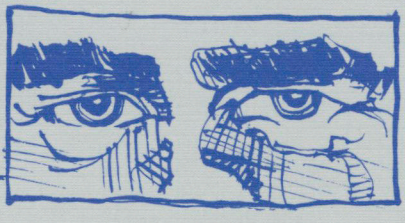
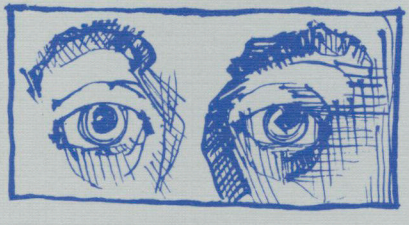
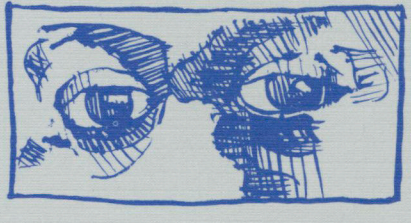
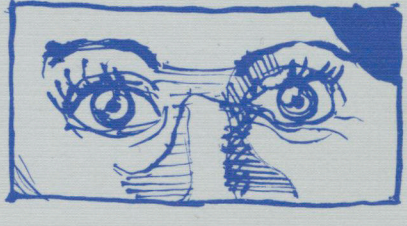
HELICON

A JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES









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A JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

VOLUME I, 1980

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ANDREA KAMBARA

PAST THE LOOKING-GLASS

"Consider anything, only don't cry!"

I've come a long way getting here, a fall
Girls dream of, closing their eyes in sleep
Who wake in wonder. I've had my share
Of cards and grins, have eaten buttered bread
With tea to make me tall. Each riddle gleamed
Too bright, the sign of madness; logic tricks
So swift I nearly lost my head. Sometimes
Salt tears appeared as I wept like a child for bed.

The queens who never cry must rule their head
At any cost. When leaves turn up their yellow hands
Cracked-dry and empty, when rushes lose their scent
And fade in heaps at my feet, I would dream
Of coming home, but lost the backward path.

MARYELLEN McLAUGHLIN

WIND RIVER

The other day I thought of Riverton,
in buttered August sunlight we drove through,
I looked for Indians, and you were laughing,
eating pretzels. Heartbreak radio
stopping now and then;
                your Nikon poised
to save my first views of your holy land.
Beside the highway, grazing antelope,
oblivious to traffic, camera, time,
as if there were no changes,
                or no world.
Tumbleweeds, amazing, and the signs:
NATRONA: POPULATION 5 — Wind River —
and everything was slowed in dust, in bars,
in the back of a pickup there was one
young Indian, eyes closed, and the wind
lifted his dirty hair, he never moved,
living in Riverton, while we were passing through —
careless summer ride to Jackson — life
was sweet,
            As a child I dreamed of Indians
that walked silently and fed deer from their hands.
In Riverton, the men wear heavy boots,
and life is hard and dirty, seldom sweet.
There were no deer in Riverton that day.

AVALON

I saw three Amish girls, they stood as one,
Giggling outside a beach hotel.
Their hair was down and drying in the sun.
Older than I, they were no more than girls.
There were no secrets in their eyes, and time
Had not reclaimed their faith, nor taught them pride.
The song of the Atlantic, so long mine,
Is meaningless to those who've never lied.
Though by this ocean's sound I've lived, its roar
Is not the lullaby that it once seemed,
And not the hymn I've often wished it were.
The song is mine, it echoes in the sea.
So turning west, I know it will remain
Inside me. Ocean hums a soft refrain.

JEFF LIPKIS

COOTIES

The day Valerie Priest pirouetted to the forefront of my consciousness was the day Miss Raleigh lost control of the fifth grade class at Cedar Street Elementary School. This was itself something of a memorable occasion: the fifth grade teacher was an ice-cool martinet. We loved her anyway: she was beautiful. Perhaps, it occurs to me now, her dainty sarcasms sharpened and intensified her beauty.

I say she was beautiful, but in fact I hardly remember her severe face. I certainly have no recollection of her body. Beauty, for children, is something of a platonic category; true aesthetes, they have no inclination (indeed, no capacity) for exploiting it, appropriating it. The little antennae responsive to sexual buzzings exist nonetheless. And those of most of the fifth grade boys registered something quite out of the ordinary in the presence of Valerie Priest.

Valerie's family had only moved to North Hollywood the previous year. She was pale and aloof. She had a small, exquisite face, dark almond eyes, and medium length glossy black hair, worn in what I now think was a shag cut. Amid the large and boisterous great-grandchildren of Teutonic peasants, she appeared almost Asiatic, an expensive Kyoto courtesan.

Prohibitively expensive, we soon learned. She had no desire to be liked. Once, while I was entertaining her with a recital of the Gettysburg address in what I took to be a Transylvanian accent, while standing on my head, I observed a small, lady-like cat yawn, the open right hand arriving at the mouth a second too late. And then what I was only to recognize retrospectively as a quick, con-

descending smile. I had never been condescended to by someone of my own age before, and the blood would have rushed to my head had it not been there in apoplectic volume already.

On the morning of the day Miss Raleigh lost control of the class, someone, Jimmy Franklin I think, threw up before school on one of the benches by the handball courts. One by one we tiptoed up for a look.

A group of girls stood well off to the side and upwind, their heads together, giggling. Suavely I walked up and began to regale them with a graphic description of the vomit, its color and consistency. I intimated that I had procured a small sample for their inspection. This produced the desired response. The girls scattered amid shrill cries of "eck" and "ugh." I smiled down at my sneakers, then looked up into the cool, disdainful eyes of Valerie Priest.

"Actually," I said to Valerie, "it's fascinating to think about the metamorphosis." The word was lifted from the previous week's vocabulary list. "Breakfast becomes barf. A mere half hour ago, that" —I gestured toward the bench— "was cornflakes, hot chocolate. . . ."

"Jay, don't be vulgar," said refined Valerie with such severity I stopped abruptly, uncharacteristically, and studied my sneakers. She tossed her head, pivoted gracefully, and walked off. My cheeks burned. Twice in one week she had made me blush.

And in class that morning I underwent a third humiliating experience, at the rather more accomplished hands of Miss Raleigh. It was November of 1960. I wonder if today a presidential election is regarded by elementary school teachers as the edifying spectacle it was then taken to be. We were to be witness to democracy in action, the principal, skittish Mr. Skelty, had solemnly informed us, witness to a free people choosing freely its leaders, its next President, its Congress. We were herded into the auditorium to watch video tapes of the first debate, a mystifying event of appreciably less entertainment value than the subsequent performance of snow blind Robert Frost stumbling over his hortatory inaugural poem, same auditorium, same tendentious M.C., Vivian Skelty.

In the classroom, the responsibilities of the citizen in a participatory democracy were tirelessly hammered home. Among the plethora of activities launched that fall by autocratic Miss Raleigh, I recall recitations of the names, party affiliations, and districts of all of California's congressmen, two formal debates on the not entirely germane topics of free trade and capital punishment, a lengthy dis-

cussion of all the ballot propositions, and a number of quizzes in which we had to demonstrate a familiarity with such esoteric entities as Quemoy and Matsu, the missile gap, and Henry Cabot Lodge.

One such exercise devolved on me. A large map of the U.S. with all states outlined in black, had been hung up on one side of the room. On the Wednesday morning following the election, I was to color them in, one by one, according to their duly expressed sympathies, as recorded by the *L.A. Times*. The colors were of my own choosing: blue, my favorite, for Kennedy and the Democrats, bile yellow, the yellow of Jimmy Franklin's vomit, for Richard M. Nixon.

The problem I faced today was this: with inconclusive returns from California, my partisan enthusiasms had prevailed and I had colored the state blue. For several days I had put off changing it to yellow, and Miss Raleigh, a righteous Republican, was getting increasingly irritated.

"Perhaps this morning, if it's convenient for you, Jay, you'll correct our map to reflect the preference of the voters of this state. Unless you are privy to some inside information." She delivered herself of this sarcasm as soon as I entered the room. I shrugged and walked over to the map. "Not now," she snapped. "Get in your seat. You'll do it during nutrition and lunch."

It is difficult for me to imagine a time when a humble electorate was compelled to wait 24 hours to find out the results of its balloting. It is equally difficult for me to recall my passionate identification with the state of California. My enthusiasm for Kennedy is rather more comprehensible: my parents were active Democrats, even, to use a quaint expression of the day, liberals; and Kennedy's youthfulness was something that appealed even to children. I took his rejection by California voters as a grave personal insult.

I remember, during nutrition, slowly scraping away at the blue crayon wax with my index finger and feeling both acutely embarrassed and vaguely resentful that my state, my state, had shown such a disgraceful lapse of judgment in so critical a matter. The blue proved more obdurate than I'd anticipated. I would scrape off a fine shaving of pale wax, and would simultaneously embed deeper into the unresisting pasteboard a complementary layer of pigment. I tried coloring over one small peeled area with yellow. The result was distressing: a bluish turquoise. I scraped away at the yellow wax.

Not many months earlier I had begun biting my fingernails. The thin and ragged edge of my index finger was making a poor instrument. I cupped my hand into a small claw and tore at the blue with all my torn nails. In one downward sweep of my hand, the abused nail of my forefinger caught, the skin pulled away from the blue carapace, and tears stung my eyes. The physical pain, I remember, I felt to be indistinguishable from, indeed a part of, the larger anguish of betrayal. I remember, too, the distinct desire to bring my pain to beautiful and cruel Miss Raleigh, who was banging boxes around in the cloakroom.

Just then I heard a timid knock on the open classroom door. No students were allowed in the building during nutrition. I looked up. A man I'd never seen before loomed above me in the hall.

"Uh, is Suzanne around?" he asked. If his tone and demeanor were not in themselves sufficent to throw me into paroxysms of bafflement, the allusion to Miss Raleigh assuredly was. Teachers did not have first names any more than they had private lives.

Hearing the stranger's timorous "Suzanne," I experienced a small, chilly frisson. Above the roar of a cracking gestalt, I heard myself say, "She's in the cloakroom."

Then, quick footsteps, the click of stiletto heels, the angry hiss of nylon. Miss Raleigh rounded the corner, tucking a lock of red hair behind her ear.

"Jerry. What. Are. You. Doing. Here?" She pronounced each word separately. She stood rigid, hands on hips, one toe tapping a menacingly slow beat. Her imperious green eyes burned like dry ice.

I felt a sudden kinship with handsome, unhappy Jerry.

"Come here," she whispered, and started retreating to the cloakroom. Jerry followed. She changed her mind. "Jay, go outside for the rest of nutrition. You can finish California at lunch."

I knelt outside the door in the warm and fragrant hall, pretending to tie my sneaker. I heard angry whispers. They stopped. The door swung open. "Jay. Out," commanded Miss Raleigh.

The stranger was holding her left hand and, eyes downcast, was stroking it, stroking it slowly and feelingly, as if to bring a dead thing to life.

Stephanie Morrison. The disembodied name — I've tried it out on friends — conjures up nothing more exotic than an emaciated model, or a brittle young secretary in an advertising agency. For me

the name will be forever bound up with a doleful, malodorous girl with a chubby face and short, spiky black hair.

All fifth grade girls had cooties. Stephanie Morrison (as malicious Rick Malleus explained to me one day) was herself a cootie. I still wince when I think of the cruel teasing the girl was subjected to for so many years. She was an untouchable. A traditional dare, or penalty, was to hold hands with Stephanie for a specified number of seconds. The dare had never been successfully taken up, the penalty never exacted.

Constant abuse scars in predictable ways: poor Stephanie embraced the fantasies of her tormentors — she made herself over into a cootie. Perhaps the dynamic was more complex (the thought is not original with me); perhaps Stephanie elicited the abuse, acting out of some grim imperative obtaining to the filial relationship. It is certainly true that one has to despise oneself before becoming despicable to others.

Stephanie Morrison stared across the empty tables at the row of boys. We were lined up by height, in single file, in front of the door beside the cloakroom. Before the other door, at the far end of the room, the girls were similarly arrayed.

I stared at turquoise California, next to the blackboard. Everybody else was busily engaged in calculating who his or her partner would be. The class had just returned from nutrition, and we were headed for the auditorium for an hour of "social dancing." On the very stage where Kennedy and Nixon had so inconclusively debated ("through the miracle of television"—Mr. Skelty), we would gingerly execute the monotonous steps of "Tea for Two."

Perhaps responding to some dimly perceived disorder in Miss Raleigh, a certain wildness in her bottle-green eyes, a rapid licking of the lips, an equally uncharacteristic washing gesture (her dainty freckled hands caressing each other at belt level) the boys that morning were especially unruly. I shut my eyes and saw Jerry's stricken countenance.

After some cursory pushing and shoving, Tony Velasco, Stephanie's prospective partner, abruptly abandoned his place in line. He sauntered toward the rear, then slipped back into line in front of plump and complacent Johnny Weber.

"Tony," shouted Miss Raleigh, but it was too late. Curly-haired Alan Freedman, three quarters of an inch taller than Tony and now paired with Stephanie, emitted a shrill wail and rushed to the

front of the line. The whole line now gave way, snapping at the midpoint, as it were, into two buzzing coils of pre-pubescent malice.

"Freeze," yelled furious Miss Raleigh, and in her fury proceeded to make a grave mistake. "Stephanie, come here," she said, glaring at Alan Freedman. "Please choose whichever one of these *little boys* you want for a partner."

Stephanie sidled across the room, an unpleasant smirk crimping her fat face. She stopped about five feet in front of the nearest group of boys, rubbed her snub nose, and regarded each of us, one by one. The tiny brown eyes rested on Marty Bayliss. Marty was, in the then-current elementary school parlance, "tough." which was to say his blond hair was slicked back in a ducktail, he wore white t-shirts, or a white t-shirt, a tight black leather jacket, smoked Camels after school, and spoke knowledgeably and at great length about a topic then not expressly forbidden, but not discussed in any very candid way by adults, and about which the dearth of empirical data contributed materially to the most engaging fantasies. I would like to be able to say Marty became a respected civil libertarian, a noted concert pianist, a distinguished professor of classics. In fact he was executed at point blank range by members of a rival motorcycle club a mere seven years later.

Stephanie took two more steps toward Marty. She reached out a small sausage arm, though he was still ten feet away, and extended it, palm splayed upward, as if to hypnotize him.

Marty smiled back. He began walking toward her, still smiling. He reached out his hand. She lowered hers. The great stillness in the room was the more impressive for the pandemonium which had preceded it. Stephanie's blubbery-lipped smile widened. Her anticipation was almost palpable.

When their hands were within an inch of each other, Marty let loose a demonic squawk, pinched the girl's broad nose, and leapt onto the nearest row of tables. Stephanie, blinded by tears of rage and pain, strode unsteadily toward another boy, Howard Michaelson. The tears fell, her tiny maniacal eyes sparkled. Howard, possibly more terrified than repulsed, leapt onto the table. At the same time Miss Raleigh made a grab for Marty. He dodged. She slipped and fell heavily against the edge of the table.

The next moment Stephanie was off, careening around the room like a chubby rabid rodent. Within seconds, all the boys, even obese Brian Obsfeldt, were up on the tables. The girls backed up

against the wall, giggling and screaming, and little Stephanie circled and circled, a lone Fury, moaning and mumbling to herself. Whenever she tried to approach the tables, she was met by jeers and kicks.

Miss Raleigh had pulled herself into a chair. She'd had the wind knocked out of her, and sat bent over, her jaw slack, her red hair disheveled. Everyone was watching Stephanie. I watched Miss Raleigh. Our eyes met.

Without any forethought, without, indeed, much consciousness of what I was doing, I jumped down from the table and yelled "Stephanie." She came running over, then stopped, expecting a ruse. I grabbed her fat wet hand and pulled her toward the door. As we walked by Miss Raleigh, I turned and said, "We'll wait in the aud."

When we were in the hall, I released her hand and ran down the pale green corridor to the auditorium. Stephanie followed. We sat down on the stage. She started to say something. "Just don't talk to me right now," I said. Then I noticed my hands were trembling. I experienced a moment of intense nausea, and walked unsteadily to a trash can by the side door. I swayed over its open mouth. But by clenching my teeth and shutting my eyes tightly, I kept down the cornflakes and hot chocolate.

I was the object of considerable curiosity at lunch, but I don't recall attempting to explain my motives. I also remember being discomforted after lunch, when Miss Raleigh, self-possessed once again, discussed the "unpleasant incident." Marty, Tony, and Alan were roundly castigated, not by name. "But that does not exculpate the rest of you," we were told, and evangelical Miss Raleigh, now hitting stride, delivered herself of an icy sermonette on Charity. Marty was then ordered to the principal's office, a denouement robbed of some of its pity and terror by our knowledge of the bumbling incumbent.

Then Miss R. singled out one member of the class for his good breeding, his common sense, his compassion. I blushed furiously, of course, and blushed the more for finding myself blushing. One can hardly be overpraised by a teacher one respects, and when that teacher is an exemplary representative of the opposite sex, the praise is especially titillating. But Miss Raleigh's encomia were curiously dissatisfying. The blush rapidly cooled, turbid ego juices congealed. I looked up from the desk top at Miss Raleigh, dissatis-

faction in my eyes and a faint, and I hoped faintly derisive, smile on my lips. If she noticed, she didn't show it.

After school I headed out one of the side exits. I lived to the east, beyond the shopping center. Most of my colleagues lived west of the school, on the other side of intimidating Carmichael Boulevard. The schoolyard stretched before me.

It had grown unseasonably warm by mid-afternoon. Fresh tar steamed from the newly filled cracks on the basketball court. The macadam surfacing the entire schoolyard was badly fissured. When bored at lunch, I would follow with my eyes the hairline cracks which divided and subdivided like tiny capilliaries.

Occasionally we would pry up pieces of macadam abutting one of the larger fractures and try to hit the flagpole. The American flag and the California flag flew on two adjacent poles, and we always aimed for the ball on top of the former. I think respect, curiously, not indifference, determined the choice, and I wonder now what prompted this reverence for the state flag. California had once been a nation, Miss Raleigh told us, eyes bright with pride. If it were a nation today, it would be one of the richest and most powerful in the world. With — and here a cautionary index finger was raised, and the voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper — with a higher per capita income than the United States. That the earth cracked and, occasionally, trembled under our feet didn't matter. Nobody's roots went very deep. Fissures underfoot were a condition of being.

I looked out across the empty schoolyard and east toward the San Bernardino Mountains, where the smog lay dense and still. The mid-afternoon sun shot the upper regions of the amorphous, puce colored mass with delicate jaundice highlights. I stooped for a drink of water at the far fountain.

As I started to straighten up I felt a cold hand on my neck. I turned awkwardly and looked up at Marty Bayliss. Behind him were three older boys dressed identically in white t-shirts, black leather jackets, and jeans.

"Better wash your mouth out real good if you don't want Stephanie's cooties."

"Look," I squealed, "somebody had to step in and end it. Another couple of minutes and Miss Hadley would have been in the

room." Miss Hadley taught sixth grade in the adjacent classroom, and like most very ugly people, was exceptionally malicious.

"So it had to be you, huh?" We were talking at least.

Only then did it occur to me to make him laugh. "I looked upon myself as a human sacrifice." I leaned back against the white stucco wall and spread my arms. The abrasive plaster scraped the back of my hands. "I am the light. I am the way," I intoned.

Marty smiled.

One of his sullen attendants interrupted. "Hey man, we don't have all day." I looked into his pig eyes, his spacious chin, where a surly beard was beginning to conceal a glowing band of acne. I looked away.

"Marty, listen. You don't really *believe* in cooties." This was a mistake. Something shut off behind the pale blue eyes. For a moment he groped to express his anger. Then he grabbed the front of my shirt, twisted it, and pushed me back against the wall.

The double door at the far end of the south wing clattered open. We waited. Valerie Priest rounded the corner, and stepped into the diffused late-afternoon light. She stopped, rocked back onto her right leg, hands on hips, and studied us. Her thin smile, reflexively condescending, cut deeper than usual.

"What's going on boys?" Her voice was small but cool, flawlessly hostessy. She accepted our stares.

The smile deepened, and I noticed, with slight alarm, how unreally white her throat was. She lowered her eyes for a second, and a tiny turquoise vein in her perfect left eyelid fluttered.

"I cannot believe, I really cannot believe that you two are going to fight over poor Stephanie Morrison. Please, Marty, tell me I'm wrong. I mean I'm really shocked at both of you."

She pretended to see the three junior high school boys for the first time. She inspected the nearest one until he looked down, then she turned to Marty. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your friends?"

Marty mumbled something unintelligible.

Valerie moved closer to the older boy. "What's your name?"

"Chuck." Chuck didn't look up. His small cupped ears blazed.

"Well, Chuck," said Valerie, reaching up and stroking his neck with her tiny white hand, "if you were really a good friend of

Marty's, I don't see how you could have advised him to do anything but forget as quickly as possible the whole unpleasant incident."

She turned to me. "And if you two don't apologize immediately, I'm never going to speak to either of you again. I'm serious." She smiled shyly. This intensified our confusion.

"Uh," said Marty. One of the junior high school boys said something that sounded like "beer," and gestured with his head. All four walked off, hands in pockets. Just inside the gate, Marty spit copiously at the cyclone fence. Saliva glittered in one metal rectangle. The strand snapped, and I turned back to Valerie. She was no longer smiling.

"Walk me home," she said quietly.

"OK," I replied, as if it had been a question.

I pause. Valerie's conversation does not sound credible. Sadly, it is. An oppressively anachronistic sense of authorial obligations compels me to try to explain the nuanced inflections, the brittle superciliousness. I can only offer the following information: Valerie's parents were rich, educated, and divorced. Her father was a successful psychoanalyst. Her mother was an unsuccessful actress.

"Why *did* you do it?"

"Do what?" I grinned. This stupidity was greeted by patient silence. "I don't know. I guess I felt sorry for Stephanie."

Valerie's eyes narrowed.

"I did." And at that moment I believed I did. Miss Raleigh was forgotten. "I thought girls appreciated chivalry when they saw it."

We walked through the open back door, past the staircase and out the front of the building. The flags hung limply. We crossed the lawn and started down the steps of the underpass beneath Carmichael.

Valerie smiled and shook her head. "The other girls *did not* appreciate what you did. You must see that they need Stephanie."

I frowned, and concentrated on the distinctive tunnel fragrance, a heady mix of fermenting urine, bubblegum, wet moss, a peanut buttery smell of unknown origin, and other alluvial odors.

"Do you know what a scapegoat is?" A truck whooshed overhead.

I didn't know what a scapegoat was. "I think so."

"A scapegoat is somebody who everybody assigns their sins to. Symbolically. Then they kill him. Or her. So nobody has to feel guilty."

I nodded. We ascended into banal daylight.

"So Stephanie is a scapegoat. What are the sins?"

We stopped outside Moskowitz's Candy Store, two doors from the tunnel exit. Valerie cocked her head at me. "You don't know?" Her smile sharpened. "The sin is needing boys. Wanting boys to like us. Having the cooties."

I frowned. Valerie laughed. "Don't you see. It's not so complicated. Stephanie makes it easier for the rest of us." Valerie saw I was still puzzled. "Look. Little boys are very frightened of the attentions of little girls, of their needs. Now this fear is expressed as hostility. If there can be one person the boys can direct their hostility toward, well, so much the better for the rest of the girls."

"Let's get some milk bottles," I said. These were small containers of edible wax, filled with different flavored juices. You could carefully bite off the top and drink the bright liquid. Or — and this was much the preferred method — slowly chew mouthfuls of wax and juice, biting hard to seal off the remaining contents.

The string of bells on the door jangled, the pneumatic closer hissed, and we breathed chocolate and pistachio nuts. The store was empty. I started to walk to the counter. Valerie turned toward me, her head tilted, and I stopped.

"So why did you do it?"

"Look. I really did feel sorry for Stephanie."

"You don't give a damn about Stephanie."

This brought me up short. "Fuck" had not then penetrated the elementary schools, and "damn" was the foulest curse, the *ultima thule* of naughtiness. But precisely for this reason the word was always used with great ceremony, as a single expletive. To slip it casually into the middle of a sentence was not done.

My mouth opened and shut before I managed a lukewarm denial. "I did too feel sorry for her." Even as I said this I realized, with a small jolt, that there was a sense in which this wasn't true. "OK, why did I do it?" I was genuinely curious.

Valerie's eyes became slits; her metallic laugh tinkled. "Suzanne Raleigh," she said.

I walked to the counter, agitated. Mrs. Moscowitz peered over the glass case, a wizened pixie, yellow and deflated, black wig askew, exhaling smoke. I concentrated on the large, translucent mole just to the left of her shapeless nose. "Two. Cherry," I said, pointing. "Please." I paid and returned to Valerie.

"Yeah," I said, with simulated casualness, "I suppose I felt sorry for old Miss Raleigh."

Valerie gave a lady-like snort. "Sorry?"

"What?"

"Sorry? For Suzanne?"

"First, I wish you wouldn't call her that. Second, yes, I did." I was glad to be annoyed.

"You know, you're not going to win her chilly little heart by dancing with Stephanie Morrison."

This tone, this diction, was unspeakable. I scowled at the festive floor. I looked at Valerie. Navy blue shoes with pointed toes, like the junior high school "soshes" wore, white sox, carefully rolled down, thin and elegant legs, cotton skirt, powder blue, pleated and rather long, expensive white wool pullover, a cable-stitched stripe navigating each slim shoulder, running to the vulnerable, kissable wrists, a flaring Peter Pan collar, navy blue, setting off the magnificent white neck, the dainty chin, the smirk. "Girls don't like good little boys, Jay. Especially girls like Suzanne."

I bit hard into the pink wax. Red juice spurted.

"Out," screamed Mrs. Moscowitz.

The door hissed behind us. I offered Valerie the other bottle. She shook her head. I bit the top off, sucked noisily, and began chewing.

"Hey, Jay, don't be angry." I looked up. She was smiling. "Spit it out." I spit into the gutter.

Valerie Priest leaned forward and kissed me on the lips.

She winked at me — I think she winked at me — pivoted on one perfect foot and ran off.

FRANK PAPATHEOFANIS

NO MAN'S EXPEDITION

All was not quiet,
We tipped from side to side,
My elbows touched the warm, sticky water
The noise had never ceased tearing
My skin dry, mouth coarse leather,
Slowly we slipped over the oily shimmer,
Only twelve more days and we would land in French Cameroon.

DANIEL O'RIORDAN

HUBERT VAN EYCK'S "THE HOLY LAMB"

This field is full of all the holy ones.
They come with palms in hand and hope in heart.
Above the earth a dove distributes grace
As each enlightened soul enjoys a glance.
The dying lamb provides the metaphor
And cherubs swing their censers high as God;
A golden chalice catches blood that streams
So strangely from the yearling's open neck.
The rich, the poor, maiden and whore shall shine
Beneath the falling glory of the Lord. . . .

What assurance pacifies the throng?
Their human doubts are tightly sealed behind
The splendid sparkle of His glory rings;
How quickly will the secular return
When they have quit the presence of that lamb
And Heaven's bright divinity is flung
Away for wordly practicality —
There are lands to conquer, infidels —
But in this quiet field, who speaks of blood
That will be spilled to spread His holy name?

NIGHTMARE EROTICA

Beneath the tree
Where nothing grows,
I watched the moon
Until I froze.

The clouds were streaked
And shadows long,
A wolf was loose,
The wind blew strong.

And O! she beamed
Upon the rise
As if to boast
Her blue disguise.

A howl was heard
To chill the bone,
The moon spread wide —
I turned to stone.

BREUGHEL'S "THE CRIPPLES"

Their purpose, then? to suffer and to beg?
The chains and foxtails signify their cause.
One pivots on his pointy shin, all pegged
And crutched and capped to seize the day.
He whispers to a confidant who turns
A hidden ear as if to arbitrate
An absolution for a cripple's crime.
Another squats, mouth open as a sore,
With legs of flesh but quite without control —
And, opposite the rest, two others still.

Do they look forward to eternity?
Bare sustenance from cheap compassion's coin,
God knows they know no decency on earth,
The woman in the cape, as whole as poor,
Extends her beggar's pan while turned away —
She has no pity for the miserable,
But stands aloof as if, indeed, alone.
The cripples could be on another world.
Through wretched, starved, and far beyond repair,
The devastated judge, and do ignore.

EDWARD C. ERNST

A PRE-MODERN AESTHETIC IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT BROWNING

In his essay "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," Morse Peckham asserts that the fundamental precept of the Romantic movement was a belief in the self as the primary source of order in human experience. Rejecting the notions of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment who claimed to have discovered a pre-existent, objective order in the universe based upon Newtonian mechanics and a belief in a first cause watchmaker God, the Romantics moved away from this mechanical concept of order toward a more organic conception. The Romantics recognized all appearances of order in nature as a creation of the individual imagination, as a projection of the self.[1] In Peckham's formulation of Romantic theory:

> Nature does not redeem man. Rather, man through the exercise of imagination, redeems Nature. Value enters the world through the self, which is not supported by any perceptible social or cosmic order, and the self projects upon the world an order which serves to symbolize that self-generated value.[2]

For the early Romantics, especially the sublime Romantics like Wordsworth and Shelley, "The self was seen as the portal of the divine, a mythological symbolization for the sense of value."[3] These poets appealed to an other-wordly knowledge, to the Spirit that "rolls through all things" and to the "white radiance of eternity." In his book *Beyond the Tragic Vision*, Peckham expands the notions of his essay but suggests that there are dangerous implications in

such transcendental beliefs. While seeking a truer sense of realty, the Romantics fell into the trap of asserting their own subjective authority in opposition to the subjective orientations of others.[4]

We might recognize Tennyson as the final torchbearer of what we are calling here "transcendental Romanticism." In "Ulysses," Tennyson makes his most heroic affirmation of the gnostic, transcendental quest as Ulysses leads his men ever onward:

> To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought. (31-32)

Peckham describes the pattern of Romantic poetry as a movement from spiritual death to spiritual rebirth, and he gives us the example of Carlyle's central chapters to *Sartor Resartus* — "The Everlasting No," "The Centre of Indifference," and "The Everlasting Yea."[5] Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, as many have noted, might also be cited for an example of such a pattern. Peckham also suggests that the Romantic poet, as the creator of order in a fallen world, takes on an almost religious aspect in his spiritual explorations:

> The Romantic poet thus takes upon himself the role of Christ, and he is himself his own redeemer and the model for the redemption of mankind.[6]

We might say that the English treated *In Memoriam* like a religious text and fancied that Tennyson was something of a prophet. The Queen kept the poem on her bedside table next to her Bible to console her after the death of her husband, and Tennyson became Poet Laureate, the institutional visionary for his country, on the strength of *In Memoriam's* reception in 1850. In his collected poems, Tennyson felt sure enough of his authority to write that the "I" of *In Memoriam* "is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him."[7]

Peckham identifies Robert Browning as one of the first European intellects to firmly reject the powerful transcendental currents of Romanticism.[8] Though Browning holds to the notion that each individual projects an order upon the world, he rejects the belief that any single visionary or poet can know all truths. Browning sees the subjective imagination as a tool, an instrument with which we approximate a vaguely defined objective order in the world. For Browning, art, as the product of the imagination, is an instrument as well, and art can be called "truthful" only in so far as it admits its own falsehood. In *An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Browning writes:

> Certainly in the face of any conspicuous achievement of genius, philosophy, no less than sympathetic instinct, warrants our belief in a great moral purpose having inspired even where it does not visibly look out of the same. Greatness in a work suggests an adequate instrumentality.[9]

Art serves a moral purpose not as a didactic example, but as a symbolic orientation that inspires in its apprehenders a sense of new and different possibilities. The recognition of other orientations and perspectives is the foundation of any system of moral choice.

Browning used the dramatic monologue form to express his relativistic metaphysic. The masks which he assumed in each poem allowed him to re-construct the world differently from the various orientations of his characters. Sometimes he intentionally placed complementary monologues together in publication to emphasize the effect of the orientation of one against the other. The monologues "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi" were paired this way in *Men and Women*. The different orientations of these two Renaissance painters bring out some of the issues which we have already touched upon. In "Andrea del Sarto" Browning presents a character who buries himself in his subjective, transcendental projections upon the world, while in "Fra Lippo Lippi," Browning presents a character who readily acknowledges the instrumentality and contingency of artistic vision. Perhaps Browning has even cast Andrea in Tennyson's transcendentalist image and Fra Lippo Lippi in his own.

From the first few lines of "Andrea del Sarto," we cast Andrea in the transcendentalist mold as he addresses his unfaithful wife Lucrezia and asks: "You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?" (4.) Andrea wants to pierce the mask of the world to get at another kind of truth that lies beyond. As Andrea begs his wife to sit beside him to watch the Fiesole twilight from the window, he reflects upon a time of peace, a golden age gone by, when married couples were united truly, soulfully:

> Should you let me sit
> Here by the window with your hand in mine
> And look for a half-hour forth on Fiesole
> Both of one mind, as married people use,
> Quietly, quietly the evening through,
> I might get up tomorrow to my work
> Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
> To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this! (13-20)

Andrea is an aging painter who has never quite reached the heights promised by the technical prowess of his youth, and much of his discourse is a lament, a *maudit* for his lack of success and his lost and unachieved possibilities. But we must be sure to recognize a certain falseness in his assessments of his life. For instance, in the opening lines he more-or-less composes as if he were painting it, a falsified, staged picture of a loving married couple gazing out at a setting sun, united under the frame of the window casement. As he clasps his wife's hand, he coins a poetic metaphor for the perfect, hermaphroditic union of man and woman:

> Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
> And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside. (21-22)

This is not only an untruthful image of their life together; we should understand that the notion of such a perfect union is itself only a romantic myth as well.

Andrea also presents us with a fanciful vision of his wife as he projects her into an artistic frame as well, imagining that she is a neo-platonic image of perfect womanhood:

> So! Keep looking so —
> My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
> — How could you ever prick those perfect ears
> Even to put a pearl there! oh, so sweet —
> My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
> Which everybody looks on and calls his,
> And, I suppose, is looked on by in return,
> While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less.
> You smile? Why there's a picture ready made,
> There's what we painters call our harmony! (25-34)

Lucrezia is an untouchable, unearthly beauty in Andrea's eyes. He only distractedly realizes that while others look upon her, she must indeed look back in return. He does not expect her to answer his questions; he very nearly denies her any consciousness. Andrea cannot bear the thought of earthly despoilment of her beauty, and in his own self-mockery, we can imply that he cannot despoil her sexually either:

> Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
> The Roman's is the better when you pray,
> But still the other's Virgin was his wife. (177-179)

Browning depicts a psychological drama here as Andrea attempts to capture Lucrezia in his imaginative projection by making her an abstract ideal, by making her his "moon." Andrea suggests

that he alone possesses the true vision of his wife's beauty: "You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!" (176). But Andrea does not realize that what he possesses is a private, self-deluded vision. The wife that he claims to possess is truly other than what he thinks she is; moreover, she is sexually possessed by another — the cousin who calls for her at the end of the poem. Reality defies Andrea's fanciful vision, and the transcendental world in which he lives exists only for himself.

What we have here is a study of the consciousness of a transcendentalist who is locked into his own orientation even as he feels his authority fading and the world turning against him. Perhaps Browning presents us with an allegory of the plight of the transcendentalist aesthetic in his own literary age. He has Andrea describe an almost Tennysonian landscape in his rumination upon the Fiesole sunset. Recall Tennyson's "The Lotuseater's" — "A Land in which it seemed always afternoon." (3-4) — and then listen to Andrea:

> A common greyness silvers everything —
> All in a twilight, you and I alike
> — You, at the point of your first pride in me
> (That's gone you know), — but I at every point;
> My youth, my hope, my art, all being toned down
> To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
> There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
> That length of convent-wall across the way
> Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
> The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
> And autumn grows, autumn in everything. (35-45)

To match Andrea's claim that he lives in a stopped time, his life "in a twilight . . . at every point," we can recall Tennyson's commonplace advice to "Annihilate within yourself these two dreams of Space and Time."[10] Whether or not he intends us to think of Tennyson in this passage, Browning clearly attempts to capture the impotence and isolation of a transcendental visionary, likening it to the powerlessness of cloistered religious meditation.

Andrea accepts his twilight existence with little argument. He convinces himself that his life has been pre-determined:

> The whole seems to fall into shape
> As if I saw alike my work and self
> And all I was born to be and do,
> A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
> How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;

So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: Let it lie! (46-51)

But while Andrea would have us believe that his fate is revealed to him in the melancholy of the landscape, we should see that Andrea has egocentrically projected his own melancholy into the landscape. The vision of the "whole" which Andrea claims to discover in this twilight scene is really something that he fabricates. He cannot step away from this fettering vision to see that it derives its authority not from God, but from himself.

Andrea's certainty that God "laid the fetter" prevents him from reaching beyond his melancholy toward the regenerative exuberance of his contemporary artists. Andrea lacks the freedom of artists whose vision is less certain and who do not so willingly concede that "All is as God over-rules" (133):

There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here. (79-87)

Other artists attempt to reach for what is not of themselves, and therefore they can renew themselves with visions of new heavens. Because of the certainty and constancy of his vision, Andrea cannot reflect upon his past visions to doubt or overturn them. He claims to have a visionary knowledge of artistic perfection, and so his work suffers when judged by earthly standards of imperfection:

I do what many dream of, all their lives
— Dream? strive to do, agonize to do . . .
Yet do much less, so much less . . .
Well, less is more Lucrezia; I am judged. (69-78)

Knowing the faults of his art and excusing himself those faults are what make Andrea "The Faultless Painter." Andrea grants that "A man's reach should exceed his grasp" (97), but he believes that he is fated to grasp everything that he reaches for. The certainty of that knowledge precludes the act of either grasping or reaching.

But Browning himself denies the certainty of any knowledge or any vision. In his essay on Shelley, he writes:

> An absolute vision is not for this world, but we are permitted a continual approximation to it, every degree of which in the individual, provided it exceed the attainment of the masses, must procure him a clear advantage. Did the poet ever attain to a higher platform than where he rested and exhibited a result? Did he know more than he spoke of?[11]

Andrea claims to see something in his own paintings that others do not recognize and suggests that before a heavenly judge, his works might be judged more favorably and he might take his rightful place beside the great masters:

> In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —
> Four great walls in the new Jerusalem,
> Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
> For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
> To cover — the first three without a wife,
> While I have mine! So — still they overcome
> Because there's still Lucrezia, — as I choose. (260-266)

But even here he sould be found lacking — "still they overcome" — because he chooses to reserve for himself that private vision of Lucrezia which we looked at earlier. He refuses to let even a heavenly host judge his work, for to accept such judgment would mean accepting the community of others, even if those others be the great Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Andrea refuses at all cost to give up his own perverse, self-sustaining authority. He chooses to remain the sole judge of his art. And yet when we say "choose," we say it ironically. For Andrea is too self-knowledgeable even to consider a different course for his life. He knows that he is a cuckold — "What does he,/The Cousin! What does he to please you more?" (242-243). He knows that his art fails to inspire others — "All is silver-grey/Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!" (98-99). Yet he refuses to conform, he refuses to place himself in context rather than isolation. He chooses for himself a profoundly lonely glory, because he refuses to recognize a less egocentric justification for his life.

Whereas Andrea believes that he has discovered a special knowledge and possesses a singular vision that justifies his life, for Fra Lippo Lippi, life is a continual search for value that is always escaping:

> This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good;
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink. (313-315)

"Fra Lippo Lippi" has all the vitality that is lacking in "Andrea del Sarto." Fra Lippo tries to see the world for what it is and tries to recognize those moments when his own fancy takes over and leaves the world behind. What this drive toward reality provides him is a remarkable ability to imagine what the world is not. Apprehended by the night watch as he leaves a brothel, Lippi is intrigued at once with the faces of the watchmen:

> I'd like his face —
> His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
> With the pike and lantern, — for the slave that holds
> John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
> With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
> And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
> It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
> A wood-coal or the like? Or you should see!
> Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so. (31-39)

He jokes with us here, for it is he who has styled himself as the painter. We can style ourselves and others as we wish, he seems to say, so long as we leave ourselves free to accept contrary demonstration. Indeed, these night watchmen will find that Fra Lippo Lippi is not so much a monk as he appears. For Fra Lippo has more than a monk's imagination when he sees "curtain and counterpane and coverlet" as more than just bed trappings — "A dozen knots,/There was a ladder!" (63-64). Browning recognizes imagination as that part of the mind which releases the moral responsibility to act and make choices, because the imagination makes choices apparent. New orientations apprehended in art beget new choices in life. What releases Fra Lippo's imagination so that he sees in the bed sheets a ladder that would give him access to the street? — the songs of the revelers of course. The *stornelli* verses which intersperse the poem, like so many outbursts of spontaneous art, seem to be a source of energy to which Lippi appeals again and again. By recognizing an artistic source that is outside of himself, Lippi shows that he is profoundly responsive to the world around him.

If we conceive of art as that which inspires monks to climb from their bedroom windows to join in the nighttime revelry, Lippi's "betters" have good cause to fear Lippi's art as they do. For his betters take it upon themselves to teach men "What to see and what not to see," though Lippi suggests that they are not always so sure what they themselves see in the first place. Lippi

tells us that the Prior's first invectives against the fleshly paintings of his youth instructed him to paint men's souls, not their bodies. But the Prior did not quite know what the soul looked like:

> Your business is to paint the souls of men —
> Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
> It's vapour done up like a new-born babe —
> (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
> It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
> Give us no more of body than shows soul! (183-188)

While asserting, "I'm my own master, paint now as I please" (226), Lippi nonetheless seeks accountability for his vision and grounds that vision in the demonstrable. He paints only what he sees in the world. Like the painters of the High Renaissance who follow him, Lippi sees God and soul in the beauty of the men and women of the world in which he lives:

> For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
> I always see the garden and God there
> A-making man's wife: and my lesson learned,
> The value and significance of flesh,
> I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards. (265-269)

He seeks a true unity of the attributes of body and soul, of his beliefs and understandable truths, avoiding the valueless, unreal middle way which he finds in the waffling of his "betters."

Art for Fra Lippo Lippi, and for Browning, we suppose, helps us to explore the world by helping us share what each of us knows of the world:

> Don't object, "His works
> Are here already; nature is complete:
> Suppose you re-produce her — (which you can't)
> There's no advantage! You must beat her, then."
> For, don't you mark? We're made so that we love
> First when we see them painted, things that we have passed
> Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
> And so they are better, painted — better to us
> Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
> God uses us to help each other so,
> Lending our minds out. (296-306)

But for art to go further:

> If I drew higher things with the same truth!
> That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
> Interpret God to all of you! (309-311)

As we have said, art is an instrument whose truth is that it has little authority, and art should always recognize its fictitiousness. In the final passage of *The Ring and the Book,* Browning glorifies this special redeeming imperfection of art:

> — Art may tell a truth
> Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
> Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
> So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
> Beyond mere imagery on the wall, —
> So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
> Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived, —
> So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
> Suffice the eye and save the soul beside. (855-863, xii)

With these notions in mind, art cannot go wrong, cannot fail to fulfill its instrumental moral purpose.

Fra Lippo Lippi ironically suggests that it is the Church which taught him the useful instrumentality of his art. His skill as a painter provides him with a means of making amends for his sins. At the end of the poem, he assures the night watchmen that he will paint a picture to atone for the evening's transgressions:

> It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
> Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
> And hearken how I plan to make amends.
> I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece. (341-344)

The piece that Lippi plans will tackle a difficult problem that faces all artists — the re-entry of the artist into society after he has set himself at odds with traditional orientations.[12] Andrea del Sarto, after losing all touch with humanity, is unable to let himself join the community of even the greatest painters of his day. But in the painting which he describes for us, Fra Lippo Lippi will strip himself bare for judgment by the world. His monologue is nothing less than a confession of guilt after he is apprehended by the night watch. At the end of the poem, he fears the dawn, lest his patron, Cosimo de Medici, find him at large. In the painting which Lippi describes — a painting which the real Fra Lippo Lippi executed in St. Ambrose Church in Florence, *The Coronation of the Virgin* — he will paint himself into the picture, not to celebrate his greatness but to emphasize his guilt and diminutiveness before the otherwise holy company of the scene. Lippi suggests that in such "pure company," he would feel obliged quickly to take his leave:

I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm — "Not so fast!"
— Addresses the celestial presence, "nay —
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw —
His camel-hair make up a painting brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus!" (368-377)

The painting reaches toward divine approbation even as it atones for the imperfections of its painter. Lippi joins the society of the scene not by universalizing his "I," by glorifying his personal orientation as a transcendentalist might, but by recognizing that he truly deserves a humble place in the picture. Lippi admits his sinfulness; he embraces his fallen condition. In doing so, he recognizes a certain equality for all men and women and for all orientations. Lippi paints a portrait of his penitent self for all to see: "And so all's saved for me,/And for the Church a pretty picture gained" (388-389).

We should recognize Fra Lippo Lippi's picture and his discourse as an assertion of his individuality in the company of others, an assertion that is perhaps as triumphant as Roland's slug-horn blast at the end of Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.* Roland blows his horn in recognition of the faces he discovers in the hillsides that surround him in the final scene of the poem. We can read *Childe Roland* as a poem whose message, like that of "Fra Lippo Lippi," is that only through the negation of the overbearing self can one find truth in the company of others:

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! In a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew *"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."* (199-204)

Significantly, both Roland and Fra Lippo Lippi are driven to creative, artistic attempts upon their recognition of, or apprehension by, other consciousnesses. Both seek to declare and demonstrate their recognition of other orientations.

With this pair of monologues, "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," Browning explores some of the central artistic issues of his day. He seriously questions the use of transcendental know-

ledge or intuition as private justification. Each of us must recognize, like Fra Lippo Lippi, the artifice of all artistic vision. Lippi readily recognizes the limitations of his art, and his life and his art are livelier for that knowledge. It is Browning's sense of the imperfection of his own artistic vision that gives his poetry a special energy and makes it stand out from an age whose poetry, take some of Tennyson's for instance, often does recede into a twilight.

We might conclude by speculating on the influence that Browning's relativistic aesthetic of instrumentality might have had upon the literary generations that follow him. At first glance, it might seem that he made only a temporary inroad into the transcendental attractions of art. We can trace a continuing transcendental impulse toward apocalyptic vision in the work of Hopkins, Yeats and Eliot. All these poets acknowledged the use of art as a spiritual, gnostic project, as an avenue through which to pursue an a-historical reality. In Hopkins and Eliot, the affinities between art and high religious orientations are enunciated clearly, for instance, in Hopkin's powerful sonnet sequences and in Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Yeats' mystical ventures, especially his baffling work *A Vision*, took him to a world that few have been able to explore with him.

But with Browning there does begin a parallel movement in poetry toward a more earthly aesthetic. In the work of the English Pre-Raphaelites we recognize a moralistic bent which was fostered perhaps by Browning's notions of artistic "instrumentality." We must also note that in the Pre-Raphaelite attempt to recognize the artifice of all art, in their self-conscious recognition of the boundaries or frames that enclose the work of art,[13] there is an acknowledgement that art is not a universal but a limited orientation, an extension of an individual's narrow subjective vision. In the twentieth century, we note that in the Modernist tenets of both Pound and Williams there was a strong rejection of notions of higher realities and truths and in their place a powerful assertion of a physical reality — "No ideas but in things." For both Pound and Williams, there is a suggestion that art is primarily useful as a means for communication — Browning phrased it, "Lending our minds out." Consider the straight-forward, impression-offering presentations of Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" and Williams' "This is just to say." Perhaps Wallace Stevens gives us an affirmation of Browning's faith in the ultimate truthfulness of subjective relativism. Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" attempts to go beyond an indiscriminate relativism to suggest that

reality does indeed mysteriously cohere. In similar fashion, Browning's sometimes contradictory monologues in *The Ring and the Book* combine to form a coherent truth that means "beyond the facts." We should acknowledge Browning as one of the first in our modern age to stand upon these practical, unbeguiling notions of art and reality. We recognize Browning as one of those responsible for releasing the imagination from the Romantic "dialogue of the mind with itself," as Matthew Arnold put it. We must give Browning credit in his place, just as he would give us credit in our own.

NOTES:

1. Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism" in *Romanticism: Points of View,* eds. Robert Gleckner and Gerald Enscoe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 235-257.
2. Peckham, 254.
3. Peckham, 254.
4. Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision* (New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc., 1962), 229-239.
5. Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," 244.
6. Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," 254.
7. Donald J. Gray and G. B. Tennyson, eds., *Victorian Literature: Poetry* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976) 106.
8. Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision,* 273.
9. *The Complete Poetical Works of Browning,* ed. Horace E. Scudder (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1895), 1010.
10. From a letter to Emily Sellwood in Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co., 1911), 171.
11. *The Complete Poetical Works of Browning,* 1010.
12. Peckham treats this problem at great length in *Beyond the Tragic Vision.*
13. For a short discussion of the Pre-Raphaelite and Victorian use of framing devices in poetry and painting, see Gerhard Joseph, "Victorian Frames: The Windows and Mirrors of Browning, Arnold, and Tennyson," *Victorian Poetry,* 16 (1978), 70-87.

CHRISTINA CALVIT

WELTSCHMERZ

When to the night of certain day they came,
Protesting loudly that they could not see,
They then began to search for one to blame,
Sincerely shocked by life's duplicity,

Becoming wild talkers, poets if you will,
Or, perhaps, becoming not at all;
Some chose to shift the dust from window sills
With vacant cant, recited to the wall.

Yet never is the world for all their turning
Convulsed, or even prone to take alarm.
Quintessence does not care for human yearning,

It stands and does not stand with open arms
And says one thing, if laughter could be read,
"The icy feet of truth are cold in bed."

SCENE FROM A COLORING BOOK

As if colored by a child's hand, the sky
shines crayola blue, black and barren trees
stand like sticks, houses have pasted themselves
flat, black and white on the page; no birds fly here,
no barking dog disturbs the brilliant tones,
no bud gives scent to the wash of slick air,
and if our heads could look like tiny wheels
if our arms flew out from our bodies' line
as though perpetually astonished,
if we had no joints, no flesh, no pupils
then we could walk in the white roads and breathe
the blue air and finally could open
the black door of that white house to find what lies behind.

TO MY BROTHER

It was in October,
we'd been picking apples;
apples for Thanksgiving
apples for our pie.
While walking in the woods
we gathered shiny rocks
and threw them at the trees,
where apples hung like treasure,
peeking through the leaves.
We wanted some to eat,
Timothy and I.

A woman told me stories,
I was sitting in her car,
of kings and queens and fairies.
I drew a picture for her
of a queen with a crown
sleeping in the sun.
Then I saw my father coming,
He said, "Let's go home now."

He picked me up so high
but I saw my brother lying
from the corner of my eye.
His neck was sort of twisted
but his hands were on the grass,
white against the green.
He looked just like my picture,
the lady in the sun
except his arm was shiny
with little bits of glass.

The shadow of our Buick
was oddly bent and twisted,
wrapped round another car;
there were apples on the ground
so red against the gravel.
Red eyes looking all around.

My father kicked an apple
sitting in his way
and it rolled into the grass
right by my brother's foot.
We got into a car
that smelled of someone else.
I drew my brother lying
in my picture of the queen
and I signed it at the bottom,
To Timmy, love Christine.

MARY KINZIE

STUDY

after reading More's **Utopia** *again*

That year there were two of us.
Long-distance firsts. At swimming, zweiter
Stufe on the liquid shelf
ribboned by the glassy daze
the Himmsee made from sun upon
a rose, retiring shoulderblade.
We sat in the abandoned library
at a table one foot thick
with nothing on the ancient floor.
Someone read to others out
of earshot homilies that had
no past, or nodded to no written
world, intentionally present
tense, and good, and temporary
though the future drove like bells
in afternoon admonishments
from autumn's discontented suite.
The days hung low. The woodwork waited.
Sunlight seemed life's first attack
of exaltation, or politics,
perhaps, embraced those indecisions
out of which we carved our coming selves.

There in that sophisticated
chaos with our unsuspecting
lips upon the wave, our eyes on books,
our hands relentless, economic,
second-nature as philosophy,
all sciences explosive in the vein
in which you looked at me, and dove,
the mountains stood along, invincible.

PITY

It crossed the alleyway of pain
at the dispensary of thought.
A ribbon tenuous and frail
grows stronger at the knot.

BEN SLOTE

NIGHT SHIFT

Next to his propped up feet, on the coffee table, a two dimensional starlet looked toward Ted. It was a cover of an old magazine, one all the nurses and scrub techs had fingered through, so the lady bent a little toward him. Ted picked her up. Her neckline dove to the white label and its upside down computerized print, and her clinging red dress was still racing toward Ted where the page stopped. Her blond hair and blue eyes reminded Ted that he had read something about her while he was on line in the supermarket; she was really a brunette or something. The controversy had been thoroughly discussed in the lounge. When there was no work, Ted loved to go to the nurses' lounge and listen to them gossip. They talked about each other, about doctors, and about nothing at all.

"Teddy, d'you see that guy in Seven?" said a young black nurse knitting furiously. They all affectionately called him Teddy because he smiled a lot and always listened to their dissertations.

"No he musta been in a while before I came," Ted said.

"Oh, you on the four to midnight, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Hey, first time alone. Teddy, things can get pretty ugly on nights."

"I'm not too worried. I've seen some kidney transplants and transported a guy who was dying from lung cancer I think."

"Yeah?" She acted awestruck.

"Yeah. Last week I talked with an old geezer in the Holding Room about something like the weather while the guy was waiting to get his second leg amputated."

"Hey, I never said you weren't brave or nothin'. Just thought a sensitive *young man* like you, on his way to college and all, might be a little green."

"You're not all that much older than me," said Ted.

"I'm older than you think. Anyways, alls I wanted to tell you was that there's a nasty thing in Seven lookin' awful mean. Tatoos all over. Big and mean. Scares me a little," she said, stopping her knitting long enough to shudder. She returned to her knitting and Ted returned to his starlet.

He had seen a few pretty women on the operating table, but it never excited him like he thought it would. Condie and Gordon were always asking if he saw naked ladies, saying how lucky he was. "All I get to see is dirty dishes and Harry, the old fart of a cook," Gordon would carp. Ted had a hard time picturing the starlet's body spread out on the table. He could see the blue eyes and blond hair, but the red dress would be there too, contrasting with the starched sheets. And there would be nothing to operate on. She'd be spread as thin as newsprint.

The magazine fell open to the cover story. She was dancing with some silver haired man in a tuxedo. Ted was reading about her new affair and hair when the circulating nurse came in: "They're out." The operation was over.

Ted, bouncing on the balls of his feet, walked down the corridor. On nights, most of the hall lights were turned off. Now the passage was a silver-grey tube, illuminated by one flourescent light at its far end and the little yellow light outside of room Seven. He saw it flick off. This meant that the surgeons had finished closing. The big door, which looked like it was coated with teflon, could now be opened, and the stretcher brought in. They were slow on nights. The stretcher was still outside the door, obediently waiting with its sharp tucks and folds, as Ted jaunted nearer. There was no slanting light in the hall. The operating room door, which was opened when any procedure was finished, was closed. From the small vestibule which connected Seven and Eight, Ted heard the calm low tones of the two surgeons. Ted was now alongside the stretcher, waiting outside the operating room.

"What are they doing in there?" he mumbled as he wheeled the stretcher back, got on his toes, and looked through the small square window in the teflon door. No one was doing anything. No one was in there except the patient. Ted dropped to his heels.

Immediately the little elastic band which kept Ted's scrub hat on tight around his hair became slick with sweat. He poked his sliding glasses back in place and tried to quell a flash of nausea. He took a hard swallow and looked again.

In the middle of the room, on the operating table, lay the patient, shrouded in white. Only long yellow feet stuck out from under the cascading sheet. The topography under the crisp mountainous outlines defined a giant. Stretching from above, big, pie-eyed operating lamps stared down at the table's contents. The concentrated rays filled each declivity in the sheet, glowing on a featureless ghost, vivifying its pallor. Impulsively, Ted opened the door. He didn't enter, just reached in, turned the surgical lights off, and shut the door again.

Preparing an "expired" patient and taking it to the morgue was part of the orderly's job. Ted was unsure of the procedure. He had done it once before, when an old lady's spleen ruptured, but then he had help from Sims, whom he hated. Now Ted would have loved to be with any orderly, even Sims.

He decided to clean the room first. This would take a long time. Because heart operations are so long, the pump room is always the hardest to clean. This time he didn't mind how long it took. There was no rush.

Back with his mop, a translucent gallon jug of bug-green liquid, and a pack of other cleaning necessities from the utility room, Ted stepped into the room. With the big lamps off, the recessed ceiling fixtures infused the whole room with clinical light. He picked up empty wrappers, empty plastic syringes, and empty I.V. pouches that had once bulged with Ringer's and Heperin solutions. Everything was empty and strewn around the dead man, on the black linoleum floor. He gurgled the bug juice out of its narrow plastic opening and onto his mop. He liked to mop; it was rhythmical. He turned on the radio on the wall. Supermarket music came tinkling out. You could tell about how old the surgeon in charge was by his station. Only the oldest doctors refused a soft backdrop of music as they operated.

Wanting only to fill the vivid vacancy, Ted absent-mindedly left the soapy music on and continued to mop. He engrossed himself in his musical mopping, wiping out the thing he mopped around. This station, Ted decided, was only good for mopping and standing on line in Krogers. He pressed down harder than he had

to on a bloody tile. The mop head was already red. He took it off, threw it in one of the stuffed hampers with the tips of his forefinger and thumb, and put on a fresh white one.

The supermarket music stopped for the news. Ted realized he'd been scouring the same prep table for the past ten minutes. There was nothing left for him to clean. The floor and I.V. poles shone, the overhead table had been wiped clean three times; Ted had even wiped off the complex of silver knobs and dials of the anaesthesia cart, something he wasn't supposed to do. Everything sparkled in icy mechanical splendor.

Ted turned off the radio, pushed up his glasses and readjusted his shower cap. It was moist all the way around the edges now. The nausea flared up again. Quickly Ted turned out the teflon door, into the softer light of the hall. He could go to the lounge and ask one of the nurses the procedure. He didn't know what to do next.

"Go to Recovery and ask for an expiration kit," she said as if she were telling Ted what to get at the grocery store. "There'll be instructions inside." She was eating some old salad out of a yellow Tupperware bowl. The starlet was still on the coffee table, still bending toward Ted, still smiling.

After informing the pretty Philippine nurse in Recovery that her service wouldn't be needed, Ted picked up a package made up of green linen, with crossing white strips of cloth used as ribbon. It looked like a present. Instead of "Happy Birthday," "Expiration Kit" was dully penciled on the green.

Once Ted was back in the pump room, there was nothing else he could do. He had run out of diversions. He stared at the blank sheet. Slowly, he peeled back a corner of stiff white: a giant frenzied face stared straight up into the clinical light, frozen in ashen amazement, as if it were breathlessly witnessing its own death. The corpse's lively yellow and grey hair rushed backwards, like John Brown's, and he had that maniacal look in his dead eyes: fearing and fearful. The corners of his toothless mouth were pulled down to his chin, digging deep lines in his sallow cheeks and creasing open a small rectangular cave. The peaked upper lip, a thin overhang, covered the receding threshold. Both lips were purple, encased in corrugations.

Ted fumbled with the present, untying the strips of cloth, unwrapping the package and setting it on a silver prep table. He began to follow the directions xeroxed on a three-by-five card,

constantly pushing up his glasses and readjusting the elastic strip. He clumsily taped the grey eyelids shut. Ted was surprised at how cold they were. At first he used two-sided tape. When he pulled his hand from one of the eyes, the tape came back with it, folding back an eyelid and flashing its slimy blue underside. Three uprooted lashes were lined up on the tape stuck to Ted's index finger. Immediately, as if a spider were creeping up his palm, Ted sent his hand into convulsions. He hurriedly stuck the little crumpled wad into the overflowing trash bag. His heaving chest slowed down to bigger breaths. He suspended the biggest one, rushed back to the table, threw the sheet back the rest of the way, and deflated.

A giant hairless torso and roughly shaven legs, disproportionately short and spindly. A freshly sewn ridge ran its long red route straight down the middle of the flabby waxen chest. To Ted, it looked like a zipper. Through a flash of nausea, he envisioned a man silently screaming, trying to escape his gruesome suit of death, but unable to undo its zipper.

On one side of the tightly bound neckline, above a purpling brown nipple, a faded red arrow pierced a still, blue heart. The heart wasn't the colored kind, just outlined in blue. Across from it stood a chesty naked lady, hands on hips and feet spread shoulders-width apart. "Sue" was on his meaty right arm, near the shoulder, inscribed in shaky blue script, and below it was the fading image of another naked lady. Her phantom right arm at one time saluted. On the inside of the forearm tilted an anchor with two snakes coiled around it. Ted didn't look at the left arm. It was lying out of sight along the other side of the jaundiced bulk. Lifeless as it was, the body still contrasted with the cold, unsympathetic steel that surrounded it.

Ted wiped away the drying blood that soaked the anchor, and patched the slowly oozing I.V. holes with fresh adhesive tape. A red spot methodically grew on the white square. By now Ted's own condition had reached a state of stagnant, numbed queasiness. The corpse's clammy hands shook as they were brought together at the ridge. They were the biggest hands Ted had ever seen. Big yellow fingernails, cracked with age, were set deep in long, stiff fingers. Like most hands, they looked older than the rest of the body. The rest of him was only about fifty.

Ted turned and reached for the ribbons which were for tying together the wrists and ankles. The right arm slid off its cold plateau, off the side of the table and into Ted. For an instant, a

long band stood out on his neck. He spun, quickly grabbed the dangling arm and set it on the stretcher. A short nervous laugh was forced from his stomach. The red now filled most of the white square as he crossed the dead man's half-closed hands and bound them at the wrists. He then tied to the ribbon a manila tag with the corpse's name, hospital registration number, and home address on it. The characters on the tag were the same color and shape as those stamped out by stock boys who flip their silver stampers from the only pocket of their short, stained aprons and punch out 50 prices of green beans on 50 boxes in rapid succession. Ted crossed, bound and tagged the corpse's narrow, bloodless ankles. The corpse was still getting colder.

He brought in the stretcher from the hall. Five hours ago, this guy wiggled from this stretcher onto the table he now lies dead on, thought Ted. This same stretcher is to take him to the morgue. Ted "cornered" two sheets on the stretcher, so that when he lifted the corpse on the stretcher, he could fold the sheets in such a way that, with the help of the five safety pins included in the present, he could bundle up the corpse properly, completing its preparation for the morgue.

He untucked all the corners of the sheet under the body. Pinning the stretcher between his thighs and the operating table, Ted grasped two edges of the sheet and pulled. The dead man hardly budged. Ted pushed the stretcher away for a moment, slipped his right arm under the corpse's bumpy thighs and his left under the shoulders. The back was smooth and cold, dank like stones on a beach. Ted heaved, trying to get the corpse to the end of the table. Then it would just take a slight tug on the bottom sheet to carry him on the stretcher. But the corpse didn't budge. He could roll him, except that the corpse had to be on its back again by the time he was in the middle of the stretcher. Ted had no desire to roll a dead man. He had no desire to be there at all. He went out again, again for some help.

They were doing a crossword puzzle.

"Do you think anyone could help me move this guy onto the stretcher?" His forced assertiveness went unnoticed.

"Sure Teddy," said a young white nurse.

"I told you that bastard was a load." It was the knitter. "Must be two hundred and fifty pounds of him. And look at Teddy. You ain't half his size. You gonna need lots of help."

Three young women, the knitter, the white nurse, and a young scrub tech accompanied Ted back to Seven. The women talked on the way.

"Is Jan still seeing Doctor Morris?"

"Seein' him? Shit, she's seeing a whole lot of him!" The laughter of the three young women echoed in the corridor.

"Dave's in Iowa, at a convention, so Jan is making the rounds."

"Isn't Morris' wife real cute?"

"Shore is. Nice too." They were in the room by now. The knitter was next to Ted, pinning the stretcher against the table and grabbing the bottom sheet. The white nurse and tech were on the other side. Ted stared at the corpse.

"Yeah, I wouldn't trust that bitch for nothin'."

"Me neither, me ne. . . ." The four strained. "Jesus, why's this guy got to weigh so much?"

"Dead weight." They liked this. The laughter didn't echo in the operating room. The silver tables, knobs and dials didn't respond. Ted responded with a tight little laugh, tossing his head back with the others. Catching his distorted face in the silver shell of one of the surgical lamps, he knew he wasn't smiling.

After five minutes of struggling through giggles, the three and Ted managed to get the corpse on the stretcher, crooked. It bent to the left at the waist, its legs angled to the opposite corner, and the bound feet stuck six inches over the end.

"You got it from here, Teddy?"

"Yeah," Ted mumbled, forgetting to thank them.

He called down to the morgue on the phone between Seven and Eight. An old, gravelly voice said he'd be there. Ted wrapped and pinned up the corpse, and tied on the last stamped label to one of the pins. The corpse was all sheets again and Ted's nausea subsided a little. He pushed his load out of the pump room and into the nearby elevator. It wasn't even easy to push.

At night there are no elevator operators, so Ted operated it himself. He stepped on a brass knob that stuck out of the floor. The heavy black door with its large white "7" glided across and banged against the other side. Ted flipped the unfolding inner gate the same way and pushed the brass lever on the side counterclockwise, sending the elevator on its downward hum. It was dark in the elevator. One of the two lights was out.

Ted never got to take the elevator down so far before. He liked operating it. He wasn't feeling so bad now. I guess once you get used to it, it's not so awful, thought Ted. Those nurses are only a few years older than me.

He whistled in the dark elevator as he nudged the floor flush with the thick white line on another heavy black door. A big white "B" was now at his feet. He rattled open the gate and stepped on another brass knob. The door and "B" swung out of sight.

The morgue was down the hall and to the right. It wasn't real obvious, just two blue doors with two large frosted panes. Ted pulled the stretcher out. It bumped on the brass threshold, jostling the swathed corpse. The body didn't leave the stretcher, but the top surface lifted up and the whole thing shook a little, like someone does when he sleeps in a train that rocks slightly. The corpse continued its small gentle sway as Ted pushed it down the hall. He started up his soft whistle again. There must have been something wrong with the stretcher's wheels. Ted had to make his right turn. A khakied janitor from within an open utility closet watched the whistling boy push what the janitor knew was a corpse down the hall. Ted saw him and cheerfully said hi. The janitor said nothing, just watched the boy go by.

Ted rapped loudly on one of the frosted panes. A dark blur materialized on one pane. The morgue doors could only be opened from the inside or with a key from the ambulance office.

The door opened and the blur turned into an old, dark black man in dark blue pants and a light blue shirt. The shirt was light enough to see that he had one of those old fashioned T-shirts on underneath, the ones with no shoulders. He had been doing an autopsy when Ted called. Although he had taken off the green gown, white dust from the surgical gloves was still on his rough hands.

"I got some more business," Ted said. "A big sonofabitch too." Ted didn't swear very often. The old man didn't say anything. His tired face didn't even change. He just opened the inner doors and helped Ted bring the corpse in.

The inner-most room, the morgue itself, was very small. On the left wall was a bank of lockers where personal belongings were kept until they were picked up by the family. Next to the lockers, out of place, was a small wooden table with a desk light. A big hotel registration book was lying open under the lamp, getting all

its light. Next to it, or really behind it, was a closed blue door. Behind that, autopsies were performed.

The right wall was bare except for a steel box with a heavy bar and chains hanging from it. The whole contraption was hanging from the white ceiling.

Right in front of Ted was a bank of square doors with silver handles. Each door looked like the ones the Good Humor man would click open and reach into. "Jesus." Ted whistled his amazement. He felt it was the right thing to do.

The old man tiredly thumbed the tag attached to the corpse, stuck his head back to read it, and wrote down the information in the big lit-up book. Ted still gazed at the silver doors.

"Number nine" was the first thing the old man said. He clicked open one of the doors on the bottom row, barely pulled on something inside, and watched a long drawer methodically slide out the rest of the way. The drawer was about eight feet long and four feet wide. What looked like a steel ladder fitted exactly in the bottom.

They silently maneuvered the stretcher next to the drawer. The old man, who was next to the gaping hole, took the corpse's feet and nodded for Ted to take the shoulders. They strained. The old man's big muscles had turned flabby years ago. He quickly saw it was too much.

"Too heavy," he said, after a wincing grunt.

"You know what they say," smirked Ted, "heaviest weight is dead weight, huh?" Alone, Ted laughed too loud. He was paralyzed by a short cold stare, shot from eyes that begged for rest.

The old man went to the hoist. Its chains rattled from the bar as he slid the whole device along its groove in the ceiling.

"Pick up your end of the grate," the old man rasped. Ted numbly obeyed; that was all he was able to do. They both picked the iron ladder out of the drawer. It was heavy and very cold. They wedged it as far as it would go between the corpse and the stretcher.

"Now, when I roll the cadaver to the side, push the grate under. Come over here and hold the grate . . . all right, that's good."

The old man hurried around the stretcher and rolled the corpse on its side. He didn't have a good grip and Ted pushed the ladder underneath just in time for the corpse to flop back on it. The old man took a deep breath, wiped his greyed brow, and shook his head.

Ted watched as the old man pulled each chain over, one at a time, and slid its fierce iron hook around an end rung. Silently, the old man walked to the right wall where two light switches waited, one red and one black. He flipped the black one up and chains began to clank. The corpse slowly rose a few inches and stopped when he flipped the black switch back a notch. Then he flipped the red switch up, and the corpse slowly clanked over, stopping so it swayed slightly over the opened drawer. The old man, after waiting for the ladder to steady, flipped the black switch down. The dead man sank into the drawer.

The ladder, though it descended slowly, banged down, with an unforgettable resonance, the boom a heavy door makes when it is slammed on an empty room. For an instant Ted tightened up, the long tendon stood out on his neck. Once he had gotten out of the way of the hoist, Ted had stood on numbly, not even thinking about helping; not thinking at all, just seeing.

The old man unleashed the corpse, slid the hoist back to its wall, and shoved in the long, heavy drawer. The square silver door clicked shut.

"Okay, that's it," the old man said.

"Yeah," Ted mumbled, starting for the blue doors.

"Hey, don't forget your stretcher."

"Oh, yeah." Ted retrieved the empty stretcher, spinning it toward the doors. The old man called out from the drawers, stopping Ted at the blue doors.

"Listen son, thanks for the help."

Ted turned. "Oh yeah, I'm sorry I . . . ."

"And listen, take it easy. You know death ain't never easy, 'specially when it's this close."

As Ted pushed the light stretcher back to the elevator, he heard the blue doors close. Their echo and the old man's words volleyed inside Ted all the way up to the nurses' lounge.

He couldn't read any magazines or do any crossword puzzles. He didn't even put his feet up. All he could do was readjust his scrub hat, poke his sliding glasses back in place, and hear the nurses' prattle.

BEATRICE MOTAMEDI

SIMILES

While riding a train
through gold and topsoil —
black fields of corn
on the way to Wisconsin,
I thought to remark
to a fellow passenger
that our track, like a vein
cut and pulsed
through the land's broad palm,
that the lake we had passed
gleamed in the dusk
like a fingered jewel:

he turned and warned me
I'd ruin my field,
with so much seed.

ALAN SHAPIRO

HANDS OF COMPASSIONATE WOMEN: LAM:4.10

— A woman of Boston Congregation, having been in much trouble of mind about her spiritual estate, at length grew into utter desperation, and could not endure to hear of any comfort, etc., so as one day she took her infant and threw it into a well, and then came into the house and said, now she was sure she should be damned for she had drowned her child . . .

— from John Winthrop's journal
August, 1637

Good friends and neighbors, I have come to tell you
(for I can see this now, now that I see)
that my intolerable twilight's over,
dissolved just as the Lord intended always.
Though palsied with the love I bore my child,
its small elusive good, I somehow felt
hope rising like the erratic exaltation
of larks in that vast pause before a storm.
But now all hope is stiller than a flame
no breathing frets. And I am almost calm,
and, in a way, upright.
Oh, how I hoped
then, as I watched my child thrive, day by day,
her flesh soft as a light upon her bones,
the warm light of the Lord. And so, at first,
I, loving her, praised Him. I prayed that since
she was so godly, surely I was God's,

surely He made my love His dwelling place.
And then the thought, as quiet as the quick
stealth of a thief, took shape in me, that He
could not love Jesus more than I loved her.
And all my praising stopped.
Then my child sickened,
faded with judgment, grew well like a sign,
shifted from His dark Word into His light,
and back again. I drew back from her cries
as from a Devils' chorus, hymning of sins
so deep they never could be named, or known.
I prayed myself to sleep each night, and dreamt
another child, peevish because neglected,
tugged at my sleeve until I noticed him
who, when I turned to notice, turned away.
Throughout that awful twilight, my little babe
was but the scripture of God's mood toward me,
the righteous reflex of a righteous love,
was hard and crooked where I was perverse,
shifting in and out of Hell, until today.
For I awoke, sensing a certain sweetness,
a kind of grace, and knew my trial was ending.

I have been cast out of God's furnace now,
as He once cast the child out of my loins,
much as I cast the child, my only hope,
my only child, this morning, into a well.
But I have come to tell you, you good people,
that when I heard her small weight hit, her one
brief cry, I felt — as you may never feel —
that what He hath intended hath been done,
and praised Him for the light He took away,
and praised Him because I knew, at last, that I
was damned, and that the dark was comforting.

CLAUDIA PAP

FATHER'S WORK

Father, I watch your hands
at rest.
Your shell-pink nails
worn smooth by washing.

Sweeping across
the ivory face
of your wristwatch
a blade-thin
second hand
cuts
a vital minute
into singular beats.

All day the sweep-hand
paces your work,
as your own hands
carve and mend
a body waiting to heal.

Why do I watch
your hands? They say
well as your lips
would say to me,

Come now, my child,
what power do
we ply?

ERICH HELLER

THE POET IN THE AGE OF PROSE

Reflections on Hegel's *Aesthetics* and Rilke's *Duino Elegies**

Although Hegel has acquired the reputation of being a difficult and often obscure philosopher, his *Lectures on Aesthetics,* particularly his observations on the difference between the *epic* poetry of the ancients and the *novel* as the dominant literary form of the present, lead with perfectly lucid directness *in medias res,* to the center of my reflections. The great epic poems of antiquity, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* for instance, or Virgil's *Aeneid,* show not only the minds of certain poets; they are, at the same time, as are all great literary works, recognizable as the product of an age; and the age of Homer, the age of epic poetry, Hegel characterizes as a "fundamentally poetic state of the world," that is, a world in which poetry is not merely written, but, as it were, lived. The active intervention and participation of gods in the lives of mortals; groves and springs and hills as the habitats of nymphs and fauns; the poetic comprehension of what is, was at that time not a matter of the poetic imagination at work in the minds of a few chosen individuals, of artists whose successors, much later in history, more often than not lamented their separation from their contemporary surroundings, but was "natural," a matter of fact, of ways of thinking and feeling shared by the whole community. It is not absurd to say that in such a world *our* distinctions between imagination and fact were of little importance, if not unknown. It is this that led the young Nietzsche to accuse the first great analytical rationalist of Greece,

*These are extracts from the text of the 1979 Faculty Lecture given to the College of Arts and Sciences of Northwestern University.

Socrates, the indefatigable questioner, of having destroyed mythology (or what now goes by that name), of having helped to bring about the end of tragedy, indeed, of Greek art.

But back to Hegel: of his own epoch he said that it was the age of prose, and in this respect it certainly is still ours. The age of prose: this meant for him that prose had become the ruling mode of perception. Understanding is prosaic understanding. Our science is, of course, written in prose, and this implies not merely a manner of writing, but a style of comprehension; and prose is our psychology, our economics, our sociology — all our efforts intelligently to grasp the nature of the world.

For Hegel, all articulate religious beliefs of the past (Greek mythology, for instance) are part and parcel of a poetic understanding of the world although the religion of the future would be, he asserted, beyond any kind of truth that can manifest itself entirely in images, or in works of art. Still, with regard to the past and the present he distinguishes between "two spheres of human consciousness: Poetry and Prose." Yes, of course, he was what Jacob Burckhardt called him, a *"terrible simplificateur"* of history: the world of the ancients was "poetic," the modern world is "prosaic." Clearly, it would be pointless even to try to prove that there was a great deal of prose in the "Age of Poetry" and that there is a great deal of poetry in the "Age of Prose." For Hegel's distinction is not a technical one: it is concerned with modes of perception, universes of understanding. It is not a question of more or better poetry being written in an age of poetry; what Hegel means are different coinages of the mind, different currencies in which we pay for our attempts to understand the world. It is, therefore, an understatement within his incomparably more comprehensive historical statement when he says of poetry as an art that, in the Poetic Age, it has "an easier life" than in the Age of Prose. An easier life? Only because Hegel speaks at this point of poetry in a technical sense. Obviously, the poems of Archilochus or Sappho differed from the talk of ordinary Greek people as they conversed on the agora, the market-place; and yet the poetry of the poets was, according to Hegel, merely a more glorious flower of the common soil, related to it as the sunflower is mysteriously related to what looks prosaic enough: the seeds, the roots, the ground from which it grows. An easier life? It is the least that can be said when it comes to distinguishing the nature of Homeric poetry from literature written at a time when, in Hegel's words,

"prose has appropriated to itself everything that is of the mind, and has impressed the stamp of prose upon it." Once this has happened, poetry, if it survives at all, "must melt and pour into a fundamentally other mould," the material supplied by reality, in the end even language itself. No wonder that, with such resistance of the prosaic, "poetry finds itself involved everywhere in manifold difficulties."

Never mind the intelligently informed or pedantic arguments that can be raised against any such grand historical categorizing: there is no doubt — to choose another activity of the mind than poetry — that the philosophy of Anaxagoras or Heraclitus is closer to the poetic mode than to the philosophizing of Kant or Locke; and no doubt whatever that the novels of Stendhal are not only written in prose, but are, *therefore,* representative of the nineteenth century just as the epic poetry of Homer stands for a form of writing irrevocably of an age long past.

After the mythological crystallizations of ancient art — or, for that matter, the art of the Middle Ages — the modern novel is abundantly more "interesting" because it has discovered the "interestingness" of things that apparently were of no interest to the ancient poet or, it is to be assumed, his public: the nuances of love or love-making, the shades of greed or jealousy or envy that determine human relationships, the subtle subterfuges and self-deceptions, the infinite variety of objects with which man has surrounded himself. It is, then, in radical opposition to the Homeric epic that Hegel judges the modern novel: it is often superbly successful in revealing an entire world through many details of individual characters and their interactions, through their varied responses to the events they bring about or to which they become victims, through the fine delineations of things and the manifold impressions they make on different kinds of people. Yet, because the novel presupposes, as Hegel puts it, a "prosaic world order," it unavoidably lacks the poetic condition that could only be supplied by a world that is, or that is felt to be, poetic at its very core. And if the novel, nonetheless, is successful in occasionally creating *poetic* effects, this is due, as Hegel says, above all to the collisions between "the poetry of the heart" and the inexorable prose of the external sphere. No doubt, in saying this, Hegel, like the early German Romantics, for instance Novalis, thought of Goethe's prose works, his novels, above all his *Wilhelm Meister.* Still, it is amazing how far this conflict between "the heart" and "the circumstances," between "within" and "without" will take us — as far as Rilke's radical

withdrawal, in the *Duino Elegies,* from the external sphere: "Nowhere can world exist but within." Rilke did not know Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* but he knew or divined the character of the world in which he lived and in which, sometimes desperately, his poetry strove to assert itself as a valid aspect of truth.

The sense of having been born into a wrong age, a sense that, in one form or another, has been uttered by poets writing in the high season of what Hegel called Romanticism (the mode of poetry trying to survive, to assert itself even in the Age of Prose) has been most succinctly conveyed by Goethe. During his second sojourn in Rome in September 1787, beholding works of Greek sculpture, he wrote: "Those superlative works of art are superlative works of nature, brought forth by human beings in accordance with true and natural laws. Chance and fancy are gone. What is there, is there of necessity: God wanted it to be like this." It was, at that time, Goethe's ambition to pursue as an *ideal* what he saw as *nature* in those human creations; and when he denounced most of the artistic productions of his own age as lawless, forced, "unnatural," he appeared to have done so because they defied what in that passage he called with rare assurance the will of God. And indeed it would take up more time than we can afford to spend if we were to cite, from the Goethean and post-Goethean epoch, only a select few of the poets' sublime lamentations about the pathology of their spiritual existences in the Age of Prose. We might begin, perhaps, with Schiller's poem "The Gods of Greece" that views anything beautiful in the poet's own time as nothing but the dead monument to what was once a *living* truth; or Hölderlin's elegy "Bread and Wine" that mourns the absence of the gods from the poets' lives — "But we, my friend, are too late," the gods "are far above ourselves, away in a different world;" or Keats' "Sylvan historian" who records a time of poetic beauty that is irremediably lost; or Yeats' forms created by "Grecian goldsmiths," forms in whose company he desired to be once he was "out of nature," or what was looked upon as nature, in the Age of Prose; or Rilke's "Who, if I cried, would hear me among the orders of Angels?"

This is the beginning of the First of the *Duino Elegies,* the cry — in the conditional — of one who indeed felt that he was a native of the age of the novel, that literary form that Hegel had defined to be the representative genre of the prosaic epoch; the cry of a poet who had just essayed himself his only major prose work, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge;* the cry that echoed Hölderlin's

lament, much later than Hölderlin and, therefore, more timidly and insecurely. Never before has so ambitious, so successful, and partly even so great a series of poems about the spiritual condition of man so openly revealed its tentativeness, the helplessness that its author carried into his most audacious assertions by such an abundance of conditionals and subjunctives: "Who *would, if* I cried,"

> . . . And *even if* one of the Angels suddenly pressed me against his heart, I *should* fade in the strength of his stronger existence . . .

In the years 1907 and 1908 Rilke had published the two volumes of what he called *New Poems.* They were new, new in substance and tone and manner, much different from what he had written before, *The Book of Hours,* for instance, or *Song of Love and Death.* . . . What, then, was new in the *New Poems?* That the poet, judging the poetry of individual emotion, of what went by the name of Neo-Romanticism, exhausted, determined to sing no longer the songs of his subjective experiences and feelings, but to try to express the essence of the things themselves, just as if the things themselves opened their mouths to say what they were: a panther in its cage, the wind of the nocturnal sea, a figtree on a rocky height on Capri, a blue or pink hydrangea, Venice on a late autumn day. With extraordinary intensity and virtuosity he sought to carry out a poetic program that, in 1908, he laid down in his "Requiem for a Young Poet," a young man who had killed himself because of unhappy love. That desperate young poet had acted so desperately because he was not yet poet enough to have learned how to survive poetically what humanly had become unbearable: namely, as that "Requiem" pronounced with the typically Rilkean mixture of humility and hubris, by no longer using words in order to say, like a sick man, where it hurts, but to build from them, as if from stone, an edifice, much as medieval stone-masons did, who sank their private selves into "the equanimity of stone." That "Requiem" is, perhaps, too impressive a poem simply to say of it that it anticipated by nine years the anti-Romantic dogma of T. S. Eliot's most influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent;" yet this is exactly what it did.

If Hegel had been as subtle a critic of individual poems as he was a grand metaphysical historian of the arts, he might have said of Rilke's *New Poems* that they abound in those paradoxical and superlative qualities that poetry can still achieve against the un-

relenting defiance of the Prosaic Age: they are vigorously rarefied, energetically subtle, vitally decadent. If they were music, they would have to be intoned in sustained *forte dolce.* Achievements of such paradoxical kind, and only such achievements, are still possible after the "death of art," that is, after it had passed the historical phase in which it had, according to Hegel, fulfilled its "highest destiny." The poet, in such a period, has to produce out of his inner self, not only the poetry, but also, as it were the climate, the temperature in which it can breathe. No wonder there is something febrile about such works, something terribly exhausting about the labor of producing them. Indeed, these were the conditions of his own self that Rilke, through his double, the young poet Malte Laurids Brigge, poignantly describes in Malte's *Notebooks.* Rilke transcended this situation by the "violent" deeds, as he himself said, that he had perpetrated with his *New Poems.* He indulged the illusion that fresh poetic enterprises would *easily* succeed now that he had purged his soul and mind by making Malte Laurids Brigge suffer what he himself suffered. But his anxiety continued after the *Notebooks* were published in 1910. It lasted and certainly returned again during the years of the First World War and during the years that, with horrible explosions, followed upon the horrible explosion of 1914.

Yet there came that *dies mirabilis* in January 1912 when inspiration returned and "the Voice" spoke to him out of the storm that blew from the Adriatic as he walked along the ramparts of Castle Duino, the Voice that, as was revealed ten years later, intended to teach him the great lesson of why such a violent effort had been needed to wrest, in the Age of Prose, from the "things" of *New Poems,* from those blue or pink hydrangeas, or those rocks in the moonlight, their poetic essences. It was because the world outside was being progressively deprived of any meaning it had for the inner soul. Not even the apples — Cézanne could still paint them strenuously with dedicated love — were lovable any more: they now looked and tasted as if they had been produced by machines. Where once there had been houses built to survive centuries, some flimsy structures were run up that seemed to be the embodiments of transience; excogitations of mechanical brains formed avenues of soullessness, and silos, brimful of spiritual emptiness, rose into the sky. The Seventh of the *Duino Elegies,* written in 1922, deplores in this manner the state of the world: *"Und immer geringer schwindet das Aussen,"* ever more diminishes the substance of the

external world, thus justifying to him the momentous insight: "Nowhere can world exist but within."

This is what "the Voice" finally intended to say when on that January day in 1912 it first spoke to the poet, who had spent many months of aridity and barely hopeful waiting.

. . . . . .

(Rilke's Angel) has to be thought of as the being in whom is *realized* what emerges from the Elegies as the *task* of man: *to* transform the doomed external world — doomed not merely through present technologies and future wars, but through the diminution of its spiritual status — into pure inwardness. And this is why the Angel is so terrifying to us: he deprives us of the hope of our ever recovering what, mistakenly, we most desire — happiness within the sphere of the visible — and points to the kind of salvation that we fear most, the salvation that depends on an inner metamorphosis, "Herzwerk," as Rilke called it . . . "work of the heart" that aims at the most radical renunciation. . . .

. . . . . .

"A castle immensely towering into sky and sea: it is like a promontory of human existence" — this is how in October 1911 Rilke, a few months before the Voice spoke to him from out of the storm, described Duino. A castle that is like a promontory of human existence — the very phrase reveals what at that time and during the years after *New Poems* — was Rilke's most urgent poetical concern: to find among the things of the external world a concrete equivalent — ten years later T. S. Eliot would call it the "objective correlative" — of his inner state. *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* tells the story of this quest. The survival of poetry, indeed of art, seemed to depend on its success: to find the object, or the configuration of objects, that would naturally, spontaneously, express, or rather contain and convey, the poet's inner vision, the mode of his feelings, thoughts, passions, affections or dislikes. What Rilke had observed in Paris of the emergence of an "object-less" art, an "abstract" art (to use a convenient misnomer), or an art, that through the distorting, disordering and sensationally rearranging the forms in which the world around man presents itself to his perception — well, what Rilke saw in the shops of the art-dealers, be it even the most recent experiments of a painter he dearly loved, Picasso, filled him with deep anxiety; indeed, with unrestrained anger. "Mischief and senseless caprice," he said of those works, or even "poison, sheer poison." They struck him as

excesses of human hubris, the arrogant betrayal of a world given to man so that it should provide him with his bread and his wine and with the occasions of his art. And he saw even more, namely that this art, by "transcending" the common human reality, announced future catastrophies: wars and destructions and deformations of the real world. Was it really impossible to save the inner and outer life of the creations of nature and man, to rescue our inheritance from senseless waste and neglect? Had the world, as it is, finally become a hindrance rather than an inspiration to human creativity? Such were the questions Rilke asked in 1906, long before the full meaning of such acts of desertion were revealed to him at Duino and Muzot.

The world as it is . . . No, at no time was Rilke naive enough to believe that a work of art is, can, or ought to be a dutiful "imitation" of nature. But although there was clearly, throughout history, a great variety of perspectives and insights offered to art in comprehending the world, they had been the manifold gifts of truth. In this belief he was, like his contemporary Proust, close to Plato. This is why he could say, seeing some products of modernity, that they reflected "that anarchy of vision driven to extremes through having become corrupted by microscopes and the increasing invisibility of so many experiences." "Invisibility," at that time, had not yet established itself as the domain of the Angel. Rilke was still engaged in the kind of work of which his mouthpiece, Malte Laurids Brigge, said that it consisted of "unexampled acts of violence" in that it "more and more impatiently, more and more despairingly, sought among visible things equivalents of the inner truth." But all visible things turned out to be hopelessly prosaic things. A dramatist whom Malte much admired — he obviously meant Ibsen — had preceded him in this search with brilliant and yet, to Malte, not quite satisfactory results. It seemed to the young poet that Ibsen reached out for tragic depths that could not possibly be contained within the prosaic bourgeois dwellings which he chose as their visible scenes. There was a little girl's wild duck imprisoned in its cage; there was a man, meant for a different life, restlessly pacing up and down within the narrow walls of his room; there was a fire outside the window that burnt to the ground the edifice of mendacious respectability; there was the sun which a young artist, collapsing into madness, begged of his mother. "But that was not enough," is Malte's conclusion. Why not? Because what was

needed, was not "the unexampled acts of violence" that forced the vision within on to a stage cluttered up with stuff the symbolic power of which was shop-worn if not altogether spent and exhausted; what was needed was, as emerged in the end, the unexampled act of liberation that is prefigured in the Angel, the transformation of the visible world, its melting in the "fire of subjectivity;" its resurrection in the pure and ideal spaces within — "*Weltinnenraum,*" as Rilke called it — all this for the sake of truth, the true relationship, so badly upset, between the world of human inwardness and — the world.

. . . . . .

The Angel had to intercede to bestow upon a world that appeared to have become spiritually useless in its grey, unyielding prose, the blessing of a resurrection in the invisibility of the inner spirit.

How seriously should we take this? As seriously as we are still capable of taking art and poetry and religion. True, at the same time as Rilke, after years of waiting, concluded the *Elegies,* he wrote the *Sonnets to Orpheus* in praise of the son of a king and a muse, the patron of song, who descended into the dark underworld, lost to it what he loved most, and revived it in his poetry. And during the four years that were left of Rilke's life, he continued to write poems. Some of these belong to his most beautiful. Yet even those that impress us first as most "visible" and even serene, are bathed in a radiance that seems to come from the Beyond where there is light after the suns of the Here and Now have set. No matter whether the Hegel-Rilkean findings will be proven true or be refuted by what is to come (I think I have reason to doubt the latter alternative), they will remain as most remarkable documents of a historical hour, even if it was not the last one of poetry. But in the poetic world of Rilke, which with possibly equal rights we may call the world of Yeats, George, Hofmannsthal, Benn, Valery, or, going back a little in time, of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, the poets created "absolute" poetry, "pure" poetry, the kind of poetry that flourished in the chasms and gulfs that the poets themselves felt were fixed between their poetic dedication and "life," the prosaic life of the epoch. After such extremes it is not surprising that language itself, the coherent speech of the race, should be suspected of having been drawn into the conspiracy of the prosaic against the mind of poetry. To yield poetry again, it had to be taken apart and made incom-

prehensible, untouchable, as it were, by the prosaic understanding. For what can be comprehended does not seem to be worthy of poetic attention. Of course, there are remarkable exceptions: Walt Whitman instantly comes to mind, Yeats, Robert Frost, Bertolt Brecht, Wilhelm Lehmann and some that have settled down somewhere in between. But the main stream has, I think, been traced by Hegel and by Rilke's *Duino Elegies.* The river's estuary is still uncharted; but the spirit of poetry, and of what hitherto has been called humanity, is bound to face hard times in the Age of Prose. Let us meet as an intellectual and moral challenge — what Hegel — perhaps mistakenly — deemed to be historical inevitability.

MARY PECKHAM

SKEWED

Have I loved too straight?
Never concealing
This uncertain wait
For equal feeling.

Perhaps if I lied?
Bent at harsh angles
My untrued yearning,
All it entangles —
Blurred faith, aimless pride?

Oh, I am learning
This twisted living.
Deft obliquity,
Stern, unforgiving,
Will serve to lead me
Where I am turning.

OUTING

Once past the gate, the wilds were ours.
We turned from steel to rocky towers
To revel in uncitied bowers.
Nature, benign,
Seduced us with beguiling flowers
And bright design.

We took the fields with battle cry,
Challenged all her artful sky
To prove its brilliance but a lie
And cloud the sun.
Clear, unchanged blue was the reply —
But she had won.

Below, dim oaks stood strange and still,
Echoed our cries from off the hill,
Breathing an air of dark and ill.
The sun still shone,
But now its light showed stark and chill
On hide and bone.

That calf had never meant to stay
Wedged in the forked tree-trunk this way.
Like us, it wandered there to play,
Meant no offense
To Nature, or her cruel display
Of gay pretense.

THE BABYSITTER

Her hair, deep brown, and her eyes,
Reflecting all of the world
She must have known at fifteen.
Only blonde, and only five,
I longed only to be her.

No one told stories like hers,
The danger and the ladies,
Always the handsome stranger.
She made popcorn like mother
Never could have, and one time
A tall boy came to play
With us until past bedtime,
Carried us on his shoulders
To bed. He was our secret.

Once I went into her house;
They kept a green parakeet
Letting him fly through the rooms,
And buckets of dark guppies.
She was not at home that day,
But her mother took me in,
And when I left with cookies
I had seen her very room.

Sometimes, in the neighborhood,
I would see her with her friends
Laughing, smiling in the sun.
And if she would smile for me,
I would give her my whole heart
In a whisper; I would stand
To watch her until she turned
The corner, seeing only
Her smile, her dark shining hair.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTINA CALVIT is a junior in the Theatre Department. Her marketable skills are acting and writing poetry. She is worried.

EDWARD C. ERNST, a Bonbright scholar and recipient of a 1979 Edwin L. Schuman Award for the essay appearing here, is a senior English major. He will attend Johns Hopkins University in the fall.

ERICH HELLER, Northwestern's first Avalon Professor of Humanities, has continued to teach certain courses since his formal retirement last June. An internationally distinguished critic of European literature and culture, he is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the recipient of the Gold Medal of the Goethe Institute and the Great Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

ANDREA KAMBARA, a senior English major will attend the University of Chicago next fall. Her poems have been published in *Pegasus, College Poetry Review,* and *Seventeen.*

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CLAUDIA PAP is a junior English major.

FRANK PAPATHEOFANIS is a junior in the Honors Program in Medical Education. He was the recipient of a 1979 Edwin L. Schuman Award for two poems, one of which appears here.

MARY PECKHAM received a Faricy Award for a series of eight poems last year. She is a junior Writing major in the English Department.

ALAN SHAPIRO teaches in the English Department. His book, *After the Digging,* will appear this summer from Elpenor Books, Chicago.

BEN SLOTE's story "Night Shift" won a 1979 Edwin L. Schuman Award. A junior English major, Ben is 21 and happy.

Helicon owes its name to the legendary habitat of the Greek Muses, those inspirers of human art and learning in all its many branches. Accordingly, its ideal goal is to present some of the best student and faculty work in literature, history, philosophy, religion, and art. This inaugural issue accents the literary part of the spectrum, not so much by conscious design as by chance: the range of materials submitted this year happened to be more restrictive than the editors had hoped. The relatively brief time between announcement of the journal and the deadline for submissions is one factor that should not interfere in future years, and the staff looks forward to increasing contributions from those in other areas of the humanities.

COVER BY JOSEPH HAWRY