafe, looking at the ferries squandering in and out of Elliott Bay, the sun fixin' to die on the far Olympics, I will tell you of all the strange deeds of that strange Anderson family on that strange far-away hill called my youth.

But I will tell you the one story, which my sister and I told our parents, long after that long hot summer: told them so regularly and so consistently, that along about November, they looked at each other, and decided that child's imagination was child's imagination, but there are limits and . . .

. . . for two months, the Andersons were investigated quietly, and then for two months, very very noisily, in a scandal that must have rocked the blue-sky beautiful country of Central New Jersey . . . long after Mr. and Mrs. Anderson retired to jail, to mull over the various disciplines they had imposed on various children, over a period of a dozen years or so.

It's the story of the new boy, Paul, who arrived in mid-summer. If I can't remember anything else, I can remember that Paul—shorter than anyone else—was a fighter. He fought with his lungs, lustily and long. Mr. Anderson put up with it for a week, long after Paul's mother had sailed away first class on the beautiful *Queen Mary,* for a beautiful summer in the

Lake Country.

It was night. Dark night in New Jersey. Bedtime. Mary and I were brushing our teeth. Comparing the rapid spread of white tooth-paste foam from out our mouths into the metal O of our water bowls. Next door, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, in concert, were trying to convince Paul to take some castor oil. Seems that living with the Andersons had affected his digestion.

Paul wasn't very interested, and opened his mouth to let us know of his disinterest. Next thing we heard were some rather stiff noises from next door which indicated to us in the know that Mr. Anderson had gotten his famous temper up. Then—klunk, klunk, klunk—we heard the suddenly terror-silent Paul being dragged down the hall. By the feet. To be thrown in the tub.

I think—although I am singularly reluctant to admit this—that Mary and I, mouths still ringed with white tooth-paste, giggled at each other. Paul was learning about his summer parents.

But I could never forget, can never forget, will never forget you, Paul—the smears of blood down the hallway, and on the edges of the white porcelain tub. And despite your battered face the next day, I kept thinking: "How strange, that Paul should have such a nose-bleed. How strange . . ."

How strange, that summer in the black-white heat of 1938. Families off taking pictures of wooden shoes

and tulips. A frenetic man in uniform ranting through Germany. And fifteen children learning something new about the adult world in a beautiful sun-split summer in New Jersey . . .

April, 1969

23

IT'S A PERFECT DAY for Decency. The sun bobs in and out of the clouds, like a child playing seeks. The wind is from the north. The book-end, bureaucracy, blue-brown Seattle Municipal Building looks stark and witless.

The City Council chambers are hot and full. Purity has brought out a gaggle of teen-queens, clear-eyed, clean-minded youths, and a smattering of beaming parents. "What a wonderful thing," I think: "An organizational meeting for Decency. What a windfall to us politicians and businessmen: to all us clean-living Americans."

"Belief in God and that he loves us, that's what we stand for," says Al Rosenthal, the clean-teen shipped from Miami for the occasion. "Love of our planet and country: Patriotism . . ." he says, breathless. "We want a youth commission in every city—to work with the city government on teen problems." He

smiles, and his milky-white teeth come out, the moon on his happy, sunkissed face. "What do you think of that, kids," he says, darkeyeing the expectant audience.

"Well," I think, "I don't know about you other kids, but I feel like the back of a Wheaties box." The Wheaties Sports Federation and that healthy Bob Richards, always calling everyone "Kids." Kids this and Kids that. Lord, if I were seventeen again (if I were seventeen again!) and one of my peers called me "Kid," I'd be tempted to drop my Decency for a moment and bust him one in the nose.

Finally, the speech, the how-to-do-it for Decency is over. The audience shuffles some, and the testimonies begin. A snippy little girl in a snippy dress crabs up to the microphone. "My name is Janine Twit," she says, voice still teetering on the edge of adolescence: "and I'm from Seattle Upwithpeople. Seattle Upwithpeople will gladly support a Youth for Decency Rally," she says. "Thank God for small favors," I think: "I would hate to watch Upwithpeople and Youth-for-Decency getting in a brawl over something like this."

"May an older person speak," says an old toothbrush moustache from the back of the audience. He totters to a standing position, a white 40-&-8 cap falling over the left eye. But it's too late: "No," someone yells, and the bottom falls out of the whole thing.

A clean-cut SDSer—obviously squirrelled in a trunk past the gimlet-eyes at the chamber door—vaults up to the microphone, and starts to eat it:

"Decency, you say . . . what about Vietnam . . . starving children . . . napalm . . . American Imperialism . . ." The whole bag of beans. Everyone begins to groan and twitch.

"There it is again," I think: "The pig-eyed jack-in-the-box. Why is it we can't go anywhere, even to a good wholesome boring Decency meeting, without getting bopped on the head with all the evils of our society and civilization? O why, why?" There is a good deal of shouting, and people bouncing up and down like apples in a tub of water. "Point of order . . ." "You haven't been recognized . . ." "Mr. Chairman . . ." "Would you *please* sit down . . ." "Jackie Gleason has been . . ." "Would you *please* . . ." ". . . exploiting sex for thirty years . . ." "Point of order . . ."

All the politicians who came in so gladly in hopes of garnering a few easy votes begin to look tired. Mrs. Harlan Edwards starts whispering a mile a minute to Mayor Miller, who in turn looks content to retire under the speaker's podium. John F. Gordon, the mayor's liaison with all these . . . these kids, leans a tired head on a tired hand. Ed Devine slouches further and further in his chair, concentrating elaborately on one set of fingernails.

Everything gets entangled, spaghettied up by all

the blood and mud out there 5,000 miles to the west. The hopes of purity, unencumbered youthful enthusiasm, get lost in this rage, this adult *mess*—happening somewhere way over there.

I think of these two . . . kids, in their alligator green suits, and their alligator green vests, with their clear eyes and overweening ambition for the pure and the clean and the good. The door opened for them—back in December—when the Doors, an outrageous rock group, did some outrageous exposing on stage in Miami.

The door opened for two ambitious purity-bitten seventeen-year-old Kennedy types to race around the country, to meet mayors, to create giant rallies, to say: "I'm for Decency." That's it: they are exposing themselves. They are saying: "Let me tell you how clean I think, and feel . . ."

And like all *hubris*, it has to fall. In this case, in the trap of the adult world. The adult world of wars and fear and greed and poverty and anger and anguish. The adult world . . . like the alcoholic grandfather you used to keep in the attic. The one who *had* to stay upstairs whenever someone important came to visit. You'd sit in the parlor, with the school principal, or the president of the bank; but no matter how hard and loud you'd talk, you could always hear the old geezer pounding around up there—tripping over his own feet, banging into the dresser, knocking

his bottle of Four Roses off onto the floor. And you'd turn red, and get nervous, and keep wishing the old man would just *die* for God's sake, so you wouldn't have to yell like a boob about the weather to drown out the sound of the old fool retching his guts out in the bathroom.

Finally, somebody gets the meeting back to order. Finally, old blabbermouth sits down, and the dullness sets back in. The routine. O, they try to interrupt. When the new chairman, the local representative asks, "Is there any opposition to my setting up a committee to hold a rally? . . ." one of the SDSers starts to babble something; but then one of the Miami set storms to the microphone, tells them that by breaking up the meeting, *they* are being undemocratic, *they* are ignoring Robert's Rules of Order, *they* are being indecent.

And that does it. That thing about being indecent. Suddenly everyone is laughing, and clapping. Ed Devine sits up, smiles. Mrs. Edwards stops talking and smiles. The good gray mayor essays a twitch of the lips.

And John Gordon. The city's representative for Good Things. All of a sudden he's laughing and slapping his knee, laughing the hardest. And you know he's thinking: "I knew these kids could take care of themselves. Thank God—I knew if we gave them a chance, they could take care of the whole thing

themselves."

And as far as he knows, they have, and will. Take care of themselves. Again. As if we ever thought they couldn't. Those kids.

April, 1969

24

New York

THE FREE STORE THEATRE in New York City has all the charm, warmth, and variety of the men's room at The Blue Moon Tavern. It's just about the same size, too.

The walls are decorated with the usual indecencies. The sign outside—the marquee, I guess—is a four-foot high piece of beaverboard. The single word "Che!" is written on it. Slashed on, really. "Maybe it's written in blood," I think—trying to get the spirit of these new revolutionaries.

In its brief run at the Free Store Theatre, "Che!" has gotten all sorts of notoriety. The necessary notoriety to assure that those of us with a disproportionate prurient interest will crowd the dusty theatre at every performance. To get harangued for two or three hours with the usual four, five, six, and nine letter words; lines interspersed with revolutionary propa-

ganda, lusty action, and nudity enough to shock and amaze us. We avant-garde theatre goers put up with damn near anything to open our minds.

The good officers of New York's Ninth Precinct have been very obliging to the producers of "Che!" With two or three well-attended, well-reported arrests, they have managed to turn a box-office droop into a real rouser. And, with luck, and a few more busts, "Che!" should be able to go on in its present ghastly state damn near forever.

Still, some of us pre-revolutionaries are a bit put off by the price of prurience. At $6.95, $7.95, and $9.95, "Che!" ranks with "The Sound of Music" in sheer dramatic financial gall. I had a distinct vision of my $8—plus those of the night's seventy-five other adventurers—being shipped off in Eurofunds to some dark jungle in Peru, to maintain some healthy, revolutionary band—keep them in bananas and Wheat-Chex until their time comes to take over the world.

I can't say we had no clue as to our fate. Maybe it was the small diamond inserted through the right nostril of the lovely ticket seller. Maybe it was the pert voice (". . . eight, nine, and ten, and thank you . . .") answering the telephone every three seconds to talk, listen, then say "No, there is no genital contact on stage." What were they asking her, anyway?

I think it was the rest-room facilities, myself, shar-

ing skimpy and decidedly unprivate quarters with the dressing room, so I couldn't help but think: "This is going to be one of those dreadful Pirandello plays where the audience is going to be made to get up and come down and bumble around on the stage and get involved with the actors. And they'll try to get somebody—maybe me—to take off his clothes in front of all those people . . ."

Would there were such adventures. Would there had been such creativity. Instead we got up to forty-five minutes of The President of the United States (a homosexual, dressed in blue undershorts), Fidel Castor (a lesbian, dressed so as to reveal only her most private parts), and Che (a shaggy bi-sexual, dressed in red velvet with the fly open) wrestling around on the stage, pushing, caressing, and jangling each other, mouthing the lines of all neo-Beckett revolutionaries. Like:

"My revolution is the feel of your prick."

or

"We have functionalized the beauty of our peeping toms."

Dill-pickle lines like that.

Fortunately for all us bores in the crowd, the play dribbled to a halt because one of the actresses decided to have a fit of public pique. Seems she was angry over having to spend alternate weekends in the less-than-cozy quarters of the Ninth Precinct. She burst

onto the stage, and between weeps and sighs, cursed us for paying $10 "to watch us take off our clothes."

Then she wept some more, and said that she was only interested in art and drama, and that she just wanted to act, not go to jail. Not again. I made a mental note to myself to drop by the offices of the Ninth Precinct and advise them to lay off for awhile so that this turkey could die a natural and wholesome death, as it so richly deserved.

Now don't get me wrong: it might be that all this weeping, sobbing, and declaiming was part of the play. I'm terribly naive when it comes to telling the difference between actor, audience, drama, and reality in these avant-garde dealies. But when a bright-eyed fellow—claiming to be the one who had actually set down the lines of "Che!"—appeared and began to read off all fifty-four of the complaints filed by the police, I decided that I had done by duty by the Theater of the Future and made my way toward the door, thinking that this was the time to do my bit for decadent capitalism by repairing to a good old-fashioned healthy strip show at the Black Cat uptown.

I want to tell you, though: that as I was falling out the door, and heading back into the world of depravity, I could hear the director from his high perch, shrieking again and again:

"Will the actors and audience *PLEASE* clear the

stage so we can have a ten-minute intermission in the play . . ." And from some back-row seat, the sweet dark voice of one of the exasperated audience, reacting to the whole mess in *basso profundo,* saying in true Shakespearian tones:

"*What* actors?"

"*What* stage?"

"*What* play?"

May, 1969

25

GOD

When the following article was published in the Seattle POST-INTELLIGENCER *on July 5, 1969, none of us expected anything. It was mid-summer, most of us were dabbling around in the San Juan Islands, trying to pluck Dungeness crabs from the blue-green depths. Newspapers and their readers go to sleep in the summer anyway, and most of the staff would be nodding over their third Martini at some local restaurant.*

The first indication that I had made it into the Apocrypha of bad guys of the Catholic Church was when I got home on Tuesday morning and was told that the telephone had been very angry all day Saturday (the day of the publication of the article), Sunday and Monday. As I was being told all this . . . I got a call from a singularly unseemly woman who feared for both my life and my soul. This was my first experience with those famous hate calls and nothing I could do (reason, explication, warmth) would stop them.

Things continued to pop when Thomas A. Connelly, Archbishop of Seattle, Washington, let it be known just what he thought of newspapers and writers who took on the Church, the Pope, and (apparently) God Himself. A brief, but torrid,

article appeared in the Catholic NORTHWEST PROGRESS*—the local organ of the Church.*

As was reported shortly after by Lester Kinsolving, syndicated religion columnist for the San Francisco CHRONICLE*, "Rarely during the four centuries since Pope Leo X condemned Martin Luther as a 'wild boar' and a 'serpent' has any Christian leader issued a more furious denunciation than that directed recently by Seattle's Catholic Archbishop upon the Seattle* POST-INTELLIGENCER.

"Within the confines of just six brisk paragraphs," Kinsolving continued, "the Most Rev. Thomas Connelly branded one of the newspaper's columns as: 'vicious,' 'insulting,' 'scurrilous,' 'an insane attack,' 'venomous,' 'a hate-filled outburst,' 'morbid,' 'irresponsible,' 'grossly exaggerated,' 'a diabolical distortion,' 'insulting,' 'humiliating,' 'a conscienceless, lethal attack upon us,' and guilty of 'flagrant and spiteful half truths that are frequently more injurious than lies.'"

As best I can figure out, the excoriation of me and the P-I *went whole hog the following Sunday: it was read, complete, from every pulpit in every Catholic Church between Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, B.C. All good Catholics were asked to write the* P-I *to complain, and more ominously, agitate their friends and neighbors into cancelling all advertising in the* P-I.

The success of this whole campaign was, thankfully, limited. According to a NEWSWEEK *article published the next week, the newspaper suffered only "sixty cancellations from subscribers. A prominent Catholic banker reported receiving no phone calls at all as a result of the boycott, and the advertising director of a major retail store said flatly: 'We have no intention of withdrawing any ads from the newspaper.'"*

It was one of those situations which, I guess, every columnist expects (and may hope for). I was delighted to be

singled out—since I had, thanks to the P-I's *generosity (and occasional discomfort), been able to vent my own spleen so outrageously for so long. Writers, like other people in the business of self, are only occasionally disappointed by public notice. Until it gets out of hand.*

I would say, though, that this whole thing got out of hand. For the first time, I was put in the position of being solidly in one camp (anti-Catholic) which, since I was (and am) trying to be one of the leading practitioners of Duwamish Existentialism, is only half true. Besides, I knew that Archbishop Connelly, alone among most members of his church, had been one of the first to demand that those businesses supplying materiel *for the church schools and other institutions be absolutely without bias in regard to their hiring practices. He expressed this point of view some ten years ago —long before others in the Catholic hierarchy were willing to take such a giant step.*

Like I say: such controversy always flatters a columnist. But after awhile, it can sour. I found that the telephone calls from anti-Catholics were almost as repulsive as those from militant pro-Catholics. I was suddenly an expert on abortions, the church, and all aspects of birth-control—a position I was ill-prepared to assume. Finally, what with the yelling back and forth, I had to have my telephone unplugged for awhile—which I felt was a Bad Thing since I think that any public writer should be available for any comments from any of his readers. I was sorry to lose that chance.

Things have simmered down since then. The Archbishop—only two months after his demand that all good Catholics take "economic reprisals against a newspaper that uses its columns to mount a conscienceless, lethal attack upon us," took a two-page advertisement in the P-I *to rail against local rock festivals. The telephone quieted down and the mailbox is no*

longer filled with three-color, vituperative letters—but rather the usual spiders, third class mailings, and bills of yore. Most of us have forgotten that the article—as bitter and angry as it was—is still a fairly reasonable request that the Church follow the lead of Cardinal Cushing, who said: "Catholics do not need the force of civil law to remain faithful to their own convictions—nor do they seek by law to impose these convictions upon others."

I GUESS I FIRST GOT WIND of the sickness in another poorer country, in another poorer time. In one of those hag-ridden Mediterranean countries—where the sun turns bloody and sick at nightfall because of the dust constantly pouring out of the burnt, sick land.

The homes—the hovels, really—are whitewashed; but inside, with their hard earth floors and windows constantly closed against the evil night airs, the huts are dark and hot and stuffed with pain. The pain of a thousand years of poverty—laid on the backs of thirty generations of peasants.

You wouldn't see the pain: probably never will. In a country of such pride, the tourists are kept away from the *barrios* where children are shrunken and grotesque because of the constant hunger.

I never could figure it out: that poverty. Who made it so? Who were the villains? The landowners? The government? The peasants themselves—did they nurse it to their breasts like some sick child?

Nor could I figure out the juxtapositions—so easily accepted by the poor and starving. For in each of the small, dog-bitten towns that I lived in—Rincón de la Victoria, Vélez-Malaga, Nerja, Motril—in each of the towns there was a man who was not thin: whose skin was not dun, whose eyes were not faded and hopeless.

He was called "Padre" by the villagers. And when —in their black-crow shawls and dusty suits—they knelt before him, and kissed his ring, his eyes would be bright and clear, like those of a hawk. His skin was clear and his hands were fat and soft. He wore a black dress, and under that black dress, his heart was full with the light of truth. His belly was full, too. With food.

There was another padre for him. One far away; one for whom he would, in turn, kneel. Everyone in the village (even the village *idiota* with his round eyes full of flies) knew of the other father, the great white-robed father, called "El Papa." The same word, in that sharp fast language, for "potato." But that other padre—the one who wore the white dresses and had his own castle in Rome—he was no potato.

No: he was king. Had his own castle, his own city, his own police, his own fine, deep bed. His own cooks, and special foods. His own jewels.

In the pursuit of The Father, his father, El Papa—and his predecessors—had come to sit on a great deal of wealth. Pennies and pesos and pesetas from hun-

dreds of years had given to these humble men of God some fantastic holdings. Some say that his net worth is now over four billion dollars. Others say seven billion dollars. Or is it seventy billion dollars? It doesn't matter much: just know that he could buy and sell us like that.

Jewels, and paintings; elaborate gold-wrought dishes, forks, crowns; real-estate; tiny vineyards and huge forests. Factories, newspapers; radio and television stations. It's a very businesslike religion, really. Very businesslike.

In my innocence, I imagine that the eye of the needle might have to be very, very large for this particular camel to get through. That's just me—and too many years of watching the juxtapositions, the contrasts between El Papa and Los Padres and Los Campesinos.

Yet, I may be wrong: his face is clear, his dress is white and pure. He's never been married—never in his seven decades known the love of women. This old man, with his old man's body, and his old man's hands, is convinced that there is another love which is the *complete* love.

Maybe so. For him. But there are others of us who —well—feel that earthly love, the here-and-now love, is a tiny bit more important than that love for the—uh—upstairs. There are those of us who figure that if perfection exists, it's right here, right now, right

this moment. There are those of us who don't particularly care for El Papa's brand of perfection. With all its castles, and jewels, and incense.

We tend to be sort of balmy on the whole subject, if you really want to know. We sort of figure that a man, living in his castle, with thousands of cardinals —old and celibate just like him—we sort of figure that they all are, well, maybe a bit blind. To problems. Of, say, women. Of birth. Of childlove. Of children. Of the killing price of too many children. Or children at the wrong time. Born in poverty, to unwanting parents.

And of the agony of abortion . . . illegal abortion . . .

It's all the rage now to reject monolithic thinking. All Irish are not beefy cops. All Blacks don't have natural rhythm. And all Catholics are not opposed to birth control, and legalized abortion.

That's the way our liberal minds are supposed to work now. Since Kennedy, you and I *know* that Catholics don't take blind orders from El Papa.

And yet, sometimes I wonder. About them: about the seven Catholics who help run our state from the comfort and power of the Senate Rules Committee in Olympia. Seven Catholics, two more who are married to Catholics, and a handful of others who quiver every time they get a call from the local representative of El Papa.

I keep wondering about those people. What they

thought about the fourteen chances they had to vote out a bill to legalize sensible abortions. And the fourteen times it was voted down. If I am a liberal, and refuse to think of Catholics in monolithic terms—then why do they go right ahead and perform monolithically? Is there something wrong in their thinking? Or mine?

In the last two months, I have seen three women —children, really—go through the agony of abortion. The agony.

You don't know them. You never will, probably. El Papa—surely—will never know them. And certainly, he, and his representatives, will never have that clawing feeling that I do when I think of what they went through. In some seedy office.

It's all sort of unsavory, I guess. El Papa wouldn't like that. Nor would the Archbishop. Nor would those senators—people just like you and me—who voted fourteen times to keep alive the seedy, grimy business called illegal abortion.

Robert Greive, John Cherberg, Frank Connor—they *have* to shut their eyes, don't they, to the girls scratching up four, or five, or six hundred dollars; they don't want to see them crawling into some drab building here, or in Vancouver, or Portland. To have the "D&C." Without anesthetic.

They don't want to think about that. No: don't think about it and it'll go away. Frank Foley, and

Reuben Knoblauch—with the help of William Gissberg and Sam Guess: they're pure and good, and don't want to think of what goes on in the back rooms. And — God knows — they never want to meet the sweet child of nineteen years, with blonde hair down to here, and blue-green eyes, who will never have children. Because "the job wasn't done right." Couldn't be done right, really. Because it's against the law—remember?

Maybe someday the disciples of El Papa—at least those who sit on the Senate Rules Committee—maybe someday they'll realize that their God may not be the god of the rest of us. Maybe someday they'll understand that the voice of their celibate, seventy-year-old Papa sounds like a curse to the rest of us.

July, 1969

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THE QUESTION OF ABORTION—or "voluntary infanticide"—has been much in the news lately. It is, of course, a real and nagging problem: one which can create bizarre emotionalism on both sides. Which is why this writer has always been careful to steer clear of the subject. As the Chinese are fond of saying: "He who venture into troubled waters gets wet."

Abortion, it must be apparent, is no solution to the problem of overpopulation or unwanted children. I am, indeed, constantly amazed that my contemporaries refuse to look to the past—where such problems have been broached, debated, and resolved. I refer you specifically to the words of the good, witty, and wise Dr. Jonathan Swift, who in 1729 created the solution to all overpopulation for all times.

Modern times demand modern approaches. Dr. Swift, at the time of the writing of his *Modest Pro-*

posal, was living in a far more barbaric time—where murder, rioting on the streets, starvation, and war were all too common. However, let us not condemn a sensible suggestion to oblivion because it isn't modern. Rather, we should change, modify, and enlarge.

For instance, I can well see the federal government embarking on this project with, perhaps, a new department of the OEO. With an acronym such as Operation EAT we could, perhaps as quickly as next year, begin to reward the poor for the overproduction of the single item they seem to know best how to create: namely, unwanted children.

I should emphasize from the start that Operation EAT should be absolutely unbiased in its choice of families to receive its benefits. Although those who will be rewarded must be in the lower income level, I would hope that the purchase program would make absolutely no reference to race, creed, color, or previous condition of servitude. (I am assuming on blind faith that there is no taste difference between —say—a Black child and an Indian child. The Pure Food and Drug Administration, I should hope, would quickly disabuse me of any ignorance on this matter.)

In discussion with various poverty program officials who might be involved in this project, I had evolved the idea of purchasing the children by the pound. It was quickly pointed out to me that this would involve an implied prejudice against families

of smaller bone structure—say, like the Chinese-Americans. I would, of course, refuse to participate in any program which would include such a bias, and have now come to accept the idea that there should be a flat fee for every purchase—of perhaps, $100 per child.

This sum would be a princely one indeed to those families in desperate straits. I have seen too many in acute need of consumer items, or with broken down, wretched, or inadequate televisions, radio, or hi-fi sets. I am quite sure that the offices of Operation EAT will be besieged with supplicants long before the official announcement of the program.

Like most government programs, this one will have to be tested in one or two key cities around the country. As a long-time resident of Seattle, I should certainly hope that this city—whose population and poverty problems are certainly as acute as any in the country—would be considered. After all, this is the birthplace of the concept, and I would trust that we could get extensive cooperation from Senators Magnuson and Jackson despite the fact that the latter has shown some diffidence toward federal spending on social problems such as this one which might deprive the military.

I would be quick to anticipate that ours, as an EAT Model City, could expect the introduction of several million dollars in federal funds into our local

economy; with, as well, a concommitant reduction in our relief case load.

Despite rumors to the contrary, I have always been a practicing member of the free enterprise system. Therefore, I am only too eager to see private enterprise participate in EAT. For instance, franchising is emerging as an excellent method of encouraging new industry and new experiments in catering. Therefore, I should like to see private businesses undertake the purchase of the foodstuffs in bulk from the government, and be totally responsible for processing and distribution to the ultimate consumer.

I would hope that a publically held corporation be set up so that those of us who see the extensive possibilities in this idea could participate. I should like to offer my services to this corporation as an idea man of, perhaps, no mean talent. As proof, I should like to proffer some title for the restaurant chain which will come out of this project: "Pik 'N' Savor" might be attractive (although a bit arch). "Tiny Tot Inn" is good, but my favorite would be "The Tender Haunch." One of our poverty workers has suggested "Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chillin." I hereby offer these ideas to any prospective franchiser free and clear.

As usual, I must make the necessary disclaimer before turning loose Operation EAT for governmental and entrepreneurial operatives. I must emphasize

that I have little to gain from this project: I have no children of my own under the age of ten and, in any event, my wife and I are comfortably situated by my job so that we would not even qualify as a needy family.

No, I place this suggestion before the public solely from a sincere hope that I can do anything possible to advance the economic well-being of our society, our city, most especially, our poor.

August, 1969

THE MYRKIN PAPERS

PART III

1

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I KEEP THINKING that it was Camus, but with my luck, it was probably Kirkegaard, who said: "There must be some reason for my having been born, I know. And it may well be . . ." May well be . . . what? By now, you must realize that I have a terrible memory, and I can't even think of the next line. Assuming of course that there *is* a next line, and that I didn't make the whole thing up myself—which I am wont to do even under the best of conditions.

I woke up this morning with the yellow light coming horizontally across the St. Johns River, light coming into the cane stalks next to my window—a bleak light that almost scared me. I stared into the mirror for maybe an hour, off and on, and thought that I might go looney, but I didn't. I was concentrating this particular morning on the stubbly black hairs growing out of the underside of my chin. These

hairs, for some reason, remind me of fleas. Only they don't move like fleas do—rummaging around, flattened out, purposeful.

I was also busy calculating my net worth: assets, liabilities, intangibles, and accumulated good-will; as well as one-year, ten-year, and lifetime income-outgo statement. It was an exhilarating if slightly dowdy early-morning activity, but it accomplished the necessary: that is, keeping me quietly if not safely abed until nine.

Last night was a ripe time for the dream machine, rolling off in all directions but one, spiralling out ideas-visions-terrors, so full of symbols and faces and memories, so rich with alpha rhythms and sine waves that I am assured constantly, even when I am scarcely breathing, that I am fully alive. Boats run up to and across giant land masses, storms are born and die in a mauve haze, tattooed gothic figures turn slowly on broadcast turntables, and my great aunt Inez appears with a powdery green face, which immediately sets me and my brother Alfred on fire so that we vie for the opportunity to dance with her and pinch her stuck-out bottom. I salute the big pot-of-fat called mind which spews forth these dreams and persuades me that what we laughingly call reality is so encumbering only because it is so constant. It has none of the flavor nor a tenth of the drollness of the nether world.

Returning home (in this case Jacksonville which has—like every other city in the universe—been called alternately "the navel," "the groin," "the armpit" of the nation) . . . as I say, returning home is no better nor worse than a dream. The great peacock imagination needs a locale, a setting for all these tintypes. We usually choose the grade schools and storefronts and streets of our youth for the backdrops of our dreams, and, in this, I am no different from others. For the first two days in Jacksonville I complained noisily for effect and for other fatuous conversational reasons of a strong feeling of *déjà vu* which, I now see, was the wrong term. What I meant to convey (even now perhaps it is possible to correct the wrong I have done—in some sort of a mnemonic expiation) was that I had a strong feeling of Displaced Reality. I have to battle to keep it from scaring me, but I am safe in the knowledge that those who draw on their dreams for entertainment and relaxation will recognize the particular syndrome I am trying to describe.

Homecoming—as it is so joyously called—gives other battles, to be sure. Those of us who grew up stealing each other's clothes and friends and ideas for twenty years can turn abrasive after the first Jello hour has slipped by. This calls for large gatherings or parties with extras (or bit players) from the dramatic past. Extras can be old un-friends, or com-

panions in various drunken escapades, or old lovers —crowded together with egg-nog, bourbon, smoke, and any of the supposed cheer that one is to get from such unnatural juxtapositions.

To say that the abrasiveness of these various family confluences ever comes out in the open is wrong. The whole thing is a yellow submarine, Ringo, with a periscope poking up through the hyacinths every now and again, and with a strenuous effort by all to smush it back down again. I am sure that leaves are confused with vines, and that the beautiful blue multi-petaled hyacinth blossom is confused with some thorny plant, but I shall do my best to suppress this botanical misapprehension. "As best I'm able," as they say in the dank and lovely South there near the dangerous Okefenokee.

Well, I have to tell you, I don't like the thorns of southern partydom, and I spent a great deal of time describing my *déjà vu* to the assembled ex-friends and relatives, or ex-relatives and friends. In the spirit of good keen fun they felt it necessary to poke holes in my balloon, to watch it sag, the air weeping out: so that after five or ten minutes of these jibes, I no longer even had the reality of unreality. One must surrender one's crosses so often at times like this.

I want to reiterate to you (and to myself) that I am in the South, the southern part of the United States, that area roughly bordered by Virginia on the north,

running along the Smokies out of Tennessee, slipping over to the toe of Missouri, and all the way down, snaking down through eastern Arkansas and western Louisiana. I want to tell you about my experience yesterday, of standing downtown in a southern city, with Spanish moss wrapped up on my pliant body and around my eyes: watching, watching. I'm at the corner of Forsythe and Julia, both good southern names, one pronounced "Fors-ayeth," the other "Joooyah." Standing there, the yellow sun through my moss, I was able to create a few ideas about the South, not as it exists in the chants of the civil rights marchers nor in the anger of Louis Lomax; not in the obnoxious advertisements squeezed out by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce which makes it look like culture is flowing out from under the Coca-Cola bottling plants; not even as it exists in the quaint fifty-year-old ideas of my beloved Tennessee Williams with all his soft-spoken Oedipal figures staggering across an oleander-infested stage. No, rather I want to describe the South as I have come to know it in my mind—which has been packed in southern heat and moss for the last twenty years, or ever since I left Jacksonville. After all, this should be the purpose of this narrative, should be the only reality we will allow, dreaming or not.

Here, in this older part of the city, are the potent smells I carry filed back there somewhere, for im-

mediate identification: cooking, fat-frying, fish in corn-meal, stewing (or rotting) vegetables and fruit —even grits: for no matter how tasteless the eternal grits, they hold their own steamy smell. In all this cooking is the overwhelming smell of fatback: the fatty part of either fresh or salt pork, which mixed impartially with spinach, turnips, squash, black-eyed peas and kohlrabi, still renders all foods the same, both in texture and in taste.

Second only to these multifarious food aromas are the omnipresent (I almost said omnipotent) and barbarous smells of the storm drains. I am hard-pressed, even with the memory so close upon me, to convey to you the rank stink of—what they call—storm sewers. On cool nights, every street corner has its resident ghost, its own Father Hamlet, hovering under the naked-bulb street lights—a steam which settles heavily on the nostrils and (judging from my weeks activities here) on the mind. A fetid ghost indeed, growing from the fecund bacteria down below mixed with an oily anti-mosquito preparation sprayed down the throats of these drains monthly by devilish masked Negroes working, presumably, for the city, not for Beezelbub.

I mentioned Negroes, and there we are: all the tensions and differences that I have with my southern ex- or non-friends are not solely in relation to the Negro, but in him at least we have a living moving

(or shuffling) example of what is so irritating about the South. And there we are, looking squarely in the mirror again: only the face that looks back is black, or brown, or yellow-brown—the lips a little bigger, and nose a little flatter, the eyes more liquid; but the shape, the relations, are all the same: hair, eyes, nose, mouth. It's the color: at once simple, at once ragingly complex; light skin—clean, light work, white collar, etc. etc. Dark skin—dirt, dark, dirty work. Garbage, dirty floors, pig sweepings, ditch digging, street cleaning: name a dirty and tedious and backbreaking job, and you have the world of the Negro. The job stinks, therefore the Negro must stink. It's black down there, white up here. What a marvellous propaganda machine the southern white is given by this simple physical difference—what a marvellous thing: a shadow, a black hand, black but comely; the symbol is ready-made, the trap is open, and the simple white southern mind *must* fall into it.

Here, on the corner of Forsythe and Julia, every third person who passes me is of a different color. And just because my simple mind likes brightness and light, every third person is far more interesting —because of the colors, and the music, and the dark liquid bones: fuschia and orange shirts, magenta pants, mauve and turquoise blouses, ivory and patent shoes. So much more alive than the flat voiced, pimple-infested, seedy southern cracker white who

settled in and runs Jacksonville. God, what a difference between black and white, or has the ample sun addled my reason, made me see white for black? There's no doubt in *my* mind why the southern white man shut his pasty virginal southern sowbelly wife in the upper bedroom behind shutters while he went rutting through niggertown in search of life, and (should we say it?) warmth, and (we must say it!) black power.

Southern white man, a slave to his slavery. Or is such possible: am I all entrapped by the obvious liberal sophistry? A slave to the emotions of the body which color the colored world desirable. James Baldwin says the mind of white man is a photographic negative and lens—we, you and I, project forth the dark parts of ourselves, letting them engorge and infest our image of the Negro, so that the husky delivery boy becomes a big black buck, lusting after everything white, with a razor in one hand, a huge black tireless prick in the other. What does the song mean *I Am Black But Comely*? Why does it ring so true, now, only now, after two thousand years of all this dark travail. When my friends ask me where I am going for Christmas, I always draw on my southern accent (like a shawl) and say "Waal, Ah think Ah'm going home for a spell and whup me a few nigras, join one of them lynchin' bees . . ." The ghosts aren't over the sewers, they're in the trees, way up

in the oaks and scrub pine somewhere . . .

Those who fancy ourselves a part of the North come to these ideas slowly. It takes forever for us to realize that a black man cannot look a white man dead in the eye, that he must always "bend his back" (Strindberg's terminology, not my own), that he can still be strung up for even looking at the flesh of a white woman for more than an instant. It is no wonder that the southern Negro is denutted, castrated long before puberty when he is cut off from any play relations with white children. A man of fourteen or eighteen or twenty-one, as full of the rage of youth as you and I, cut off, castrated, his woman working for any white couple who can scrape up $25 a week; she no doubt under attack at least once a year by some drunken white male; a Negro man learning first hand that he has got to crouch in the sweepings of the whites, enraged so that at nights he rises up, blind and furious on bad whiskey, turning on his own, slashing at his black-skinned brothers with broken bottles, razor blades, four-inch switch-blade knives. A Negro (safely in the North) once told me: "Any white-assed mothah, no matter how stupid, can tell me to eat shit. And you know brother, if life is precious, if I want to wake up the next morning, no matter how my mattress stinks, no matter how dumb and back-breaking my job: if I simply *want* to wake up the next morning, then

me, poor nigger, poor nutless, shifty-eyed nigger, am going to eat that white mothah's shit . . ."

In my own white house, with white columns, and white curtains, and a bright-light fire in the fireplace with andirons shined bright copper by Katie (from back there in the kitchen somewhere): in this bright white cool house where I grew up, we—my mother, a sister, two brothers—sit in a half-circle around the bright fire. Mr. Alan is there too (soft baby-light hair, ruddy cheeks, metal rimless glasses, a thin, bespectacled Santa). Mr. Alan who is at least quarter father to me—not that he had a hand in the actual production of my charming self, but who was there with a hand caressing my head or banging my butt at least a quarter of my youth, so that I looked up and he looked down and we understood each other quite well enough . . . Mr. Alan, Mr. Elliott Alan (pronounced "Ell-yutt" with considerable emphasis on the first syllable) talks at great length around our white and safe fire about "niggers" and "niggertown." Mr. Alan so free and easy with a word that always, no matter how I try, always chokes me up —a word that I use with a great deal of fear and trembling; a word I use on special occasions as a love word, or to mock the Ell-yutts in my past: but a word that I use (I *must* repeat) as a love word. He says nigger and nigger and nigger, interlarding his conversation with it like pepper, pronouncing it,

as always, "nig-guh," the last syllable only barely there, almost lost in a fog of his southern, gentlemanly, polite voice. Can there be any love in the way he says it? Am I too wrapped up in my moss and ghosts and the simplicity of my view of the simplicity of southern white viewpoint thus missing something terribly important? Like love?

For we can't forget, you and I, that Elliott and his wife, and his uncle and grandfather, and his aunt and son and daughter-in-law and nephew and grandson: we can't forget that the first warm and loving thing they perceived out of the tangle of birth and the simple blindness of their one and two and five and eight years growing-up, from the first crap in the pants, the first sweet sugar-tit in the gums, the first warm all encumbering arms protecting, holding, given freely and lovingly, was a great black mass known as Mammy or Dilsey or Bertha. A big black mammy with brown-black eyes and slow words and slow anger and gentle pink-palm hands and a print dress in which her massive boobies were never fully obscured, with flat shuffly feet (pink soles) never fully encased in unpolished, heelless shoes with the sides razored open so that the black toes stuck out like beetles stuck out of their own dried and tender skin.

Elliott and his endless relatives don't forget the warmth of their mammy so easily, do they? So I'm

wrong, and I know it: when Elliott says *nigger,* there's love there, no better nor worse than mine—the same sort of devotion (his eyes lit up in delight, patiently telling) to getting his grandson's mammy into the hospital, or getting grandson's mammy's boyfriend out of the jailhouse. Why is he in jail, Elliott. Why does he seem to get in 'least once a month, Elliott? Is it hate, or just nigguh-dumbness, Elliott?

Sometime I shall have to tell you my fantasy of having a Negro lover—of travelling across the South, illegally, hiding in freight cars, lying flashing in the throes of love in some dim cotton field, with red clay brushed across your black hair, love, wisps of cotton stuck in the hair on your body love. White and black, salt and pepper, the dark and the light of it, love: you and I, white against black, newsprint, the day and the night of it—always on the run. For the steel-grey, heavy-lidded eyes of Sheriff Sweat with the great patches in the armpits and across the broad expanse of the back and presumably under the belt that crosses such a grand hominy-grits and pork-fed belly —the good red-faced sheriff will be long after us, will want to play hob with our black-and-white, civil-libertarian, intergalactic play-around. O Sheriff Sweat will be mad as hell, I can tell you that, love: and at my back I can always hear, the sound of his flat-out white Ford drawing near.

The fantasies leave me. I am now, like most

southerners, cold and alone. Through the window with its plastic screening and its driblets of moisture and stuck flies, I can see the azaleas and slash pine and yellow cane. The sun comes down now, not flat across. If I listen hard, I can hear the engineer of the Florida East Coast Railway Champion skirting town, playing with the horn on the giant diesel at some of the sixty crossings between here and Daytona. He just mouths the horn a little bit, so it comes out "yow-up" or sometimes shorter: "oo-wump," "wump." It's a funny sound, a spooky sound, unearthly. I've never heard it anywhere else. I wonder if the Florida East Coast has a special course in Crossing Horn Blowing, or The Mournful Sound of Trains Long Past. I can follow the sound and the progress of the trains in a great circle route from the downtown terminal out past MacDuff and Edgewood, along Ortega and finally fading out somewhere in the direction of MacClenney. I am sure I woke up this morning, heard that peculiar "oo-wump," was a bit scared by it. Another creature come up out of the Okefenokee, I thought: along with the thick smells and the clouds of mosquitoes has come this dismal sound which (O Lord) may be no train at all, but something just as large, just as dispassionate, just as mournful.

I have another enervating day before me today. Since my prolific grandparents never ceased ruffling

up the feathers of their pasty, soft-spoken, oft-fainting southern white women, I would guess that there will be fifty of them here. There will be Uncle Jess, all grunts and groans as he carries his prodigious stomach across the room from sofa to bar, and back to sofa again. Cousin Bob, tight black vest, tight dark smile, full of the fire of ministerial truth, back from stuffing his boys at Interlaken Camp with the bright glories of Jesus and the dark wet dangers of communism and unchaperoned girls in the moonlight. Aunt Josie, wearing a prodigious cartwheel hat with all sorts of interesting intermixed *papier-mâché* bananas and plums cascading over her mottled brow. Cousin Jennifer who asked me, you know, and I weep with joy to think of it now: me, age fourteen, washed and ready for my first supper at her new house, asking me if I had been washed in the Blood of the Lamb; and poor dull me, stupid me, thinking it all had something to do with supper, and the preparation, some special lamb treat. Cousin Bowman, Clark Gabling all his cousin girls scarlet by growing up fastest and handsomest—banging now from job to job, selling tractors, now electrical equipment, now manure spreaders. Cousin Arlie, they called her Squeeks when she was, you know, just so high, invited by proud father Arman to sing "Over the Rainbow"; better than Judy ever did: or anyway, louder; poor, flat-faced, petulant Arlie, now long past, ever

past puberty, alas, Squeeky no longer. Sister Mill: the finest argument for birth-control extant—seven (or is it eight) squalling, thin-cheeked, dribble-mouthed children, all cut definitely from the same depressing mould.

Can there be more? Of course: southern prodigality, like southern manhood and southern pride, knows no bounds. Uncle B. H. and a cavernous mouth, with no end of bad teeth; Aunt Dee who drinks too much and tells endless slurred stories; Uncle Benson: tall, pale, and useless; Uncle Fred: thin and steel-rimmed (glasses, not soul). Are they *all* going to be here? Or has my memory deserted me in this endless peatbog. Have all of them, have any of them been laid in the soft dank stinky ground, where the worms—in contrast to everything else southern—work so terribly fast, where the rats grow and burrow so prolifically, and the sweet hot summer rains come so regularly at four, soft warm drops from four to five p.m., and then move on to honey the ground in Fernandina, or Yulee, or Savannah.

God knows if they live or die. I'll know, without question, today, at least. As I say, I have an enervating day before me, and I rise to meet it with nothing; nothing, that is, but a little bit of leftover Southern Gentlemanliness, and some courtly manners, and no small feeling of wonder.