paperplates

A Magazine for *Fifty* Readers

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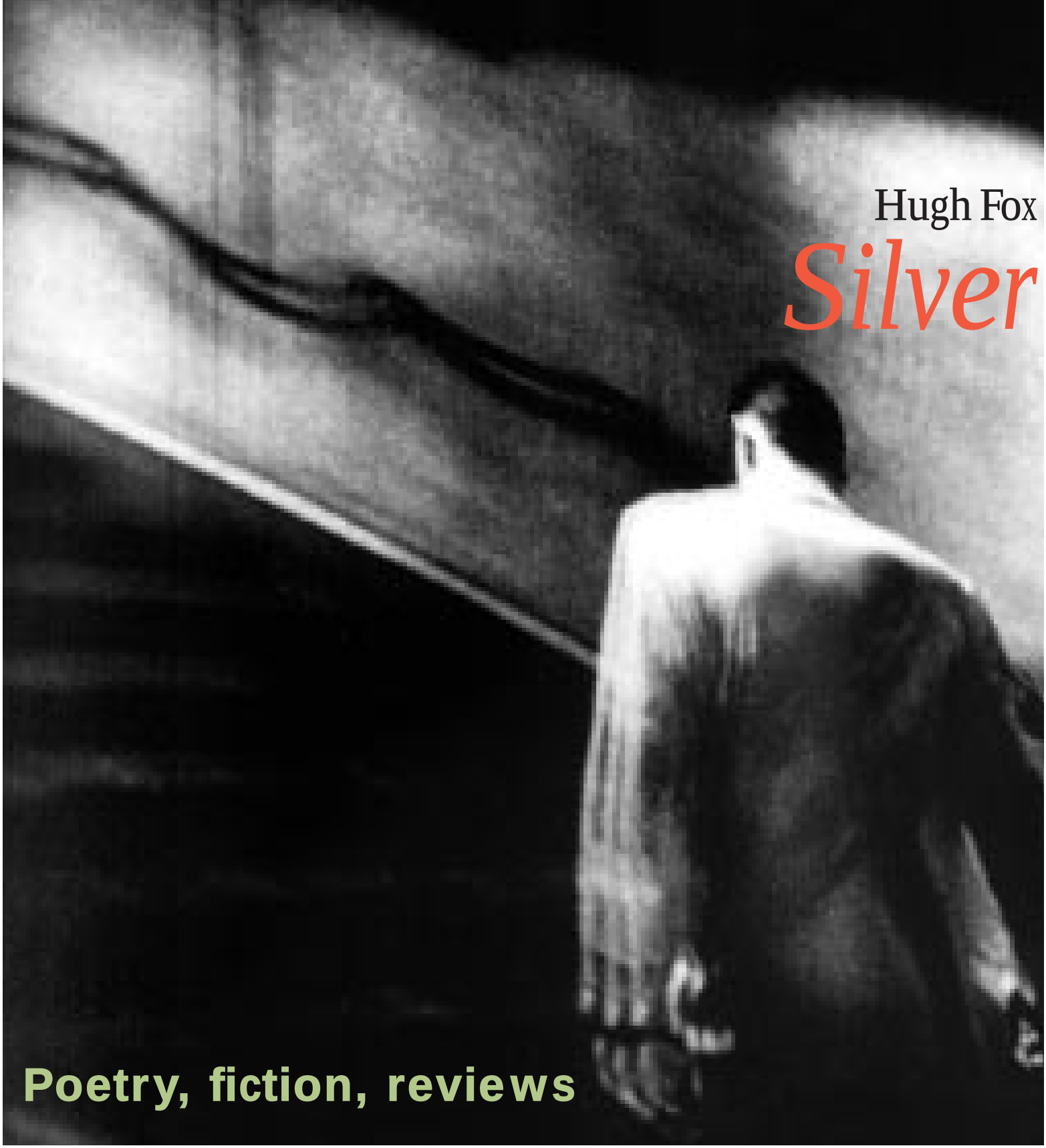
Vol. 3, No. 2



Hugh Fox

Silver

Poetry, fiction, reviews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Racing Canaries

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Silver

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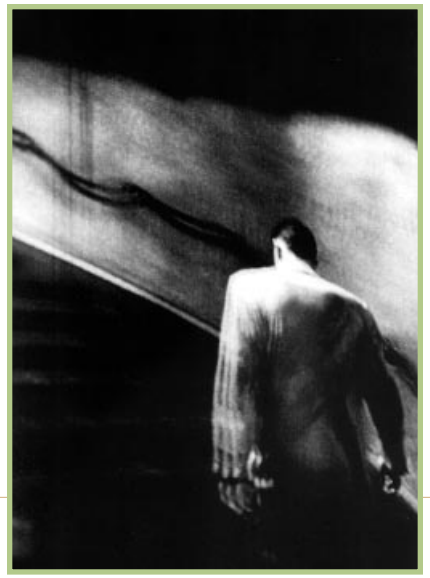

Front cover:
Photo by David Greenberg
Back cover:
Photo by Gil Gauvreau

paperplates

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submissions
We welcome submissions. For our guidelines, send us a stamped self-addressed envelope, or write to *paper@ perkolator.com*, or pick them up at *www.perkolator.com*.

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paperplexed?

This is the first issue of *paperplates* to be utterly and entirely digital (or so we intend). Some people have suggested (not that we didn't think of it ourselves) that the magazine's new situation necessitates a change of name. *Pixelplates? Dotsperinch? Digithis* or *Electrothat?* Tempting, to be sure. But really, ultimately, we saw no need: *paperplates* might be engraved, rendered, or otherwise imprinted and still rightfully bear the name it began with (which, after all, was never meant to be taken *sensu stricto*).

There are many ways in which electronic publications cannot match paper ones, particularly if the latter have large budgets to spend (ie, princely deficits). But for a small magazine like ours, whose pulse has been growing ever fainter during the past two years, this format offers the best hope for revival. Only thus will we be able to fulfil our commitment to (exceptionally patient) contributors while providing readers with something more than irregular puzzlement. (*"Have I missed an issue? Has my subscription run out?"*) Provide them, in fact, with a quarterly (as we once promised).

Notwithstanding these obvious changes, *paperplates* will continue as before, publishing the work we admire. Without perfume cards. Without advertising supplements.

Speaking of admiration, our contributors would certainly like to know *your* opinion of their work. Write to us [paper@perkolator.com].

— *Bernard Kelly*

letters

To the editor,
Vol. 3, No. 1 was my introduction to *paperplates*, and I really enjoyed it — although it is certainly its own puppy, it reminds me of various things presently and previously appreciated about *Geist* and *The Idler*. I had to share "Caliban" (and the scene-shifter theory) with most of my tinyperfect-world; and the M.F. Tierney excerpt, and (always) rob mclennan's poems stand out in memory as other high points.
Maria Erskine
Toronto

errata

Of renaming

In the last issue, while preaching on the necessity of accuracy in naming, we managed to get three names wrong ourselves:

Cover: "Liftshin" should be "Lifshin".

Contents & p. 39: "Conly" should be "Conley".

p. 37: "Anderson" should be (of course) "Adamson".

Our apologies to those so misnamed.

Two schools

Recent visits to the Vermeer exhibition in the Hague and the Dégas special exhibit at the National Gallery in London gave me the opportunity to ruminate on a subject uppermost in my mind.

That subject is how men respond to the potentially extremely pleasurable experience of holding a woman in a warm, intimate embrace.

It seems to me that the man's heightened feeling is composed of two basic elements and that these elements determine to which "school" he belongs. The first element is his response to the physical joy of feeling the warm body of the woman in his arms. The touch of her skin, the contours of her curves, the scent of her odours, the sensuality, in general, of her female figure, all add up to an overwhelming feeling of sensual pleasure, sometimes, but not always, followed by an orgasmic release.

This first element does not necessarily include the man's having a sense of the particular woman he's embracing. During the whole encounter, he may not even once look the woman in the face or even want to be aware of who she is.

But there are men, myself included, for whom looking at the woman, especially her eyes, seeing into her essence, and, one hopes, being seen by her, constitutes the second element, indeed the peak of the total experience.

It occurred to me that Vermeer belongs in this group. He sees the faces of his women, looks into their eyes, loves what he sees, and is rewarded by being seen by them in return. The face of the "girl with a pearl earring" tells the whole story. She is beautiful and promises joyful rewards to those who will take the trouble to look and to really see her.

Dégas, on the other hand, seems to me.to confine himself to the first element.

The exhibition at the National Gallery showed his paintings of women as dancers (particularly of ballet), of women getting in or out of baths, and of women combing their hair. In every case, the viewer gets a sense of the woman through the stance of her body, whether clothed or naked. I looked carefully, but in every case there was no hint of the woman's inner feeling, as the faces were either ignored altogether in shadows or were deliberately understated, in favour of the wonderfully expressive body.

I belong in the Vermeer school of men who love women for who they are, as well as for their physicality. The "girl with the pearl earring" will now adorn my apartment wall, and we will see each other often.

—Sidney Bacon

Jack Fury and friends

Two days before the Québec referendum, I was listening to Jocelyn Bérubé play a lightning fiddle and whinny like a horse. He was telling the story of Alexis "le Trotteur", an extraordinary speedster from the Gaspé. Jocelyn, like all legend recounters, began by establishing the lineage of the tale. He'd heard it from his father, who had it from *his* father, who'd worked briefly (everything Alexis did was brief; his phenomenally restless feet took him from town to town and job to job) in a sawmill. And this very grandfather's best friend had actually been there on the celebrated day, back at the turn of the century, when Alexis ran the world's first — and perhaps only — three-minute mile. Fuelled by nothing more anabolic than *poutine* and *sirop d'érable*, this greatest of all québécois marathoners broke every record held by human or beast. He had already beaten all the local racehorses when a new challenger came to the Gaspé: a locomotive. His race against the iron horse was the last he ever ran, alas. Trying to outsprint the train burst the mighty heart of Alexis "le Trotteur". He died by the side of the tracks, the locomotive steamed past, oblivious of its mechanical victory, and his glorious career fell to the storytellers to celebrate.

According to Jocelyn, whose telling is paced by fiddle, neighing, and clog-dancing, the spirit of "le Trotteur" is still alive. Alexis continues his exuberant mad dash beyond all earthly orbits, out past the planets, happily chasing shooting stars and romancing the comets.

Jocelyn was in Toronto with two other storytellers from Québec, Michel Faubert and Marc Laberge, sharing a cabaret stage with four Toronto tellers. They told in French, we told in English, and for a brief and bittersweet moment I understood what Canada could be. The audience that night was either bilingual or very polite. In any case, they laughed at all the right places in both languages and could, it *seemed*, follow the stories. And there we were, French and English- speakers, *not* trading lists of grievances, or arguing over bylaws and amendments, or effusing over or shunning our neighbours. We were just listening to each other's stories. It

has occurred to me, since that night of storytelling, that maybe the storytellers of Québec and English Canada are doing what our politicians seem unable to accomplish. A wise writer, describing her philosophy of teaching, said. "Put your play into formal narratives, and I will help you and your classmates listen to one another. In this way you will build a literature of images and themes, of beginnings and endings, of references and allusions. You must invent your own literature if you are to connect your ideas to the ideas of others." This is Vivian Gussin Paley describing how storytelling helps her class act like a community. She's talking about three-year-olds.

If this works for her preschool class, why not for the rest of us?

Perhaps what happened in a downtown cabaret that October evening in the not-particularly-bilingual city of Toronto was the beginning of this "literature of images and themes". If so, you should know what stories were told.

Marc Laberge's tale was about the time a whole flock of ducks got caught by a sudden drop in temperature and were frozen in a pond. He and his father were out in the woods when they discovered this strange sight. They got in the middle of the ice and cut away the edges. Sure enough, when the ducks flapped their wings, the ice-raft rose into the air. That's how they got home – luckily, the ice didn't melt until they reached their own yard. It must have been a remarkable experience. Marc went on to become one of Québec's most renowned adventure photographers, still gazing at the world through a lens made not of ice but of ground glass.

Michel Faubert's story was about Ti-Jean, that notorious trickster from the Québec countryside. When some bullying, bragging thieves steal his prize pig, Ti-Jean exacts a very thorough, very rough, and very comical revenge (it features cross-dressing, impersonating a physician, and a very big stick).

As for the English storytellers, Bob Barton told a creation myth about how earthworms came to be (God had some extra clay and wasn't sure what to do with it). Lynda Howes told about a Russian innkeeper who is plagued with mice, until he shows kindness to an impoverished traveller (he turns out to have miraculous powers of herding both large and very, very small cattle). Itah Sadu told a Caribbean-inflected yarn about a boy who tried on lots of identities and names until he came back to the one he started with. And I told the story of Jack Fury, a tale I heard from a Cape Breton storyteller named Joe Neil MacNeil.

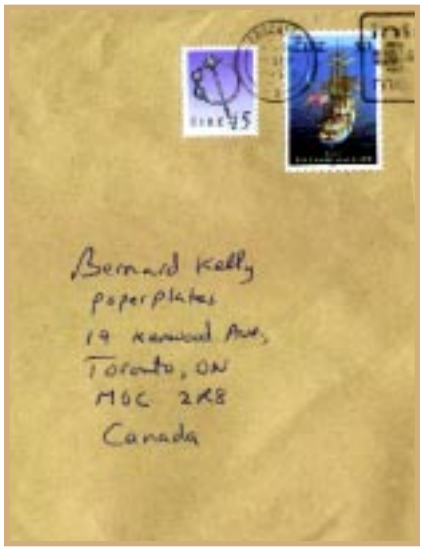
Jack Fury works for two stingy bosses. They're so stingy that he can't even afford an undented can of tuna fish for supper. Like all good folklore tricksters, Jack Fury uses his bosses' greed against them. I won't tell you all he does, but at the end of the story these two fools are begging Jack to throw them into the river so they can round up some of the fat cattle Jack has told them live under the water. He obliges, of course, and inherits their farm.

Seven stories in two languages. It's not much, I know, but it is a beginning. For one thing, these stories were told by word-of-mouth, and as Joe Neil used to say, "What the ear does not hear cannot move the heart" (you should have heard him say it in Gaelic). So the seven tales passed directly from the tellers to the listeners, there to be, one hopes, remembered and re-told.

And secondly, the stories evoke seven important things. (*Seven Tales for Highly Confused Canadians / canadiens / québécois?*) Speed and lightness; gazing through a new lens; using your wits; being creative with the clay in your hands; showing kindness to chance travellers; searching hard for your identity; and having the fury of Jack when the bosses show surpassing greed and criminal stinginess. I expect every one of these qualities will stand us in good stead during the coming period of change. Most of all, the value of listening.

My Québécois friends went home in time to vote. Before they did, late one night, over a beer, we ended up talking politics. They said that nobody they knew wanted to break the country up. They also said that change is necessary and urgent. I suspect they planned to vote "oui". But I know that they had a grand time in Toronto and were surprised to see so many citizens come to listen to their stories. They went back up the road to Montréal vowing to build stronger bridges between the two cultures. Jocelyn has a saying: "Life is a pair of pants held up by the suspenders of hope." (It sounds better in French.) My hope is that we'll begin by listening to each other's stories.

—Dan Yashinsky



Fraser Sutherland

Three poems

Basketball

This every evening in the back lane a couple of kids
bounce a basketball thud thud thump off the backboard
they are shooting holes in creeping darkness jump for rim
jobs
live in hoop do I resent this buoyant noise suspecting
they scatter sucked-out orange sections on my parking spot
or
something equally or more unsettling in heat sun sweat?
Across town another's also disquieted trying to focus in
her study flailed by mongol mongers shrilly
hawking bok choy like me she seeks to keep life
sanitized civilized climatized maybe energy defeats us thud
thud thump bumptious day glow bodies jump jostle
in mid-air middle distance they don't know what to do
with their bodies so they do it to a ball
youthful exuberance more like a fucking waste of time

But here I am on the back stoop slumped
on rotting steps exposed to the city
nursing like a sick pet stinkin' thinkin'
a self-help cheerleader calls it she says cancel that
whatever you think will happen to you aim
for the positive write a poem shoot a basketball
Well, it's good exercise for them
Suddenly everyone's younger
The case for pederasty I'm credibly informed is you really
have to love boys to put up with them this pair
didn't string lights so they can't take flashy shots
the far side of midnight blackness will blot them out
a skyhook yank them home

Wood & Honey

Thirty-odd years ago Wood and Henley
freelance loggers
bought the farm to rape the forest
Henley was shadowy
maybe the money man but I remember Wood
small and cunning, sitting
in the barebones kitchen
amid bachelor breakfast rubble
My mother asked how he was doing
deprived of wife and like domestic comforts
"Oh, I'm all right, I buy a piece of beef
and some honey if I can get it"

This statement has always bothered me
Was honey so hard to get?

Did Wood scan the aisles
for its unpredictable appearance
snatch and bear it off in stealthy triumph
– honey to thickly spread on toast?
Or was he ruefully admitting
that eyes so sharp in other respects
were blind to this elusive sweet?
Questions like these are seldom answered
maybe not worth asking about
Wood, hewer of enigmas for a 12-year-old
Wood and the missing honey

Breakup

The final signal was when they took the bed away
Mattresses, headboards, floorboards slump in the box
and V. hops in the cab with a tall dark stranger
Sprouting in the sodden November leaves
the lawn sign says Village Realty make us an offer
For months now the couple had followed a new rotation
V. there weekdays with the two kids, B. on weekends
Where do they sleep together or apart?

We doors away have tried to splice spotty information
seeking when or what went wrong. Was it midsummer
when despite B.'s vasectomy V. got pregnant got rid of it?
Did B. raised Catholic resent this? Or we speculate
maybe V. wanted to be talked out of it and the lapsed B.
decided that would betray his hardwon lack of faith
Maybe it was a mutual decision to nix an inconvenience
Maybe this is going too far the baby wasn't his?

Up to then they seemed fine just another
boomer couple on a family street V. anxious because
our kid supposed to pick up their kid after school
gets his wires crossed and she doesen't know where her kid
is
But he went home with another kid that's all right
B. lean and weedy in rumpled bathrobe offers me a beer
at night sits on the steps with his son spotting planes
Which take off and land land and take off?

No doubt about the weekend the crisis hit B. didn't come
home
A furious V. her face a mess aimed to see
a legal aid lawyer we invited her to dinner to talk it out
maybe if we could help arranged a baby-sitter
but then she cancelled B. returned and then we didn't hear
more
assumed they'd worked it out it's their business if
a marriage's shot down should we locate, decode the black
box
decide which pilot mistook a mountain for a cloud?

We notice V.'s wardrobe, how shopbound she used to strut
in tight ditzy pants bright patchwork jacket cute peaked cap
ripe and jaunty but now subdues herself in sombre hues
All this is sad, but of course the saddest business is the kids
a boy for B., a girl for V. The girl's too young to know
what's really going on, the boy knows they're going to move
maybe that his dad won't take him and our kid to
McDonald's
anymore. Has he got more to go on than that?

I think back to the spring. With help and plans B.
had hammered and slotted together a hardwood deck
overlooking their backyard crisscrossed with lines and toys
He was so proud of it, that deck. What better symbol
to show a brave resolve to mend the things gone wrong?
At that point had they even gone wrong? Or the story takes
another tilt was the deck's assertion a false spring?
Who knows the secrets of the human hearth?

David W. Henderson

Racing Canaries

Blue Panache is flying in the fifth race today.

His trainer puts him in a light cage, and carries him from the songless aviary down into the tunnel that leads to the racecourse on the other side of the great building. Before and behind them, other trainers carry their entries. The trainers do not speak to each other. The canaries, too, are silent. Some have their feathers fluffed and heads tucked back. But not Panache. His trainer raises the cage to eye-level for a moment as he walks along, and squints at the canary in the tunnel's dim light. Panache ignores the perusal. He has scant affection for the man with his moist hands, chewing-tobacco breath, and harsh training regimen.

The feeling is mutual.

Cocky little bugger. Thinks the world of himself. Well, he better fly like his butt's on fire today, that's all I can say. Get Old Man Cruikshank off my back with his early morning calls. "It's been four days since my birds have won." As if I didn't know.

As they near the racecourse, Panache hears the roar of the crowd building to a climax. The fourth race is ending. The noise level is still high as they enter the intimate arena that surrounds the doughnut-shaped, mesh-enclosed circuit. It increases when the crowd spots them. The cries and shouts brace Panache, wind him tight.

A last frenzy of betting sweeps the stands as the announcer names the entries for the fifth. The trainers enter the circuit and clamp the canaries to their starting perches. The goshawk is already in place, red restraining leash attached. He eyes the racers one by one as if deciding which will be his meal. Panache doesn't look at the predator. To do so would arouse an instinctive fear that would paralyze him. Only pride, and the roar of the crowd, keep panic in check. His trainer chuckles humourlessly as he gives Panache a last once-over before leaving the mesh-enclosed area.

Don't like that, do you? Being near the goshawk. It really gets to you! Well, a damn good thing it does. Forget about him even a moment, and you'll end up being torn to pieces in front all your admirers. And wouldn't that be too bad. For both of us. And the record.

"They're off!" the announcer shouts. Released at the bell from their starting perches, the canaries accelerate down the course, some smoothly, some frantically. Four seconds later, the goshawk is freed and launches after them. The crowd clamours as the birds fly round the course. After the second circuit,

Panache is in the lead with Seraphim, a veteran who looks more finch than canary. They take turns riding each other's slipstream, keeping well ahead of the rest while the goshawk zeros in on the trailer. Part way round the third and final lap, the crowd noise peaks. The air about them trembles, and Panache knows that the goshawk has his meal. It's the most terrible and wonderful sound in the world. Panache hears it with a pang. He hears it with relief, knows he's safe till the next time. He doesn't glance back to see who's been caught. That would be peering into the future. Instead, he flips into a roll across Seraphim's path and tunnels to the finish line just ahead of the finch. The crowd shouts its acclaim.

As the next race is announced, Panache's trainer carries him from the racecourse. Panache would like to sing out his victory, but it has been a long time since song bubbled up from his breast.

In the aviary, the trainer, cheek bulging with a wad of tobacco, takes Panache in his great moist hands, inspects him clinically. No word of praise. No gratitude. Not even one of those awful, meaningless chirps the trainers use to soothe their charges. This annoys Panache. After all, it's not the trainer who's out there with his life on the line, bringing the crowd to its feet. Panache wishes, just for once, the man could feel the terror that comes with falling behind on the third lap, the goshawk closing — the terror that leaves one flying on instinct, training forgotten.

Scrutiny complete, the trainer sets Panache on a perch in his cage.

Look at the bird, all puffed up with himself! A bloody marvel he thinks he is. Goes to his head, all that cheering and shouting, and fans gawking. "Isn't he beautiful!" they gush. As if beauty matters. It's fast that counts, and he's fast all right. I made him that way, dammit. Without me, he'd have been goshawk meat long ago. God's truth. I don't get half the credit I should from the fans and sportswriters. Beauty didn't get him where he is. I did, with my training and special diet. And some other things best not mentioned. You do what you have to.

Blue Panache, nonetheless, is gorgeous. He not only possesses the classic lines racing canaries are bred for, he is also endowed — luck of the genetic draw — with a cinnamon-orange body, yellow white-tipped wings, agate-green tail feathers and an opal-blue crest, the last giving him his name. When he molts in the off-season, he gets depressed. Although he's out of public view, he worries that some day a photographer will slip into the aviary and catch him at his worst, ruin his reputation.

He's no pure-bred, of course. Few of the hundreds of canaries in the aviary are. He has Norwich, finch, Hooded Suskin, warbler and other blood in his veins. Pure-bred canaries don't last in the racing game. The Glosters, Borders and Lancashires sent here to compete bring their superior airs, but seldom make it through the first fortnight. The few who do have a burnt-out look. They perch to one side of their cages, feathers fluffed out and eyes glazed.

Extremist acts

Tragedy highlights
the truth:
all the lonely, ugly ducklings
do not get redefined as swans.

— *Ronald Epstein*

Panache has been competing a long time now, but he's still caught up in the excitement of the racing life. He's a crowd favourite, and wins often. In fact, he's won more races than any canary still competing, and is only four victories shy of breaking the all-time record held by Old Africa, the famous brimstone canary, now retired for breeding purposes.

Old Africa was still racing when Panache started years ago, and Panache learned a lot from watching the more experienced canary. His rolls, his dives, his ability to pull bursts of speed out of nowhere — phenomenal! But Old Africa had no time for the young upstart, acted as if Panache didn't exist. Panache has never forgiven this. He goads himself with it. He's determined to break Old Africa's record, ruffle the old bird's feathers, perch alone at the top of the sport.

Panache's trainer has a new assistant. She is neither young nor middle-aged. Her face is fine-boned, angular, and her dark hair short and straight. The trainer shows her how to clean the cage, replenish the feeder and transfer Panache to the carrying cage. When she holds Panache, her hands are gentle. The trainer seems uneasy around her.

What's Cruikshank up to, anyway, sending me this cool bitch? Wouldn't let me hire the guy I wanted. So, what is she? The leavings of a busted affair? The daughter of an old friend? Someone he's grooming to take my place? It better not be the last. I got enough on him to make things unpleasant. "Keep racing clean!" he insists in public, but with me it's different. Wants to be sure I'm onto the latest tricks and drugs. Too much money at stake.

"It's kind of quiet in here," the woman says to the trainer, as he puts distilled water into Panache's reservoir.

"Quiet?"

"There's no singing. Canaries are supposed to sing."

"Not these ones. Singing uses too much energy." He spits a stream of tobacco juice into the slop channel below the cage.

"But how can you stop them?"

The trainer takes a brown bottle from a cabinet beside the cage, pours a few milky drops into the reservoir and stirs. "With this," he says, looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. "You put it in each time you add fresh water."

"What is it? A hormone? Is it legal?"

The trainer puts the bottle away. "Come," he says. "I'll show you where I keep the race-day seed mixture."

Panache goes into a slump. No win in over a week. Nothing seems to work. He wants to beat Old Africa's record so much, he's trying too hard. He knows it. He needs a break. But, instead of giving him a few days off to recuperate, the trainer starts racing him twice a day, and not the usual once every day or two. This catches Panache by surprise. The trainer has never done this before, never looked so put-upon. On the way to and from the race-course, he walks with head lowered, gripping the carrying cage as if he would crush it.

Bloody hell! The more you succeed, the more they expect from you. Cruikshank says my job's on the line. Either the bird breaks the record soon, or I'm out the door. And if I create a fuss, he'll make sure I never work again.

All the man cares about is the bottom line. Says the bird's stud value will triple or quadruple once he tops Old Africa. "I want those four wins now," he says, "not next month, or next year. Panache isn't getting any younger. If you're not up to the job, I'll find someone who is." And he will, too, if the damned bird doesn't produce.

Panache flies as hard as he can, but the schedule is simply too heavy. He realizes now he has only so many races left in him, and they're being quickly spent. It's becoming more and more of a struggle to keep pace with his fellow veterans. When he finally manages a win, the trainer reacts by entering him in the two other races the same day. He finishes out of the money in both of them, back in the middle of the field. The racing life is starting to lose its shine.

At night, he dreams he is racing alone around the course, the goshawk right behind him. There is no end to the number of laps. He beats his wings furiously, stretched to the limit, but the goshawk closes. He wakes with a start just as the talons are about to take him.

Three long days pass before Panache ekes out another win. He hardly notices it. He is wrapped in a fog of fatigue, flying automatically, instinctively. Every fibre of his being aches. At first, he assumes the discomfort is simply the reaction of muscles and tendons to the abuse, but then recognizes that the pain is more about something that isn't there, rather than something that is. Some vital element is missing. He searches for it, tries to puzzle it out from the empty imprint, the hollow casing it has left behind.

Finally, even as the trainer clamps him to the starting perch for still another race, the answer comes to him.

Song. The void in him is the place where song used to be.

He's always known that there is something in the water he drinks that silences song. Known it and turned his back to it. It was the implicit price of being a racer. But now the extent and depth of this loss reaches through the miasma about him, weighs on him. He remembers how, when he was young, he listened attentively as the adults sang — the choppers, the rollers, all of them — and how he learned from them until he could fill the sky with his own song. There was such grace in song. It made life lustrous. Then came the day when he was selected as prime racing material. That was the end of song. Song was replaced by the perks and prestige of the racing world, and the songless aviary became the norm.

The recollection of his younger days gives him a momentary boost. At the starting bell, he hurls himself into the lead, and manages to hold off all challengers to win the race by a head, tying Old Africa's record.

The trainer struts and preens in front of the media. The record will fall, he assures them confidently. Panache wearily tucks his head under a wing. He's remembering song.

Compost

Leaves swirl in the wind around me
as I carry yellow manila envelopes
toward the postal station.
Like wild canaries
leaves float past in brilliant flashes
touching my head and hands
as they spiral to the ground.
Worthless leaves, shortlived,
crunch companionably underfoot
and gleam like sunshine on a sullen day.
At the postal counter
I send my leaves of paper
to the four winds
hoping that one escapes
the compost bin.

—Ruth Latta

Almost asleep on the friday night couch

watching late tv
is like half
a can of diet coke
left on the counter overnight

the house has died
from a week's overexertion
the furnace only heaving breaths
every four and a half minutes

it might snow tomorrow
which would be good reason
never to open the door again

even the bird is asleep
with its head twisted back
onto shortened wings

it may dream of flight
but probably not
having never left the cage

— Jason Snart

The next day is nearly disastrous.

In the second race, Panache lets himself get boxed in by the other racers, and finishes out of the money. Then, in the fifth, his wings falter briefly after the second lap. He loses rhythm and falls behind until he finds himself bringing up the rear with a Gloster, a recent arrival. With the goshawk closing, he chooses the surest way out. He deliberately "bumps" the Gloster, knocks him so as to disrupt the smooth flow of his flight, tumbles him into the talons of the on-coming predator and makes it safely across the finish line.

It's a legal manoeuvre, crowd-pleasing, but not well regarded in the aviary. It's not something he's ever resorted to before, and he's not proud of it.

After conferring with the veterinarian back in the aviary, the trainer scratches a trembling Panache from the eighth race.

Not that I really wanted to. But the vet says the bird needs rest. Says if I raced him, I'd be feeding him to the goshawk. So, I pull him. Cruikshank isn't going to like this, but he'd crucify me if I raced the little bugger right after a near miss like that, and lost him. The vet wants to give the bird a week off. He's crazy! I say three days. Any more than that and Cruikshank will forget all the nice things he had to say about me when we tied the record.

After the trainer goes off to attend to other duties, Panache waits for the tremors to stop, then opens his beak and tries to sing. The desire to sing is becoming an obsession with him. The thought of song is the only thing that helps him forget the startled, accusing look the Gloster gave him in the instant after the bump. It carries him back to a more innocent time. He wants song to fill the emptiness in him and overflow to the skies, but his throat won't cooperate. All that emerges is a chirp.

Undaunted, determined to rediscover song, he stops drinking the tainted water and pecks a small hole in the bottom of the plastic trough, where noone will notice it. The water drips slowly away to the slop channel beneath.

The trainer's assistant, however, spots him while he's working on the hole. She looks at him curiously, but doesn't intervene. When the reservoir is empty, she fills it with fresh water on which he gorges until she adds the drops. As soon as the drops are stirred in, he stops. She arches an eyebrow. "Whatever are you up to?" she murmurs.

For the next while she keeps an eye on him. He eats, but doesn't drink. When the water has all drained away, she plugs the hole in the trough with a bit of chewing gum, and refills the reservoir, but this time she adds no drops. Panache gorges to slake accumulated thirst, then goes back to drinking normally. The assistant watches him for a while to be sure. "Well," she says, "won't someone be surprised."

After two days of untainted water, Panache feels song starting to bubble in his throat, but he holds back.

Accompanied by the trainer, the veterinarian comes to see how he's doing. They paw him over. "He's looking better," the vet says, "but I'd still give him two or three more days. He's still worn out. Look at his feathers."

The trainer shakes his head, takes out a plug of chewing tobacco. "He looks fine to me. Besides, I've already entered him for tomorrow. He's missed too many races as it is." He bites a corner off the plug.

The vet shrugs, temporizes. "Well, I suppose he doesn't look that bad," he says. And he leaves.

The trainer notices the feeder is nearly empty. He calls to his assistant, who is tending another cage, and tells her to

fill it. “Right away,” she answers him, cheerfully.

What’s with her? What’s she so happy about? Up till a day or so ago, she walked around with an expression that would sour milk. Now, she looks smug. The cat that swallowed the canary. I don’t like it. I don’t need mysteries and trouble. And she’s trouble. If it weren’t for Cruikshank, she’d be out of here.

That night, after the lights of the aviary are dimmed and the late-shift caretakers leave for a coffee-break with the security guards at the entrance to the building, Panache tries an experimental trill. Not bad. He tries another and another, until his song reaches every corner of the aviary. It’s not perfection, but it pleases him enormously. The other birds are startled. Some even try to join him, but only manage a pathetic chorus of cheeps.

Panache practises until his throat is raw. Finally satisfied, he tucks his head in among his back feathers and goes to sleep.

Blue Panache is scheduled to fly in the third race. Fatigue still weighs on him, but he is calm, calmer than he’s ever been before a race. When the trainer brings him into the arena, Panache accepts the noise and tension in the air with equanimity. As his name is announced, the roar of the crowd rises in an overpowering crescendo. The fans know the record is on the line. They have come to see sporting history made. The trainer clamps him to the starting perch and leaves the circuit.

As the last of the racers are being readied, Panache suddenly throws back his head and bursts into song. At first, the song is lost in the noise, but then the crowd sees that something different is happening, and for the first time in memory, falls silent. They listen, astonished. Even the announcer stops talking. The trainer stands outside the mesh, hands gripping it like talons.

What the hell’s going on? How come the bird’s singing? The bitch must’ve forgotten the drops, damn her! Look at him, wasting his breath, and Cruikshank here specially today. Well, it’s not my funeral. If something happens, it’s the woman’s fault, but if the bird wins by a fluke, it’s my latest strategy. Noone’s going to make a fool of me.

Panache’s song is brief. He knows he can hold the crowd’s attention for only so long. He sings of his lineage, his victories and his defiance of the goshawk who stares at him, more puzzled than enraged.

He ends his song as the announcer picks up the thread of his commentary. It is time now to race. Panache knows, to the very calamus of his feathers, that today he will either win or fall to the goshawk. Nothing in between. And, feeling whole, he no longer cares one way or the other.

A leak in the roof

Perched on the kitchen counter reading,
conscious of where her children are in the yard.
At six her husband comes home, goes upstairs
to his study, turns up the music louder than his
own voice.

The only light is three lamps by the mirror.
He wipes dust off the wine bottle,
grips the glass rough, drinks it lazy,
files his day in the bureau and locks it.

Folding tablecloths she
seals the air with her laugh.
Laughing at nothing
but a child’s slippery cartwheel
through the frost of the window.

Laughing at herself and the tub
of chili on the stove,
she puts an extra fist of salt in.
Will he hear her this time?
Will they talk about it in front
of the children?

Will they talk at all today
about why she cut her hair herself?
Will he taste the salt?
Does he feel his own tongue?

One day she hid his only pair of shoes
to see if he’d leave without them.

He left barefoot with a hole in his raincoat.

—Allison Eir Jenks

B. Z. Niditch

The Day Jackie O. *Died*

Characters

Tom, Marsha (married to Tom), Roger,
Officer Flaherty, Officer Dinge

Marsha

I remember the day Jack died as much as the day Jackie O. —

Tom

That was the day, Marsha, I left you for Jesus.

Marsha

Oh, Tom, after all we'd been through.

Tom

Jesus has been through more — take crucifixion.

Marsha

You only became a Jesus freak for sex. It only lasted a while, thank God. Before that it was Scientology, surf boards and Sufi.

Tom

I couldn't help but have a crush on Sky Saxon ...

Marsha

And Monica and Viv and Guru Fletcher. You've always had a man in your life, or another woman. Take Tatania. First you told me she was a Christian friend baptized in a St. Petersburg bathtub for fear of the KGB, and then after I found you as the only couple in the unused drive-in, you told me she was KGB herself. At least my parents were Depression Leftists.

Tom

No, Marsha, they were Leftists always in a depression.

Marsha

Make me some tea in a glass, Russian style, only iced with vodka.

Tom

Whatever you say, prol soul.

Marsha

Is Roger coming over?

Tom

He's dressing up as Jackie O. Remember, it's her memorial.

Marsha

He always needs an idol. Before that it was Garbo, Hedy Lamarr or Madonna. What's with you men?

Tom

Don't be sexist, Marsha. Just try your tea.

(Roger comes in dressed as Jackie O.)

Tom

That pillbox hat makes you look like an organ grinder's companion.

Roger

I have the Dallas assassination film for you.

Marsha

This is an obsessive relationship, you and Jackie O. You guys always need someone else's identity because you have none of your own.

Tom

Leave off your pop psychology. Go call your father in Vegas. Have him send some dough.

Marsha

What for? More accoutrements for Roger?

Roger

I hope I look all right. I can't believe Jackie is gone. I used to see her at the opera gala.

Tom

Is that where you dressed up as Maria Callas?

Roger

Anna Moffo, baby.

Tom

Well, let's watch the Dallas killing of the President.

(Marsha walks in with a gun and shoots at both of them.)

Tom

She's loco.

Roger

She almost got my cocoa-colored shoes.

Marsha

They're just blanks, you idiots.

Roger

I don't know about you two ...

Marsha

You never bothered to find out.

Roger

What do you mean? Are you suggesting a threesome?

Marsha

Two women and a boy.

Tom

I'm going to put on the Zapruder film.

Marsha

Well, maybe that will cool us all off.

Roger

(sarcastic and sexy)

Oh, really? (starts to strip tease)

Tom

I really feel embarrassed by your tease, in front of Marsha.

Roger

Life is an embarrassment, but death puts an end to it.

Marsha

You never care how I feel, either of you.

Tom

Well, Jackie is just being herself.

Marsha

The real Jackie would have cared. I met her at Bergdorf's and she was kind to me.

Tom

You never told me that.

Roger

I'm mortified.

Tom

What did she say?

Roger

What was she wearing?

Marsha

I'll never tell.

Roger

I'm the only one around here who shows and tells. Oh, what it must be like to actually be with Jackie O. I spent a lifetime dreaming about her. Once I determined in junior high to really see Jackie. There she was, bigger than life on the white house lawn on her knees, participating in the annual Easter egg roll.

Tom

Forget the newsreels. Let's all be the people. I'll be Jack Kennedy and, Marsha, who will you be?

Marsha

I'm not part of the establishment. When Kennedy first sent advisors to Vietnam I protested.

Tom

Marsha, you're a perpetual protestant.

Marsha

You were a yippie yourself, once.

Tom

That was just a phase.

Marsha

You're always in a phase.

Tom

Mother tells me that too.

Marsha

Anyone can tell you that, and that's why you keep flitting from sect to sect. No one in their right mind could keep up with you.

Roger

I can keep up with him and I'm no fly by night.

(Two policemen knock; someone opens the door.
Enter Officer Flaherty and Officer Dinge.)

Flaherty

Who is Roger Plasterkatz?

Roger

I am, officer.

Dinge

Well, get her!

Flaherty

We have reason to believe you stole an ashtray from the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

Roger

How could it have possibly been moi? I gave up smoking for Lent.

Flaherty

Search her.

Dinge

Oh, my, how she's built! Officer Flaherty, I hate to admit this, but I want this Jackie O.!
(Officer Dinge starts to kiss Jackie.)

Marsha

Oh, my God! Everyone is obsessed with Jackie O.

Flaherty

Break it up, guys. I'm going to have to report you for this, Officer Dinge. You'll lose your badge for this.

Dinge

I don't care. I never liked you as a partner anyway. Well, I'll still have my nightstick.

Marsha

Oh, Tom, aren't you man enough to do anything about all this?

Tom

I'm not sure. I'll have to ask Guru Fletcher, or Sky Saxon.

Marsha

Oh, I need a forceful hunk of man like Officer Flaherty. Oh, take me away from all this!

Tom

I thought you hated the police. You used to call them oink-oinks.

Marsha

All except Mike Flaherty here. Once I was protesting conditions of the migrant farm workers and was boycotting grapes and lettuce, throwing the produce off the shelves. I was put away in Precinct I. And Mike and I made love all night.

Dinge

Oh, I'm going to have to report you.

Roger

Well, I'm the President's wife and what I say goes. You're all free to be whoever you want to.

Tom

Well, I guess I'll go to my room and watch the Zapruder film by myself.

The End

Bernadette Dyer

Mermaid

Joseph, don't wake the dogs,
Don't send them scampering
Across this parched hot land,
For it is dangerous and dips into steep ravines
Where winds whistle incessantly
In banyan groves
And cry at the shoulders
Of mango and tamarind trees.
You must have heard the whispering
The uproar, the clatter
Of the capricious quarrelling winds
That roam and weep
Under the starless sky
Where the moon walks in loneliness.

How I shiver, Joseph, my voice trembles
For well I know, I should not be here
Upon the terrible land,
For the night is full of threatening boulders
And ragged stones
Declaring danger at hand
For even in daylight hours
It supports the wandering
Of the sharp-horned, rib-exposed cattle
You love so well.

Slumber deep
While I outside your window
A vigil keep
Singing night's dark lullaby
To herald fireflies to light your way
With the coming of a Jamaican dawning,
When dirt tracks now concealed
Will be revealed
And hand holds can prevent
Dangerous slips, terrifying slides
Against the bramble, the wicked thorns
Where your bare feet kiss against loose soil.

Now, whistle up the dogs, Joseph
Your faithful companions strain to be leader and last
Of your mongrel pack.

The scent is on the wind,
Pointed ears thrust back,
Alive with barking and baying
In moonlight remembering.
Descend to the silver river bank
Of broad-leafed jungle splendour
Where float lily pads that glide
Like oil drops all ashimmer.

Do not dally, Joseph,
Entice your companions on
To the lush vine-infested trees
The devilish overhangs
For in the perfection underneath,
We play hide and seek
In the still dark pools
And rushing water,
Nymph and fish in congregation
Clothed in water's silent rings
And in foam and in spray.

Joyous in moonlight's passing
Be not afraid, Joseph,
Draw near,
For I am here.

Hugh Fox

Silver

It was two in the morning. Fred, stretched out on his bed, his back propped up against a mountain of pillows, was reading an article on negative-painted pottery in pre-Columbian South America, exactly the same techniques as batik/tie-dye, only on pots instead of cloth: the design was painted on the pot in wax and then the entire pot was dipped in black paint and fired, and during the firing the wax would melt and the design would be left as a 'negative imprint' on the pot's surface

He stopped reading. Damned dog next door. A great big chunky aggressive Chow. They'd put it on a leash and let it out all night long, and any time anyone passed by, it'd start barking. On Friday and Saturday nights, the streets were filled with drunk and crack-high students, screaming, so the dog would be barking full time.

He felt like calling the cops and complaining, but if he did that, then the thing would end up in court and he'd have to face the guy next door — and who knows?

"Screw it!"

The phone in the hall started ringing. Shit!

His wife was in her bedroom, sound asleep.

Fred jumped up and grabbed the phone in the hallway, expecting it to be his schizophrenic daughter, who was liable to call at any time, depending on what hallucination she was having or what voices were talking to her.

Only it wasn't Bonita, but — . "Hello, Professor Elliston?" A very dry, brittle, lead-casket voice.

"Yes."

"This is Mrs Cynthia Ames, the Head Night Nurse in the medical unit at Mount Meru Gardens. Your mother passed away at 10:45 Pacific Time. Allow me to offer my condolences."

"Thanks ... . I'll get out there as soon as I can."

"Wonderful. I will call her Medical Watchdog now, I was supposed to call him first, but sometimes I bend the rules a bit."

"Medical Watchdog? What are you talking about?"

"The person who made all the medical decisions for her, her." A shuffling of papers, a little pause. "Nephew."

"She didn't have a nephew. Her one brother had two daughters."

"A Mr Grabowski."

"That's my cousin Trudy's husband. My mother couldn't have seen him more than three times in her whole life. What does he have to do with anything?"

"Well, I guess it's rather difficult to anticipate what Mrs Eagen might have done," said Head Night Nurse Ames with delicate ambiguity.

An excerpt from the novel *Funeral Arrangements.*

"Again, my condolences."

He stood there for a moment in shock, staring blankly at the huge batik wall-hanging of Yama, the Lord of the Underworld, at the end of the hallway, Yama with his multiple arms, bull head and snakey hair, he who judges the living and the dead.

He heard his wife stirring in her bed, her bare feet hitting the bare wood floor. All fuzzy and wizened, she opened the door to her room,

"Who was that?"

"My mother just died."

"Well, we anticipated that, didn't we?"

"I guess so," he said.

What was he feeling? His father dead for 22 years, no brothers or sisters, just him and his six kids, his wife, Babilonia, a few cousins, two ex-wives, a few close friends (in California and New York, half a continent away from Michigan). He wanted to cry, but it didn't happen. What was all that business about Grabowski? His mother had been on the outs with his cousin Trudy for years — and her husband, John.

"So are you going to go out there?"

"I guess so," he said. She came over and kissed him, cuddled into his arms for a moment.

"Well," she said, kissing him, open-mouthed, "I'm sorry about your mother," and zombied her way back into her bedroom, delicately closing the door as if not to disturb the dead.

Downstairs, taking his wallet out of the professor's-uniform Harris tweed jacket hanging in the closet, he walked into the dining room, took the space-phone off the hook, sat down and, tilting his chair back, dialled 1-800-555-1212:

"atw airlines, domestic, please."

The recording came back almost instantly.

"1-800-673-2490."

He dialled atw. An amazingly un-sleepy voice on the other end, a contented, fat man's voice:

"How may I help you?"

"Listen, I've got to get to Pomona, California, as soon as possible. My mother just died."

"Bamona?"

"P as in pasta — you fly into Ontario."

"Canada?"

"No, California, it's out by Riverside, Pasadena ...."

"But atw doesn't fly into Ontario, California, any more."

"Okay. You can get me to Phoenix and I can go on to Ontario on America West. Or fly me into San Francisco and I can take the United shuttle down to Ontario. But the only credit card I've got is an atw Escape Card. Twenty-two years — "

"I'll see what I can do."

The Big Hold, computer clatter in the background like a massive attack of army ants. Five minutes. Ten. Why worry about it? It was an 800 number. They were paying for it. That's how it worked.

Then back on the line:

"Okay, I've got you leaving from Lansing tomorrow at 9 on Redbreast Airlines to Midway, then atw to St. Louis, St. Louis to San Francisco, United to Ontario. — When will you be coming back?"

"Tuesday," he said. What did he know?

"Okay. You can pick up the tickets at atw in Midway."

"Thanks a lot."

Almost too quick.

He sat there, numb, remembering the way she'd been just the week before when he'd come down from San Francisco after the mid-winter Board Meeting of spi / small press international.

He was in California so he always went to visit her. Like fries and ketchup, feet and socks, in spite of the fact that his San Francisco pal, Lear Schmidt, had pleaded with him, "Why the fuck go visit her, all she does is upset you. You're 62 yourself. You've got your own heart and blood pressure and immune system to worry about. She's nuts, sadistic, you'll end up going back to Michigan and slapping Babilonia or something, just to get rid of your built-up rage. Be realistic, know your limitations ... ."

"I'm under control," he'd told Lear. "Don't worry, I can handle it."

But then, when he'd gotten down to Mount Meru Gardens, he'd found her in the Medical Unit, and they'd ushered him in to see her, and there she was, all shrivelled up and yellow, bulging eyes, a look of permanent rage fixed on her face. And for the first time he realized why he'd always filled his bedroom with demon masks: they were Mom symbols. He felt at home in the middle of fangs, bulging demon eyes, and rage as a way of life.

He'd approached the bed.

"Hi, Mom. I didn't even know you were sick."

She laboriously and painfully turned over on her back and stared up at him.

Yes, there she was, Yama, the Lord (Lady) of the Underworld.

"You and your rotten children. That Priscilla, I came all the way to Michigan for her funeral."

"Wedding!" he corrected her, "You came to Michigan for her wedding."

"Whatever you say. But I was there and I had my green jade evening gown and I wanted to wear it to the wedding and she said it wasn't 'appropriate.' What in hell's name does she know about 'appropriate'? Was it appropriate for her to smile back at the congregation from the altar? Was it

appropriate to come out here and come into the dining room with all these educated people for breakfast with wet hair? For God's sake, wet hair with all these educated people?"

Her rage heightened and expanded. It took over and then left her exhausted and panting.

She had on a skimpy hospital gown, beige stockings, her legs all uncovered.

"Here, let me put a blanket over your legs, it's not that warm in here."

Chilly and raining outside.

"No." She started to rage again. "Leave my legs alone. I have beautiful legs. I am trying to attract attention."

He looked carefully at her legs. She had been the most beautiful woman in Chicago, no doubt about that. But now, the skin was all loose and scalloped, draped, wasting away.

"Penny's getting married in August," he said, always full of news about his kids, so totally kid-centred that there was hardly room/money for anything else.

She stopped and thought for a while, searching through the memory-banks inside her, coming up empty.

"I'm afraid I don't recall her."

"Okay, what about Josh, Allegra ... ?"

Nothing. For a moment it was like standing in front of an effigy burial urn.

"So what about your things? The silver ... ?"

A sudden vigorous flipping back into the present.

"You're so interested in the silver, aren't you? My things are where they are, where they will always be!"

"Where they'll always be, huh. I suppose that the Egyptian mummies in the Brooklyn Museum would be pretty suprised at where they were if they woke up," he said. But it went right past her.

He'd stayed with her for hours, gone and had dinner, then come back that night, the next morning, and then he'd left.

He'd wanted to mourn, cry, break down. That's the way he'd felt on his second visit to the Medical Unit when it was night and she was exhausted and out of it and practically comatose. But then, on his last visit the next morning, she'd snapped back a lot, and there was this light-brown-yellow, tobacco-coloured woman trying to feed her some tapioca pudding, but Mom was resisting the feeding:

"I don't want anything. "

So the woman stopped for a moment and Fred asked her, "What part of India are you from?"

"Calcutta."

"Oh, so you're a Tamil speaker?"

"That's right. How do you know that? Noone in this country knows about things like that."

Penemue and the Indians

We are the ghosts
of our grandfathers
and grandmothers

we are life lived again

We are the knot
between the past and the future
we are string
binding our grandfathers
to our grandchildren

—David A. Groulx

"Well, I study New World–Old World contacts in pre-Columbian times, and the Dravidian languages keep popping up among the Maya and other places. The Aztec day-names, for example, are all derived from the Hindu Lunar Mansions."

"Oh, that's very interesting." She started to try with the tapioca again, mixed it in with a little orange juice from a dish of canned mandarin orange segments.

"I said no!" Mom screamed and tried to claw at the Indian woman's arm, managing to get in a little nick before she pulled away, "I am from the Other Side!"

The Indian woman got up silently and simply left.

The "other side"? wondered Fred. What the hell does that mean?

"I am upper class," his mother continued, pushing the tray away from her all over the bed: oranges and tapioca, toast, butter, coffee, scrambled eggs.

So "the other side" must mean the other side of the tracks.

His old Czech-Jewish grandmother, who could hardly read and write (but did, with great and patient effort), his skinny, blond, Irish, streetcar-conductor grandfather who had died when Fred was three —

What tracks were those? Fred wondered. What the fuck is she thinking about?

"Well, Okay, I've got a plane to catch," he said. And there she sat, like a demon on her throne in hell, eyes popping out, hair writhing on her head, balefully threatening.

He walked over to the side of the bed and put his arms

Four haiku

gay
by day the supermarket is drug-free
at night the boxboys pump it up

weekend
when everyone's gone home
to where they come from
to log on while you slog on

treatment
trees and the life
of water in the mountains
after the torture chamber

Danielle Steel
the charm of cities
literature and tv movies
has fallen to her

—*C. Mulrooney*

around her, thinking, Let her scratch me, what's a little scratch, what the fuck. Only, she didn't scratch, pull back, pull toward, do anything — was just there, inert and passive in rage, like an inflatable Medusa.

He said, "I love you," and stood there for a few moments looking at her, all glazed over, folded back in on herself. He said it again, "I love you."

Still no response? Where was she, at what coronation in what kingdom of wishful thinking?

"I'll be seeing you, pal," he said, tears in his eyes, not really ever expecting to see her again. And the truth of the matter was that he was so much of her, so much of her in him, it had almost worked, he almost hadn't ever become a separate self.

Out the door he went into the corridor. The Chief Social Worker was standing there, Mitzi Goerke on her name-tag.

"Well, I'm taking off for Kansas. Have some kids to visit down there."

"Everything Okay or ... ?"

"I don't have any space in my life for upper class, lower class, white, black, brown crap. My first wife was Bolivian, my first three kids are half-Indian. What the hell's the difference?"

Mitzi Goerke looked pained.

"Yes, she's been quite a 'challenge' to us."

"My grandmother was Jewish. I wasn't supposed to find out about that."

Mitzi Goerke lit up.

"Your grandmother was Jewish? Well, maybe that explains something I haven't been able to understand. When I asked your mother what her religion was, she said 'Roman Catholic, one hundred per cent Roman Catholic!' Twenty years asking that question and it's the first time I ever had an answer like that."

A black nurse was sitting at a desk in the hallway writing some notes. She looked up.

"I've spent a lot of time 'visiting' with your mother, and she told me a number of times, 'My mother was Jewish, but I am Catholic.'"

"She was obsessed with concealment all her life," he said. "She had some sort of image of The Perfect Aristocratic Holy Roman Vanilla Imperial Napoleonic World, and anything in her past that conflicted with that was taboo."

Pissed now, pissed not only at how she was and what she'd done and said, but by the fact that she was denying him the grief he felt he was entitled to, grief, cleansing, catharsis, leaving him with only petty, peppery irritation. It wasn't enough. He felt frustrated, almost to the point of rage.

Which was what she wanted, wasn't it?

"Well, thanks for everything. I thank you for her, guess she won't be thanking anyone for anything."

And he was off, back to her room in Valhallah, a low-lying circular building at the far end of the grounds, where the old people in not-so-good-shape stayed. First there was The Summit Area, where everyone had their own little one-room condominium, semi-autonomous, isolated, alone, and then Valhallah, where you went when you were liable to fall down at any moment and needed constant in-the-wings help and attention — and then the final medical building, which was the anteroom to Death's Dream Kingdom.

When he got back to Valhallah he went into his mother's little room and stared at the big silver set on the dresser in the bedroom.

From Mexico. Maybe 50 years old. Floral pattern. A gigantic solid silver tray, maybe four feet long, two feet across; a silver coffee pot a foot high, with a matching pot for tea; a sugar bowl, a creamer and another silver mug for who knows what; toothpicks, napkins, miscellaneous salad forks, and sugar spoons ... .

He wanted to take it, just take it. She wasn't going to be around for long. Take it. He was the only child, he'd suffered her contempt for 62 years. Since he was old enough to remember, all he'd ever heard was, "When your father and I die, you'll be a wealthy man, all our insurance, our things,"

until he'd grown up and started making his own decisions and living his own life, and then that refrain had stopped.

He didn't trust her, could easily imagine her willing everything to Mount Meru Gardens, just to spite him. Everything, everything, everything ... .

He went into the dresser drawers. Junk. Chiffon handkerchiefs and Snickers bars. Don't tell me she was bulemic too? He'd believe anything about her.

He looked in the closet. A whole row of stiff old mink stoles next to half a closetful of acetate dresses and knit suits; a bunch of old beaded and brocaded purses on the top shelf with boxes of hats, one of them actually (he thought very appropriately) made out of snake skin — real, bona fide snake skin. He never remembered her wearing it.

The bottom of the closet was filled with little cabinets and boxes.

He looked through them all and found endless hordes of plastic earrings, rhinestones, glass, some of it art-nouveauishly attractive. One set of silver earrings, necklace, and bracelet. That could be for Allegra, his 19-year-old daughter at the Chicago Art Institute, his pal, artistic-intellectual soulmate, the one he could really talk to — the same way she could really talk to him.

Okay. On to the other closet near the front door.

More endless boxes. Boxes of hats. A whole aviary trapped and killed — herons, cranes, peacocks, mallard ducks, quetzals, and lyre birds ... .

Ah, a silver squash-blossom set of earrings, necklace, and bracelet. Navaho. Very nice. For Penny, his 21-year-old daughter getting her ph.d. in anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. He'd give it to her on her wedding day. A little wedding present.

One last (Mexican?) silver set of earrings, necklace, bracelet, apple-pear-cherry design. A little ostentatious, but for Priscilla — give it to her in the hospital in July when she gave birth to her daughter, his first grandchild.

Fred took the jewelry and closed the drawer in the jewelry-chest, closed the closet door. It was like the place was already haunted by Mom's tortured, harpy ghost.

He wondered how long she'd last.

And what would the will be like?

He expected the worst. After all, he'd done all the wrong things. Instead of being an m.d., as she'd demanded ("Either finish medical school or I don't ever want to see your face again!"), he'd been a cultural anthropology professor for 37 years. Instead of marrying one of the fringe-socialite girls she'd wanted for him in Chicago, he'd married a Bolivian with a strong dose of Indian in her. ("All your goddamned Indian brats! Couldn't you have found a white woman instead of fathering a tribe of half-breeds that I'm ashamed to be seen with?")That was funny, Priscilla being as white and blonde as any Finn. Conceptión, his first wife, had a strain of Hungarian in her genetic past and somehow the blonde Irish genes lying in wait inside Fred's gene bank had paired up with Conceptión's latent Hungarian blonde genes and produced a real Sun Child.

Not that it had made any difference.

("You and your rotten wet hair and fat arms — I'm suprised you ever suckered anyone into marrying you.")

Nothing for Bonita. It didn't make any sense to bring her anything back. She was a lot better now that she was on Clauserel, but she still wandered around sucking on Tootsie Rolls all day ("I need to keep up my strength!"), and would then buy a big pizza and sit and eat that, Twinkies and Little Debbie Oatmeal Pies, Snickers bars, Bugles. He'd meet her every day over at the Student Union; her main topic was always food:

"I went down to Mental today for lunch and they had baked potatoes, but the sour cream wasn't sour enough, and I like chives and the Polish sausages were too small and they only let me have five when ten would have just about done it."

That's all she was, an endless menu.

He went back into his mother's bedroom and stared and stared at the big silver set.

He remembered when they'd bought it, on a trip to Mexico. He was ten, maybe. They'd taken him on one trip and he'd gotten sick; the second time, they'd left him with his grandmother. But he remembered the letter his mother had sent them from Mexico:

> Dear Ma and Little Freddie:
> We have been staying at Shirley Courts in Cuernavaca [or was it just outside Mexico City?]. All the fresh things, like lettuce and tomatoes, are flown in from Texas. Many very distinguished people here. We are taking down names and addresses. We went to Taxco yesterday, to the silver factory and bought a be-ooo-ti-ful silver set. Very aristocratic and upper-class. Now all we need is a house to put it in. It certainly doesn't fit into our crumby little apartment on Maryland Avenue.

The whole time he was growing up in Chicago, every Sunday they'd go up to the Northern suburbs and drive on this endless tour of rich men's houses. Even the names sounded rich — Evanston, Kenilsworth, Winnetka, Highland Park, ...

Fake Tudor mansions, imitation French chateaux, English parsonage style, Cape Cod, Frank Lloyd Wright Prairie (Maya) School, all this brick and stone, cupolas and widow-walks, turrets and entrance-gates and elaborate English manor house gardens.

"Some day, when our ship comes in," his father would

say.

"So be-oo-ti-ful!" his mother would coo, as if somehow you'd walk into the possession of one of these houses and you yourself would experience some sort of spiritual change, the alchemy of Big Bucks would transform you into a minor god. His whole childhood had been filled with this longing for something out there, beyond reach, some ineffable aristocratic blessing that had eluded them, in spite of the fact that his father was a doctor, which should have somehow been enough.

He remembered drawings his father had made when he was still courting his mother: houses that looked like the White House, huge, neo-classical white columns, Parthenons and Pantheons of impossible-to-fulfill longings. His father's words kept echoing in Fred's head, "I had a great year this year, a thousand dollars a month, every month."

But that's what the massive silver set was all about, too. It's massive and ornate enough and it turns your house into Versailles and you become Marie Antoinette, Louis Quatorze. The huge coffee urn held enough coffee for a regiment. And the same for the tea urn. And the platter — my god, the thing must have weighed fifty pounds in itself.

There were matching candelabra, but she'd sold them, hadn't she? Was going to sell the tea and coffee set, too, but then the price of silver went down, and —

It had all gotten very vague in the last few years.

Fred kept standing and staring at the silver.

It meant other things for him than it meant for his mother. It meant Aztecs and La Conquista, Bernal Diaz del Castillo's verdadera historia de la conquista, Cortés coming into the Great Temple in Tenochitlán and seeing the huge stone serpent with the stone cups in front of it full of human hearts and smoking (copal) incense. It meant viceroys and Spanish silversmiths, Felipe Segundo and the Escorial and the whole dream of El Dorado, Rio de la Plata, the old Mint (Casa de la Moneda) in Potosí, Bolivia. Mexico for Mom had meant just a place to get a good deal in silver from, but for Fred — he'd spent years and years going from ruin to ruin, Chichen Itzá, Uxmal, Mitla, Monte Alban, and then going back to The Source, Sevilla, Madrid, the Escorial itself. For him the silver set was history and identity, mixed inextricably with his own personal past.

After all, he'd gotten off the plane in La Paz and fifty little dark people had come up to him and grabbed him and called him family. His whole house was filled with little candle-holders from Spain and Portugal. Open the closet and there was Mictlantecuhtli, the spectral lord of Mictlan/Aztec Hell, every corner, every available inch filled with spears and shields from the Amazon, headdresses, pots, amulets:

aunque sea jade se rompe,
aunque sea pluma de Quetzal se desgarra,
todos vamos a la tierra de los descarnados …

although it be jade it breaks,
although it be the feathers of the Quetzal it tears,
we all go to the land of the unfleshed …

This terrible vision he lived with, everything running down, falling apart, unfleshing. Look at a young woman in a coffee shop and see an old lady. Look at a little kid and see an old man, then a skeleton, then dust ... .

Still, he wanted to take something more than a few trinkets with him.

He somehow knew that he'd never see her again, this was it, the Great Lady finally reduced to a shrivelled mass of angry yellow flesh on a hospital bed, a whole life of pretension and greed reduced to two rooms with a few chairs and a few boxes of trinkets — and the Spanish colonial tea and coffee set that looked (credit where credit is due!) like it belonged in a silver museum someplace. It was a thing of beauty, maybe the only thing that his mother had ever bought that said taste.

And he was afraid that if he left and then came back again after she was dead, it would be gone and he'd never see it again, much less be able to bring it back to his home that was, after all, its own kind of museum.

But he didn't take it.

A few trifles for his daughters, her granddaughters, and that was it! Nothing for himself!

Flight information in hand, Fred went upstairs, took a quick shower, got dressed, and lay down on the bed.

That was it. No more sleep. Death had invaded him. It was all madness now. His mother's dying was a big billboard on the Road of Life: You're next, Bippy! It won't be long now!

September song, a long, long way from May to December, but the days hurry by when you reach November ... .

About 3:30 he pulled a blanket over himself. It was getting chilly. And at 4:00 he finally fell asleep and was dreaming he was back in California, a California of the 1920's or maybe even earlier,— big old cars and women in short skirts and sleek satin shoes, the images like old films, the faces like the young Gloria Swanson and Rudolph Valentino — when his bedroom door opened and Bablionia came in.

Diane Adele Boyer

mothering

You had a girlish way about you
when you were happy
you were small
berry-stained, perhaps, or summery.
your head took on a tilt
I'd never seen before
as you displayed
the sewing you'd done
the necklace you'd made
for me,
your grown-up daughter
home for Christmas.

At the airport
I'd seen you first
your hair grown long & straight & white
in two limp veils beside your face.
I paused in surprise
at how old you looked
under the hard lens
of my absence
yet your step was light; you paced a bit
scanning the moving crowd
for me,
and homed-in suddenly
bird-like and hazel
your whole being whirring with love
as you stooped to wave,
fingers fluttering.

You had always
admired the shape of my mouth
and sometimes talked about it
as if it were a separate quality
quite removed from me,
some special art that only mothers form.
"Born with a caul"
you'd sometimes say
convinced that a hood of membrane
bestowed on me some special sign
that you alone had had the privilege
of wiping from my natal head.

Years later,
when you lay lifeless in the bright bedroom
and I came to dress you and arrange you
your smallness was gone.
The anima had popped and vanished,
evaporant,
breathless.
The tide of death in the room
propelled my hand,
now tiny in its flesh and blood
into your eclipse
where, as gently as I could, I reached
to wipe the whiteness from your head
and smooth your hair aside.

Shalom Camenietzki

Maria & her matchmaker

This may sound unbelievable, but Maria, the star of my childhood memories, ran a very tight household. No departures from routine were allowed — ever. Mornings meant porridge steaming in my bowl, and it was useless to appeal her rule on finishing the white, gooey stuff. Daily, I scooped the cinnamon and sugar off the top and, to make her happy, gulped down two spoons of the flabby substance. Lips sloped down, I snivelled and whimpered, probably looking like a mask of tragedy. Maria caressed my neck, she muttered *meu coracao* — my heart, in Portuguese — but her right eyebrow stayed just a little bit up, until I scraped clean the bottom of my bowl.

Breakfast finished, she hummed a soft samba to celebrate, I imagine, the still young morning; a day of sweet routines lay ahead. First, her match lit the gas burner. It boomed once, the same bass of the giants in the stories she made up for me. Little flames streamed out of endless cavities and moulded a blue crown with a black hole in the middle. On top of the flames she rested a glistening aluminum pot to cook the black beans she and I ate every day, except on weekends and Jewish holidays.

While I rode my red tricycle or played with Carlos, my buddy next door, in the backyard, Maria waxed and polished our wooden floors. All the while, the blessed scents of her slow-cooking beans, meats, onions, garlic, sausage, and seven spices wafted from the kitchen. Tickling my nostrils, they lifted my body and soul higher and higher on the steps of the ladder to heaven.

"A-yim," she mispronounced my name again, "It's noon now. Your beans are soft."

Ravenous, I sprinted all the way to the table because she almost never handed out any snacks. My right hand clutched the spoon, ready to throw myself at the beans, the rice, the blackened meats.

She ladled vast helpings of her black, home-made manna onto a bed of steamed rice. At the end of the meal, I felt so blissful and drowsy that more often than not she took me in her arms and carried me to my room. My after-lunch naps were long.

At three o'clock, when Maria stopped wiggling her butt to the *sambas de amor* from her favourite radio program, we got ready for our daily walk. Even if puddles dotted the streets, she still helped me every day into a starched sailor's outfit smelling of dew. (My wardrobe, I assume, must have been home to five or six such uniforms, including caps with foot-long, black ribbons fluttering down the back.) Before I swung the front door open, she urged me, "Stand still, *meu coracao*," while her thumb and finger slid up and down the crease of my pants. She spat saliva the size of a mothball onto the brush, to lend my buckled shoes a clear, limpid shine. Only then did we dart down the steps of the front porch.

Maria owned one good-looking, white taffeta dress, which she wore for our strolls. She always wore white low-heeled shoes, for she stood quite tall and bent

a bit forward. A *Kreeme,* a warped one, I vaguely remember someone — probably my father —whispering in Yiddish once.

While we strolled side by side — I refused to hold hands in public — I breathed in her afternoon aroma, a blend of mild Palmolive and the odours of woman-after-bath.

Walking on the sidewalk, we came across throngs of mothers, nannies, and children in their finest garb. All the girls wore short, pink dresses and all the boys wore sailor suits, high fashion in the 40s in Rio. To show off my Maria, from time to time I glanced at her, the most appealing, best smelling woman in the neighbourhood.

But crises arose each time we stumbled upon empty cans on the sidewalk, their lids tilted up like visors. My right toe itched to kick the cans so badly that tears welled in my eyes. And to this day I'll swear there is no music as rousing — not even Shostakovich's Ninth — as the sound of a well-kicked can rattling away into silence. But Maria tapped my shoulder. In my best shoes and clothes, can-kicking was out of the question, no matter how hard my sighs courted the cans.

Most evenings and weekends, on the other hand, were really easy. My mother's tired, long face forever mirrored the guilt of spending fewer hours with me than Maria did. Almost every day Mamae bribed me with new toys or sweets. I loved my Mamae. With her, I never had to finish my plate. My spoon on the floor or a few short-lived whimpers got me off the hook. After dessert, I rode my tricycle indoors for hours, imitating car horns at the top of my voice. I cycled in and out of all the rooms, except for Samuel's. My brother kicked me in the ass if he ever caught me breathing near his treasures.

More often than not, I woke up surprised to find myself in my room. Who carried me to bed? How did I get into my pyjamas? The night before I didn't wash myself, undress, and crawl into bed. I'd played as late as I wished and lay down to rest on the sofa only when my legs began to hurt, tired.

My heart tells me that my first memories just don't add up. Early images of Papai and Samuel almost never flash in my mind. My intellect points out that even if Samuel locked himself in his room or spent some evenings outside our home, I should have kept at least a few traces of him. And even if my father kept his furniture store open late, six evenings a week, a child's mind should have registered a few lasting pictures. What happened? Did I inadvertently or unwittingly expel these two figures from my private Eden — well, some of the time — and never let them come back? But instead of hunches, hopeful leads, or answers, I hear only the echoes of echoes rumbling in the distance.

I clearly recall my fourth birthday. Green and yellow streamers spilled from the corners of our dining room, climbing up again in the centre to join the lamp above the table. Mamae and Maria tied white and blue balloons to the back of each chair in the house. Carlos, four kids from our side street, and two cousins of mine came to the party.

When Mamae brought in my chocolate cake with four pink, skinny candles burning on top, only the mothers sang "Happy Birthday". We kids sat around the table and looked at each other, puzzled and pained, our chins and white shirts smeared with brown icing. The crowd turned cranky. and it grew painful for me to sit, embarrassed, at the head of the table. Glass after glass of guarana tumbled down, and puddles the colour of amber stained the white tablecloth. Wistful, I noticed how the kids never finished their slices of my birthday cake.

But Mamae never got upset at the uproar and mess. Twice she clapped her hands. "Time to play outdoors," she announced. On the way out, my guests howled like hungry coyotes and wolves.

Mamae just smiled at me. "Did you enjoy the cake?"

Soon after that birthday, a mystery began to haunt me: What, exactly, did my Maria do after dark, while I slept? Where, and with whom, did she spend her evening hours? In the afternoons, while I napped, she washed dishes. Then, hidden in the cool shade of our neighbour's avocado tree, she smoked a cigar in the backyard. I knew she occasionally took a nap because several times I'd woken her to play. Maria prayed at bedtime, but I wished to get hold of more precious clues to her life at night. Of course, I could have posed a few direct questions, but they struck me as being much too delicate. Week after week I procrastinated, till it became impossible for me to ask.

For comparison, I made notes on how other members of my family spent their evenings. After dinner, my sleepy mother listened to the radio or read the newspaper. On warm nights when I abandoned my overheated room and moist pillow, I found her sitting at the dinner table again, poring over papers. Did my Mamae ever take a break from her work?

From my bedroom, I often overheard my parents speaking Yiddish. Whenever I squinted my way into the living room, I found them sipping cups of hot tea. They never dropped sugar cubes into their drink, but balanced the cubes on the tips of their tongues. "That's the way my family did it, in Poland," Mamae had explained. "It keeps the taste of tea." With the war still raging in Europe, my parents almost never mentioned their families in my presence.

It was no mystery, really, how Samuel usually spent his evenings. Right after dessert, my brother, now 16 years old, rushed to the living room and planted his feet by our metre-tall radio. Bent over, he brought his left ear close to the

speaker and rocked back and forth from the waist, the way we Jews pray. His eyes stayed wide open throughout the local and national news. But as soon as the announcer told about the Red Army advancing in eastern Europe, he closed his eyes and rocked slowly, in bliss. If there were no news from the eastern front, he stopped swaying at once. Furious, he paced the room.

"Brazil is a fascist dictatorship!" Samuel yelled and raised a fist. "They don't want the masses to know about Stalin's victories!" In the middle of the room he came to a standstill and mumbled, his forefinger wagging at an invisible audience —rehearsing a political speech, it appeared.

Amused — and smug — I had watched my brother's love for Stalin for months. On the eastern wall of his room, above his bed, Samuel nailed a photograph of a dour, unsmiling man, with a high brow and a rope-thick mustache, who didn't look people in the eye. Once or twice a week, Samuel brought home a couple of red carnations or roses. First he crossed the stems, then lovingly gazed at the flowers. After smelling them, he pinned the roses or carnations to the wall, right below the picture of his sweetheart in a faraway land. Rarely had I witnessed Samuel enjoying his love affair in my plain, homely ways. Flowers sniffed and pinned, he never succumbed to Stalin's own fragrances the way I smelled my Maria, many times a day.

Lately, my skinny, restless, myopic brother had refused to wear glasses. At all times he looked cross-eyed, as if startled out of a dream. Once, Papai commented that both Stalin and Hitler bore ferocious moustaches — the hallmark of intellectual lightweights. For days Samuel scurried red-eyed about the house. This barb, I believe, must have hurt a lot, since my father was a very smart man. In his youth, before he went into business, he had spent three years learning the Talmud and commentaries in Poland. "Not all my fingers," he used to say, "are needed to count the men who beat me in a game of chess."

One evening flows, as clear as an oboe solo, from the recesses of my memory. I was about four, and it must have been Friday, because two candles had burnt past midway. Mamae turned to my father at the head of the table.

"Last night, Arieh," she said in Yiddish, "I turned off the lights at 11:30. Samuel wasn't home." Her low voice breathed despair.

"Where were you?" Papai barked. Two upright lines sprang to life between his eyebrows.

"I hung around the gate with my friends." Samuel replied in Portuguese, to be on the safe side. "I forgot to look at my watch. I'm sorry." He blinked and fidgeted in his chair. The "gate" meant the entrance to our side street.

"He's not telling the truth, Arieh." Mamae raised her voice, in Portuguese. "He's going to political meetings. How will he be able to concentrate at school?"

My father's stern face gave Mamae a chance to finish her piece. Usually, Samuel hollered that she meddled in his life.

"And what were you doing at the gate?" My father turned curious. "That's where maids hang around with namorados."

My heart beat faster.

"I was talking to friends," Samuel shrugged. "That's all."

"Friends? What friends?" My father's eyes brightened, his air of authority vanished. "I bet you guys were ogling the couples doing whatever they were doing." He smiled shiftily. "Was Maria there?"

"Oh, no," said Samuel. "I've never seen her with a man, anywhere. Have you?"

"She is tall and gawky," Papai chuckled. "It'll take her a long time to find a man."

I blushed. I wanted to hide.

Mamae brought her forefinger to her lips. In a loud voice she turned to Papai and Samuel. "The roast is very good, isn't it?"

Desperate, I prayed to God that Maria didn't hear anything.

My father laughed, tilting his head back, his Adam's apple jutting out. "Never mind, Rivkah. Samuel is soon a man. Some things you just can't read in books. Let the boy learn about real life at home."

"Not many men like a skinny ass," Samuel laughed, encouraged.

"Ugly women look like machos," my father said, to hammer the verdict. Roaring, Samuel slapped the table.

I reached for my glass of *guarana*, but it wobbled and tipped over. Highlighted by the wood beneath, an amber river streamed across the table cloth, towards Samuel.

"What's going on?" my brother hollered. "I swear Khayim spilled the *guarana* on purpose." He flung his chair back and jumped to his feet, wiping his pants with a napkin.

Scared, I stood up.

"And now, look what you did." My mother's voice soared, "You got Khayim upset." Her hand flailed back and forth, from Papai to Samuel.

My father stopped smiling. "Just a joke, we meant no harm."

"A joke," Mamae hissed in Yiddish. "How can you say something so gross when Maria's in the kitchen? And in front of the boy?" Her nostrils swelled: rarely had I seen my phlegmatic mother so angry. "You just wait, Arieh. You and I will have a little talk about all this."

"What is there more to talk about?" Papai said.

"Enough. Be quiet. You've done a lot of damage

already," she said. Bending over, chin almost brushing her plate, Mamae told Samuel, also in Yiddish. "Is this the way you Commies treat working-class women? Shame on you!"

Samuel turned white and withdrew into his chair. He too couldn't handle my mother's sudden anger.

Mamae stood up, folded her napkin and patted it flat on the table. She walked to my chair and took my willing hand. On the way to my room I licked my briny tears.

"Nothing but a stupid joke," Mamae said later, as I stood by my bed. She knelt down and hugged me. "You know Maria likes you so much. She's so good to you."

Was Mamae feeling guilty again? I wondered.

She unlocked her hug and wiped the searing tears off my cheeks. I lay on my bed, facing the wall.

"Too early to go to bed." Mamae spoke softly. "I'll read you a story. You'll feel better." She untied the laces and pulled off my shoes. "Please, turn over. Look at me," she implored, but, still stunned, I continued to gaze at the wall. Her hand cupped my shoulder to roll me over. I sat up.

Mamae read from Robinson Crusoe, but occasionally raised her eyes to watch mine. I stopped sobbing, but barely listened. I worried, instead. Was Maria crying in her room? I dreaded she would never recover from the two monsters' mean blows. And she'd done them no harm at all!

"Are you feeling better?" Mamae asked at the end of her story.

"Yes," I muttered, but shame stung my cheeks. I'd listened to the first twenty words. Maybe less.

Once in pyjamas, I began to hiccup. Every few seconds loud and frightening hiccups. My chest and shoulders shuddered.

"Do you want a lemonade?" Mamae asked.

I nodded, and she headed for the door. "I'll ask your Maria to make one."

Bewildered, I began to cry again. Mamae had acknowledged that another woman, a maid, could better settle me down.

Soon, in strolled Maria, and the scent of freshly squeezed lemon filled the room.

Maria looked me up and down while my mother, two steps behind, stared at me with tear-drenched eyes. Sipping the sweet potion (not a grain of pulp on top), I stole a glimpse at my nanny. Her eyes and tight cheeks betrayed no inner storms, although horizontal lines cut deeper into her forehead. To calm the two women, I gulped down the lemonade and stretched out in bed.

"I'll see you in the morning." Maria waved goodnight from the door.

Mamae bent down by my bed. "Next weekend," she hummed in my ear, "we'll spend a whole day at the Zoo, as we did a year ago."

"Two years ago," I uttered, half-asleep.

Later, I awoke as if a hand had yanked me up by the hair. In the darkness, feverish thoughts raced: What is a *namorado*? How can she find one? Where could I get her one?

As I tossed in bed, the initial question returned: How did Maria spend her evenings? Right away, other questions came up. Why didn't she spend time at the gate, like other maids? And what, precisely, did couples do at the gate? Why did Papai laugh when Samuel said she couldn't find a *namorado*?

I sat up. Eyes adapting to the darkness, I made out the ceiling lamp, the curtains blowing by the window, the silhouette of my tricycle on the floor. The walls and ceiling glowed as if painted the minute before. Unannounced, my father's laughter and Samuel's roar bounced off the walls and ceiling. Forefingers plugged into my ears to block out the sounds, I gritted my teeth.

"Can't find a namorado!"

I repeated this horrible phrase so many times that I began to have doubts. Had I heard it in the dining room? Or just now, lying on my bed? Maybe I'd not heard it at all? Maybe I just needed to close my eyes and fall asleep again? Forget such stupid words!

Painfully alert, I counted and recounted the spokes in my tricycle's wheels. I sat up. The room became unbearably hot. There was no escape.

Where in the world could I find her a man?

Despite the pain, it didn't occur to me to walk to my mother's room and cry, "Help, help!" The darkness, the silence in the house, my own body heat befuddled me. But not for a second did I doubt my duty to make Maria feel better.

When a sleepless night seemed almost certain, the name Manuel flashed into my mind: Manuel! — a short, skinny black man in clogs and frayed clothes. He came about once a month to our side street, to sing the latest sambas from a booklet he held. At the end of his throaty performances, his fans yelled "Bravo!" and "Bis!" The older boys whistled.

Manuel bowed, then smiled. Working his way through the audience, he sold booklets to those who could read. Others, like children or Maria, rewarded him with fresh fruit, a slice of bread, or, on a hot day, a glass of cold water.

"Manuel!" I screamed.

Leaning back on my elbows, I decided he was a good match. Maria laughed during his tours to our street. When he departed, they waved goodbye and smiled. Made for each other, no doubt. She would be happy. I slid under the cotton blanket and surrendered to sleep.

"You're quiet this morning," Maria commented when I showed up for an early breakfast. "There must be a reason."

My eyes latched onto the table to avoid hers. "Manuel!"

"Manuel?" She wiped her hands on her apron and drew closer. "Did you dream about him? Don't be afraid. Tell me the dream."

"Manuel! You … the gate … the whole evening!" On my bed, I'd prepared a much better speech. But her body was there, a foot away. Only these words left my lips.

Her eyes quivered for a tenth of a second. "But, my love," – she bent down and kissed my hair – "Manuel's already married. He has six children. They are poor. They live in a favela." She gazed at the window, then me. "I'd rather stay with you and your parents. It would be awful, plain awful, for me to marry a poor worker and live again in a shack."

"But if you find a *namorado*, I still want to live with you!"

"Take it easy, love. I'm not going anywhere. I'm in school. It takes time to learn to read and write."

"School? What school?"

"Night school. Three times a week, after dishes. When you're a big boy, I'll get myself a job. Maybe a clerk, in a store. I don't want to be a maid for the rest of my life."

I stared at her, less anxious, less jealous.

She planted a moist kiss on my nose. Her breath smelled of coffee. "Don't worry. The day I have to leave, you'll be the first one to know."

I listened but couldn't quite trust words. They had bruised me the evening before, and I was fearful, even of her.

She straightened up. "You look very tired, Ayim. You don't have to finish the porridge. Just three, four spoons more."

"But thank you, Maria!" I said, amazed.

She went back to her work in the kitchen. The rest of the house was silent; my family hadn't stirred. I rolled my tricycle into the backyard. Carlos was not out yet.

Against a pale blue sky, the sluggish leaves of our neighbour's avocado rustled in the morning breeze. Hidden in the dark branches, a lone, unseen bird piped. It stopped,, shy, in mid song.

My eyes burnt. My jaws ached. – I must have clenched them in a rage for hours. – Too tired to ride my tricycle, I toddled into the shade and collapsed on a bed of leaves and dry branches. Looking up, I caught sight of pale blue, jagged sky shining through the foliage.

My eyelids felt heavy. I kept them closed longer and longer. In front of me, Maria's face: her dignified face the night before, her forgiving face that morning.

It didn't bother me that I'd failed as her matchmaker. But I craved sleep and a chance to forget how my own brother and father had hurt me and my innocent nanny. I prayed for tears to soothe my eyes and for dreams to relieve the sadness in my heart.

Anne Burke

Doll houses

one morning my father was
gone and then missing until
the next when he returned home with
a carved wooden model
which had been painted
an ugly olive green Exhibit A he said pro-
ducing the house out
from under his arm
right along-side Exhibit B
some kitchen knives and
I told them I wanted it
for my daughter so
    I poised paper dolls
    clipped from Sears catalogue
    paper food and one-dimensional
    furniture for the upstairs bedrooms
    new wardrobes and the dolls
    were always smiling they weren't
    afraid of the cellar where the
    priest had burned the bodies
    of his young victims, altar boys
    mouthing Latinate they cannot
    understand, their clean hair
    cropped close to expose their
    ears, white shirts, bleached
    collars and grey flannel trouser
    legs newly pressed their knees
    shiny from wear

shirley temple didn't know what it was not to perform
for adults from age 3 she was
seated on some man's knee
her 29 ringlets just so uncombed
she watched as her mother pre-
pared her toilette the face
powder puffed like pink dust
in the air caught in crevices
under her eyes fire engine red lip
stick smudged passing for rouge
the sadness there interwoven
with a woman's passion for
gypsies who wear red shoes
and sold lies with violin music
said a clipping from the *Montreal Star*
so long ago when they still published
poetry (verse passing for art) she
learned what it meant to clean up
after others and no wonder any more
what it was she did all those years
(ruefully) the rages and withdrawal
shirley wearing adult clothes above
a diaper laced with an enormous safety
pin below her mother collecting costumes
(not clothes) even buying them back for
a private archives a hole in the ground
which no one else wanted (it could not
be resold) called the doll house

R.K. Marfurt

Walk through the *forest*

She knew this place. The openings, the thickets. She recognized the trees. The intricate root system, unchanged after twenty years. Unerringly she read its symbols. She herself had created them as a child, her own step-on-a-crack-break-your-mother's-back. Black magic to cope with the small town rigidity to which she had conformed but never adjusted.

At 18, she had fled the town, her father, even her mother.

Now there was only her father left, mellowed since her mother's death five years ago.

Too late, she thought with resentment. The man who walked in front of her was her father. Her two young daughters pulled him along, chattering happily, laughing, giggling. He was actually close to them. He never bullied them like he had bullied her and her mother: *Get the newspaper! Now! Is this supposed to be supper? Don't you have any brains at all? No brains, no busts, no nothing! For God's sake, at least move your butts!*

She would gladly admit that her father had softened. Yet, the painful memories of rejection, loneliness, and her helpless tears at night remained.

Let go, she told herself.

Outside the forest, the landscape of her childhood had been tampered with: On the farmland stood expensive houses. The little creek nearby had dried up. A new highway had eaten up big chunks of land and, with it, three of her favourite hiding places. Her giant weeping willow had been felled.

She felt nothing but contempt for the nostalgia that suddenly overwhelmed her. What did she care about a town she had left with a mixture of love and hatred!

She always made a point of revisiting this part of the forest. Despite the new and fashionable fitness trail, it was reliable. Only her forest was reliable.

She smiled as her younger daughter grabbed the sharp edge of a rock jutting out from between two roots. She continued smiling while the child marvelled aloud at the moss growing up from behind the rock, which was smooth and white on both sides but grey and rough on the front. It was the good-luck stone of her childhood. Never had she passed here without stepping on it. Her daughter's little fingers spread over the rock. The older girl sullenly called it "just a stupid old stone" and latched onto her mother's arm to urge her forward. The four of them walked on side by side, her father to the left, her two children in the middle, pulling her along on the right. She did not go back and step on her stone.

The path led rather steeply down towards the pond. Through the leaves, friendly sunlight touched her hair, her face, her arms. It was beautiful here. It felt great. For a moment, she relaxed.

Near the pond, a puppy shot down the path, a ridiculous but ferocious-sounding

fur ball. Was it rabid, maybe? The younger girl jumped at her mother and clung to her in fright; the older girl ran ahead. She folded the clinging girl into the safety of her arms. Then, over her shoulder, she saw that the puppy was attacking her father. She put down the girl.

When she turned, her father was still being circled by the mad puppy. A boy of about eleven, stout and breathless, was chasing it, calling it names.

An older woman, as short and stout as the boy, appeared further up on the path. She was dressed all in black, a kerchief over her head: Italian maybe, or Portuguese, probably the boy's grandmother.

The dog still leapt at her father, a bothersome little puppy.

She watched in fascination, just stood there, waiting for something to happen. She knew it would happen.

Her father noticed the old woman.

It would happen any second now, the course of events dictated by the modest appearance of the immigrant woman.

Oh gosh, there you go imagining the worst again, she thought; all in a split second she thought it, past and present melting together.

The boy was right behind the dog now. "Stop it, you stupid dog! Wait until I get you!"

The puppy darted towards her father.

Now, she thought, stiff in anticipation. How fortunate that the children had run ahead.

Her father lifted his foot. One precise, hard kick. The puppy went flying. Yowls of pain.

The red-faced boy, shocked, stopped and cried out, "You're mean! You're so mean!"

"Get that dog away," her father growled, "or you can be sure I'll kick him again."

The boy ran after his dog. Before he caught up to it, he shouted back, "It's not fair!"

She stood shamefaced, unable to move for a few seconds. That man was her father. This time, she was going to tell him off. But she could not risk reopening the past, let childhood emotions and anger overrun her, not with her children present. No. She would be grown-up about this. You shouldn't have done that, she'd say, very quietly, very controlled. You shouldn't have done that. Nothing else. Just those words. Cold and hard, but very calm, not emotional, not like before when she was a teenager and couldn't stop screaming when his insults and taunts struck her more viciously than punches. This time she would be very, very calm.

She was going to do it. But a middle-aged man, sitting on a bench close by, beat her to it. He was furious.

"People like you should be locked up for good!"

"That dog frightened the kids," her father said.

"Go to hell! Fucking old bastard!"

They heard him swear behind them as they walked away side by side. Thank God the children didn't see this. She tried to control her breathing. Her father did not say a word, which was unusual. She wondered whether he was capable of feeling sorry. He looked subdued enough. But no, her father was never sorry. Never.

She knew he was waiting for her to say something, but she couldn't because she might start crying.

"Were those the last strawberries you picked yesterday?" she asked lightly after a while.

"Yes, I'm sorry to say. It was a good crop this year."

"Are you going to make jam out of them?"

They kept up an awkward banter for the remainder of their walk. The children, who just once or twice mentioned the dog that had frightened them, chattered gaily, unwittingly covering the uneasiness between the adults.

She dragged herself around. She could stop blaming herself for not standing up to her father. The man on the bench had taken care of that. No more was needed. She wasn't going to feel sorry for him, either. How could anyone feel sorry for a guy who kicks a puppy? Her limbs felt heavy, as if she were coming down with the flu.

Alone in her room, she cried.

She made supper for the four of them. With the girls around, there was no problem keeping the conversation going.

"Please," the older one said, "can we stay longer? Grandpa said we can stay as long as we want. He'll go hiking with us. And he still hasn't taught us all the names of the stars."

"No," she answered, "we'll have to leave early in the morning." Not one day longer than planned would they stay here, not a single day.

She had almost finished packing when her father entered her room.

"That man was pretty mad at me."

"Yeah," she said, continuing to pack.

"I guess I shouldn't have kicked that dog."

"No."

"I'm sorry I did it. I don't know what came over me. It won't happen again. I'm really sorry."

For a moment, she was speechless.

"Don't worry about it anymore," she said finally.

After he left, her breathing became lighter. She stared out the window towards her forest, nodding.

No crap?

Tim Conley on Fowler language

The New Fowler's Modern English Usage
(Third Edition)
Edited by R. W. Burchfield
Oxford

Devotees of the grammar guide (those who do not write home without it) know it simply as "Fowler's", and can ably disarm the buffoon of a conversation with a smirking allusion: "My dear hottentot, Fowler finds 'harassedly' to be in bad form." (Robert Burchfield, the editor of this newest *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, likewise recommends avoidance of the word.) It is the *Audubon Field Guide* for the syntactician. It charts with a pernickety (*colloquially alternates with "persnickety"*) manner the size, behaviour and plumage of words and phrase both pleasing and errant. "Hackneyed phrases" to be found nesting in "passages that already lack any element of excitement or interest" are "unendurable." Within these 864 pages the usual suspects, like discussions of the proper use of "between", problems with participles, and exceptions to the "i-before-e" rule of thumb meet, in a strikingly casual fashion, neologisms like "cybernetics" and exotic imports like "kedgeree."

A part of me is sad for the lack of profanity in Fowler's, or rather the guidelines for profanity's usage, when slang gets its share of attention. The entry for "ain't", for instance, features examples culled from such auspicious authorities as Charles Dickens ("She ain't half bad") and LL Cool J ("My music sounds kinda real to me— it ain't no fantasy"). The "bar sinister word" has found a defender in Burchfield, if not a zealous one. So the four-letter words, not to mention their polysyllabic and guttural relatives, are disenfranchised, lonely; confined to the ghetto of those specialized dictionaries of dirty words most thumbed by youth with graffiti artist's block. Why? If one frowns at the word "kinda" in LL Cool J's phrase (as I did) and looks for Burchfield's remarks, this entry lies waiting:

> kinda. As part of a widespread tendency in the 20c. to link reduced forms of *of* (and *have, etc.*) to the preceding word in the written form of the language, *kinda, shoulda, etc.*, are often printed in place of *kind of, should have, etc*. Examples: *This some kinda gimmick?*—Punch, 1972; *That little chap must have been really desperate to take that kinda crap*—Caris Davis, 1989. The reduced forms are strictly excluded from formal writing.

All well and good, but there's that word "crap" waiting to be analyzed and regulated, and if one hurries to seek *Fowler's* hints for such a multipurpose word (as I did), one discovers only disappointment (as I did). Except as polished example, *Fowler's* is devoid of crap. I felt cheated: the hoped-for roller coaster ride, or loop-the-loop, which any lexical reference ought to offer, turned out to be two turns on the merry-go-round. There are in fact no traces of any variation of "crap", or any other happily vulgar *mots justes.* This strikes me as unusual, since Burchfield himself wrote an interesting article for *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1972 observing the history of "four-letter words" in (or not in) *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Perhaps Burchfield is reluctant to standardize "bad words" for fear of sterilizing them and making foul words fair, having dwelt on Robert Graves' lament of a decline in workable English profanity. If this is the case, however, treating one subversive idiom as a sacred cow while slicing into juicy others (after all, "knock up", "Xmas" and the indispensable verb "rev" show up here).

It is amusing to find "Hasta la vista" listed under the "worn-out humour" category, and under "cliché" — an entry which is here likely too short to meet its potential— one happily discovers "sick as a parrot", which I, at least, had never heard before and cannot imagine exhausting. But my favourite discussion appears under the title, "hard words":

> 'Why does Anita Brookner use hard words like "rebarbative" and "nugatory"?', I heard someone ask recently at a cocktail party. One possible answer is that the famous novelist does not regard them as 'hard'. Candia McWilliam (author of *A Little Stranger, etc.*) explained to *Sunday Times* readers in 1989, answering the charge that her vocabulary was élitist, 'Well, yes, in the sense that they [sc. words] can be demanding, exigent and revealing.'

Besides benefiting those who have wondered what actually takes place at cocktail parties, this entry will please anyone wanting a glimpse of a keen, linguistically oriented mind taken to wistful musings. Burchfield, puzzling over the steady decline of fun words like "enarration" and "tergiversation", sighs, "Nothing changes, does it?"

However, Burchfield says he "refuse[s] to be a pessimist. I am sure that the English language is not collapsing"; that indeed, the most popular and most ragged language of our

century will yet serve as "a tool of extraordinary strength and flexibility." It may not be a collapsing universe, but some of the directions of its expansion do merit concern: the entry for "doublespeak" emphatically describes the deathless idiom as "a dismaying feature of the 20c" which is "used deliberately, esp. but not only in politics, as euphemisms or as a deliberate means of deceit or obfuscation." ("For similar concepts see baffl egab, gobbledegook") Entries on "legalese", "officialese", and "jargon" also appear, each one longer than the last, replete with dizzying examples of language dancing around meaning. One gets a sense that, while Burchfield clearly shakes his head at these (mis)practices, he is also rather perversely interested in them, like a physician wondering at the beauty or fortitude of a given virus.

And, in case anyone was worried, it seems safe to call *Fowler's* a handy reference, since "reference" as a singular noun (rather than the more traditional "reference work") receives a short nod as "the dominant term." •

Ever, George

Tim Conley on Woodcock's Life

The Gentle Anarchist:
A Life of George Woodcock
Douglas Fetherling
Douglas & McIntyre
244 pages, $35

I always feel the accuracy of a phrase is less important than the accuracy of spirit," wrote George Woodcock in a letter to Patricia Barclay dated January 14 1976 If this were to be our chief criterion for judging Douglas Fetherling's new biography of Woodcock, the book would merit a good share of praise.

And why wouldn't it be expected to? After all, Fetherling was not only Woodcock's friend and correspondent, but among his own long list of accomplishments in literature and journalism is *The George Woodcock Reader* (published in 1980), which he edited. (During production of the *Reader,* its subject reflected the same uncertainty about timing that he expressed during the publication of his letters: "all this has its slightly macabre aspects, as if the obituaries were being written before one's death," Woodcock confided to Al Purdy, adding: "which of course they are.") Despite these qualifications – or perhaps, though this he does not utter, because of them – Fetherling wonders whether he is the one for the job. "In his last years, with his health declining," he remembers of Woodcock in his epilogue to the book, "he asked me if I would write a book about him and his work. I was honoured to be selected, but I believe that he could have made a wiser choice – someone with more ability perhaps. This is not false modesty, it's blinding hindsight."

It seems too late to quibble now, though, doesn't it? To protest in an epilogue that maybe you aren't the best writer for the book, particularly after having repeatedly justified the need for such a book, throws a wet towel over the possible enthusiasm of one's reader. Shouldn't the biographer simply paint the portrait and step away, with a gesture of "take him for all in all"?

Woodcock was born in 1912 in England, but moved to Canada in the tide of his father's romantic ideals about the place, and swiftly moved back with his mother ("a very, very strict woman" in her son's description), who had discovered she did not share them. Thus began a conflict of national identity for Woodcock, which would frustrate him throughout his writing, travelling, and political career. His claim to Canadianness puzzled his friends in England, and became a target for his more desperate critics, such as Robin Mathews, or "writers in the U. S. orbit – whom Woodcock would seem to offend by his existence" : Morley Callaghan and Mordecai Richler. Yet Woodcock, in a gesture which might ironically be taken to be a most Canadian one, enjoyed giving off flashes of national other-ness: his occasional references to his own "Welshness" of character, it seems, were partly justified by his unlikely inclusion in the 1944 anthology, *Modern Welsh Poetry*.

One of the human connections Fetherling stresses is Marie Louise Berneri, the vivacious and outspoken intellectual, by whom Woodcock was given his anarchist direction, and with whom he was – as were so many others – deeply infatuated. When he left Europe for Canada with the separated but not yet divorced Ingeborg Linzer Roskelly, he dreamt of Berneri's death, only to arrive and find that his dream had been all too prophetic. Woodcock was haunted by her death and would continue writing poems to her, like the one from which the following stanza is taken, written twenty-eight years later. These lines, it seems to me, reflect both his surviving love for her and those qualities Antonio Gramsci prescribed for conscientious survival: pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will.

Utopia has arrived.
You would not recognize
or like it. We are still
hoping for liberation
but do not expect it.

Politically, Woodcock was ever the outsider. As an anarchist living in a country Robertson Davies once characterized as a socialist monarchy he could hardly be otherwise. He himself once wrote how surprising it is "how long the cloak-and-dagger spectre with the smoking bomb has survived." Fetherling makes the intriguing suggestion that writing from Canada "may have given Woodcock rather a new viewpoint on anarchism; indeed, spending the rest of his life in Canada, with its national disease of constitutional hypochondria, would help ensure that Woodcock's ideas on anarchism were always in flux, according to changes in the ever-shifting political climate." Woodcock's writings on the subiect of anarchism are as many as those of his literary criticism, and include the famous historical survey. *Anarchism.* Many authorities were not impressed with his ideas, particularly in times of Cold War zealotry. In 1955 Woodcock found himself blacklisted by the McCarran-Walter Act; meaning, basically, that his entrance to the United States was prohibited. Almost forty years later Woodcock would defend the liberties of an American barred from entering Canada: David Irving, a "Holocaust-revisionist" (Fetherling's phrase, but unfortunately not an unpopular one). "I am concerned," wrote Woodcock,

> for the moral state of a society that restricts liberties, even to a small extent, under the specious reasoning that in this way freedom or decency can be protected. Freedom and decency can only be protected if people in a society fight for them against governments and Pecksniffs of every kind, including the literary kind. That is why I am opposed to the anti-hate laws just as I am to the anti-pornography laws; people will hate as much and lust as much as ever, whatever the laws, and negative emotions are less dangerous when they are not repressed by the regulators.

The phrase "whatever the laws" is the mark of his anarchist faith; but of course, the pundits did then as they do now, and pointed and cried "left-winger" or "right-winger" as it suited their attacks. Woodcock often carefully wrote replies, offering detailed differences between, say, Marxist and Bakuninist thought, or outlining the specific nuances of his own beliefs.

To call Woodcock industrious would be to make an understatement verging on the inane. Among his nearly 150 published books are a study of his friend and sometime mentor, George Orwell (*The Crystal Spirit,* 1966); biographies of writers and thinkers like William Godwin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Aphra Behn; many original studies of Canadian literature; travel books; several volumes of poetry; and his own autobiography (all three volumes of it). (The bibliography of Woodcock's works offered in *The Gentle Anarchist* runs to eight pages.) Under his long editorship, the periodical *Canadian Literature* became one of the definitive forums for discussing the subject. His philanthropic efforts, such as India Aid, extend from many and various carefully worded letters to contributions to fund-raising bake sales (he himself baking and selling). As he was approaching eighty, when most people aim for 'taking it easy', Woodcock had begun the mammoth task of translating Proust, mostly just for the love of the work. "But then no one," admits Fetherling, "however dedicated an enemy, ever accused Woodcock of sloth. Nor of lack of persistence."

Woodcock died in 1995. His ashes were dispersed across the peak of Anarchist Mountain. The praises which sounded from within Canadian literature were warm and many.

The "trick" of biography, it seems to me, is the illusion of smooth continuity: the reader must be convinced to make leaps of faith over the inevitable holes of varying size in the documentation. For example, Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson,* admits he has nothing to report about his subject's activities in 1780, as he was unable to travel to England to meet him that year, and so inserts a collection of sayings (as 'remembered' by another friend of Johnson's), without regard to when these clever expressions were actually uttered. The reader is sufficiently entertained by them, however, to overlook the absence of detail.

There are moments in *The Gentle Anarchist* where the 'trick' of padding doesn't fully come off. In a chapter ostensibly about Woodcock's "Starting Over in the New World", for example, Fetherling tells us about the ins and outs of Soho, without suggesting the exact relevance of brochure descriptions such as this:

> Handel once lived in Frith Street, Mozart in Brook Street and Wagner in Old Compton Street. Truer to the preconceived image, perhaps, is Dean Street, where, in the eighteenth century, lodged a scandalous actress with the wonderful name of Peg Woofington, who was one side of a ménage à trois with David Garrick and a fellow actor, Charles Macklim.

Woodcock neither lived in the 18th century nor wrote about any of these people; so I am left wondering why wonderful Woofington would worry Woodcock. For such a slim volume, these flourishes – not so many as to be a serious flaw – seem silly.

In *The Gentle Anarchist* we get a well-handled measure of the *Anarchist,* but Fetherling's inability to win an interview from Woodcock's wife Inge, or to tell us much about his childhood, mean, finally, that we get not enough of the *Gentle.* •

Contributors

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It all started ...

with a phone call. Ida liked the west coast; she'd always wanted to live in Victoria; and now that she was retired and had time to spare, she was particularly glad to be living in a city where she could walk and cycle the whole year round. Karen, who was on the bedroom extension, said the worst thing about the Prairies was the time it took to cross them; she only lived there because of the work; when she retired, she'd be jogging along behind Ida. Karl, who for some reason was also on the bedroom extension, said that Toronto for him was like Montreal, except it was in black and white and dubbed: he saw, he understood, but he didn't enjoy it much. Brenda, who, for convenience' sake, was sitting on my knee, said that the best kind of home town was the kind you took for granted.
"Does that also apply to men?" I asked.
Then Ida said: "We should publish a magazine. I'll do the film reviews. Karen can put her plays in it. Karl and Brenda can do the book reviews."
"What about me?"
"You, you funny old thing? You'll be the publisher," she said …

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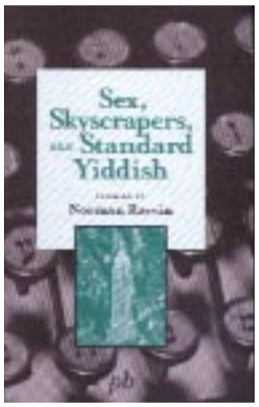

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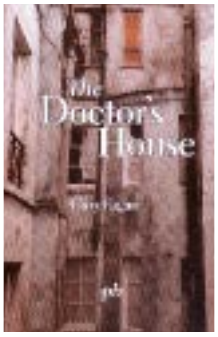

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