ARCHIPELAGO

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www.archipelago.org

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Contents

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All previous issues are available in the Download/pdf editions. All individual articles are available on-line at Index. Subscription by e-mail to the Download edition is now available through our web site.

About Our Contributors

Robert Kelly's <kelly@bard.edu> selected poems, RED ACTIONS, is available from Black Sparrow Press, which will be publishing in November 1998 his poems of 1994-1996, THE TIME OF VOICE. He is working on a fifth collection of short fiction. He teaches in the Writing Program at Bard College. Born two years before the death of Mary Butts, he laments never having known the woman whose re-emergence onto the literary horizon is one of the most important events of recent years.

Stefano Levi Della Torre is an Italian essayist and scholar. The exhibit for which this essay was written may be seen at PhotoArts <http://photoarts.com/journal/claireturyn/venice>.

Gabriele Leidloff <leidloff@public.uni-hamburg.de> is a visual artist whose work has been exhibited internationally and on the web. For further information please contact: Art Resources

Transfer, Inc., Bill Bartman <artresources@compuserve.com>; Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Michael Kapinos <kapinos@berlin.snafu.de>; or the artist.

Katherine McNamara <editor@archipelago.org> is the editor and publisher of *ARCHIPELAGO*. Her non-fiction narrative, NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH A Journey into the Interior of Alaska, is due out this year from Mercury House.

Ewald Osers, who was born in Prague, has lived in England since 1938. He has three times chaired the Translator's Association; is a member of the team preparing the new Oxford German-English Dictionary; is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature; and was Vice-President of the International Federation of Translators. He has translated over one hundred books of poetry and prose from Czech and German. In October 1997, President Václav Havel presented him with the Medal of Merit (*Medaile Za zasluh* (*II. stupen*)) for his work; he is the only living English-language translator to receive such a medal. Among his better-known translations are Ivan Klíma's fiction, including MY FIRST LOVES, A SUMMER AFFAIR, and LOVE AND GARBAGE. Catbird Press / Garrigue Books has published Osers' translation of Karel Capek's WAR WITH THE NEWTS. Mr Osers winters in Naples, Florida, and summers in Reading, England.

Simon Perchik was born in 1923 in Paterson, N.J. He served in the armed forces as a pilot, and was educated at New York University (B.A. English, LL.B. Law). His poems have appeared in *Partisan Reveiew, Poetry, The Nation, North American Review, APR, Harvard Magazine, New Letters, Massachusetts Review, Beloit, Southern Humanities Review, Denver Quarterly, The New Yorker,* among others. His books of poems include: THE GANDOLPH POEMS (White Pine Press, 1987); BIRTHMARK (Flockophobic Press, 1992); REDEEMING THE WINGS and THE EMPTINESS BETWEEN MY HANDS (Dusty Dog Press, 1991, 1993); LETTERS TO THE DEAD (St. Andrews College Press, 1993). His newest book is THESE HANDS FILLED WITH NUMBNESS (Dusty Dog Press, 1996). He is married, has three children, and lives on Long Island, where he practices law.

Jaroslav Seifert was born in Prague in 1901 and died in Prague in 1986, two years after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature. Throughout most of his life he was not only a poet but also journalist, translator of French and Russian poetry and *The Song of Songs*, and editor of volumes of nineteenth-century Czech poetry. During the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia (1939-1945) he became the unofficial national poet. In the early years of Communist rule, his poetry was banned, but later was slowly brought back into print. In 1967, at the height of the Prague Spring, he was officially declared National Artist of Czechoslovakia, and on the day of the 1968 Soviet invasion he was named chairman of the Union of Writers, which he remained until the organization was dissolved a year later. His work was once again banned for many years, but continued to be published in *samizdat*. THE POETRY OF JAROSLAV SEIFERT, tr. Ewald Osers, ed. George Gibian, brought out by Catbird Press / Garrigue Books in 1998, is the first major edition of Seifert's poetry to be published in the United States.

Claire Turyn is a photographer who lives and works in Paris. An exhibit of her photographs can be seen, on-line, on PhotoArts <http://photoarts.com/journal/clairturyn/venice>.

Franca Varini (translator) lives in New York.

James Wintner <jhw@interport.net> (translator) is director of JHW Editions, publishing limited editions / livres d'artists, including PICASSO / WORDS GERTRUDE STEIN / MUSIC VERGIL THOMSON (1992) and SPECIALIST, Robert Sheckley. Illustrated by Susanna Bergtold (1993).

In Memorium
Paul Flamand (1909-1998)
Co-Founder, Editions du Seuil
Remembered by Cornelia Bessie in
ARCHIPELAGO Vol. 1, No. 4.

Other News:
Anna Maria Ortese, A MUSIC BEHIND A WALL, Selected Stories, Vol. 2, has just been published by McPherson & Co. Her story "The Great Street" appeared in *ARCHIPELAGO* Vol. 1, No. 1.

Viriditas Digitalis, our philosopher of the garden, is on hiatus, sends regrets, and will return next issue.

The series "**Institutional Memory**," in which the Editor converses with distinguished publishers who love books and writers, will resume in the next issue. Katherine McNamara will talk with William Strachan, now director of the Columbia University Press, formerly editor in chief, Holt.

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To Our Readers:

Archipelago is now available by subscription. A live link to the Download Edition, a PDF file, will be e-mailed quarterly to subscribers, as each new issue appears. This edition is visually different than our on-line version: it is designed to appeal to those who prefer printed matter. They can read Archipelago off-line, even print out the issue, if they so desire. We are pleased with the PDF, because it offers Archipelago as we've designed it in a format that can be read by Macs and PCs with equal ease. It requires the Adobe Reader, a free-ware utility availabl at www.adobe.com. I am curious to see whether our Readers find the service useful; it is available without charge.

Katherine McNamara
Editor and Publisher

GABRIELE LEIDLOFF and ROBERT KELLY

The German visual artist Gabriele Leidloff made this radiograph of the life mask of Goethe, which she allowed to be digitized for publication in *ARCHIPELAGO*. Accompanying it is "The Flight of the Crows," written in her honor by Robert Kelly, the American poet.

Gabriele Leidloff, *Goethe*, 1996, radiograph.

THE FLIGHT OF THE CROWS

for Gabriele Leidloff

They sweep across the vast Eurasian land mass
they are friends of every weather
who has ever seen a crow discomfited
they pass among the living and the dead
the black is full of life the grey is dead
the mournfulness at the heart of the spectrum,
the grief at the heart of matter,
across the world from Goethe's *Rosa-Purpur*

but who ever saw a crow reading Goethe,
though they may be the dark angels at the end of Faust,
pelting that gay devil with red roses,

a rose is a wound, did you know that?
We pelt one another with our wounds,
we give us roses for love, the crows
mock us from the heart of the sky

which is not different from the heart of earth.
Easy. Listen. Crows, listen to crows,
they know where all things are
and decide between the living and the dead

and both of them are of use, of use to them, the living
are of use to them, and the dead.

It was in Berlin, I was one of the living,
I walked in the cold bright morning
around the Schloß in Charlottenburg,
and there at my feet came a crow strolling,
a kind I'd never seen, I thought at first
it was a matter of my eyes, or a fall of light
that cast a pale shadow on his back,
I saw him grey shouldered, capped with grey a little, hooded
with a sheen of less than black,
I thought it was a mistake, an imperfection

in the perceptual medium, a shadow
floating in the milk of sky,
a blemish on my skin,
so I asked him,

And what would you be
I asked the crow
and the bird cawed precisely as a crow would call

So I know there is a kind of crow
that I don't know,
the populations, they sweep across Europe
they are grey and black
or they are black. Or they are not.

I asked you
about a bird

you sent its photograph,
its telephone number I could call
and ask it for a date, fly me or fly you, my sky or yours,
I want to be where there are crowds in the sky
and their shadows on a Prussian lawn

you understand I love crows,
they are my morning and my ministers,
they tell me most of what I need to know

I want to listen to them cawing cawing
because I can map any city by their cry,
their music is all algebra,
their music is all abscissas and mantissas
their music is all map and graph and chart
their music is all where and flute and harp.

You sent me their picture because they were grey
and you looked in a book and knew who they are.
I open a book and find a sky
I open your letter and find some birds

the birds are words,
they tell me that when I was in Hamburg
I was on the borderline between the crows,
the line between the crows in heaven
flows along the Elbe down on earth,

but in England both kinds of crows are known,
and this grey crow the golden woman
who dances in the air above Charlottenburg
and whose name another woman gave me in Winterhude,
this crow the English call their hoodie,
their hooded crow,

so I have a name
I have a word
a word and a voice
to say it

birds in a book and a word in the sky
how many of us know how to fly

is not really the question, you can, I can,
one can lie back on a west-easterly divan
and watch the birds come streak across the sky
like novice nuns running back from class

you watch the sky until a bird appears.

2.

So the real question is what do you want to learn?
And why do I want there to be some living thing that moves
at its own will or whim across my world
and makes a noise and wakes me up

so there I go obedient as ever to
the oracle of crows.

Crow on right:
keep going as you go.
Crow on the left.
Think twice. Stop what you're doing
and reflect.
Crow behind you.
Turn back.
Crow ahead of you: follow, follow

walk towards the voice of the crow
no matter how far you have to go.

A word once spoken
becomes a whole world's sky

3.
So it is a matter of voices, of
listening to voices.

You and I both have interesting voices.
You have a beautiful voice, in fact.
It is a voice I often –long before I met you–
have heard speaking my poems in my ear
before my body flexes to get them written down.
I told you all this already,
back in Germany, where somehow
it was, maybe is, easier to tell the truth.
I told you all this, and told you I think also
how your voice is truest, most beautiful, tells
the truth deepest, when you're not
doing anything fancy with your voice. It's when
you're just talking that the truth comes out,
the long deep water of your voice, the long
deep voice of yours which is like the color of silence,
the flesh of shadow, the sheen on a crow at dawn

It is strange to think: one can have
a voice. It is like being able to have a wind
or a weather. To have a sea.
A voice. Your wonderful voice
the color of amber hidden in someone's palm.
Your voice is the shape of milk in a cup left out in the morning
by someone who left for work and hours
later her husband wakes up and finds it
your voice gets milk on the rough of his mustache,
what do you want to learn,
listen to your voice,

your voice is the adolescence of a king, shy about his body
under his stately robes, your voice is the mirror
in which a sixteen year old emigrant
studies her cheekbones using
the glass of the porthole for her mirror
wondering what America will be like, your voice
is the orchestra still playing on the sunken *Titanic*
dreaming under a century of water,
your voice is shivering Indians watching Spaniards in big ships,

what do you want to learn?
If you can hear me you can hear your voice,
your voice is the oil on a wrestler's muscles,
your voice is the opera house at midnight
empty of everything but feeling and understanding,
your voice is nothing like sunshine, nothing like light,

your voice is the sound of everybody's native language.

4.

They carry us, words
carry us, crows carry us,
the sky puts up with us,
the sky takes us home.

I lived one year in the Savoie
where black birds meant the Resistance
meant the men who smuggled Jews out of France
into the difficult and unwelcoming Valais,
are you Jewish, am I anything,

the words are hard to live in but they welcome us.
The crows have nothing to give
but what they have they give to us.
And everything that can ever be said
is said in the sound of anybody's old voice.

ROBERT KELLY
21-29 May 1996

POEMS

JAROSLAV SEIFERT

tr. from the Czech by
EWALD OSERS

DANCE OF THE GIRLS' CHEMISES

A dozen girls' chemises
drying on a line,
floral lace at the breast
like rose windows in a Gothic cathedral.

Lord,
shield Thou me from all evil.

A dozen girls' chemises,
that's love,
innocent girls' games on a sunlit lawn,
the thirteenth, a man's shirt,
that's marriage,
ending in adultery and a pistol shot.

The wind that's streaming through the chemises,
that's love,
our earth embraced by its sweet breezes:
a dozen airy bodies.

Those dozen girls made of light air
are dancing on the green lawn,
gently the wind is modelling their bodies,
breasts, hips, a dimple on the belly there --
open fast, oh my eyes.

Not wishing to disturb their dance
I softly slipped under the chemises' knees,
and when any of them fell
I greedily inhaled it through my teeth
and bit its breast.

Love,
which we inhale and feed on,
disenchanted,
love that our dreams are keyed on,
love,
that dogs our rise and fall:
nothing
yet the sum of all.

In our all-electric age
nightclubs not christenings are the rage
and love is pumped into our tyres.
My sinful Magdalen, don't cry:
Romantic love has spent its fires.

Faith, motorbikes, and hope.

THE YEAR 1934

The happiness of youth
is pleasant to remember.
Only the river doesn't age.
The windmill has collapsed,
capricious winds
are whistling, unconcerned.

A touching wayside cross remains.
A cornflower wreath like a nest without birds
upon Christ's shoulder,
and a frog blaspheming in the sedge.

Have mercy upon us!
A bitter time has come
to the banks of sweet rivers,
two years the factories have stood empty
and children learn the language of hunger
at their mothers' knees.

And still their laughter rings
under the willow sadly silent
in its silver.

May they give us a happier old age
than the childhood we're giving them!

SOMETIMES WE ARE TIED DOWN. . .

Sometimes we are tied down by memories
and there are no scissors that could cut
through those tough threads.
Or ropes!

You see the bridge there by the House of Artists?
A few steps before that bridge
gendarmes shot a worker dead
who was walking in front of me.

I was only twenty at the time,
but whenever I pass the spot
the memory comes back to me.
It takes me by the hand and together we walk
to the little gate of the Jewish cemetery,
through which I had been running
from their rifles.

The years moved with unsure, tottering step
and I with them.
Years flying
till time stood still.

A SONG AT THE END

Listen: about little Hendele.
She came back to me yesterday
and she was twenty-four already.
And as graceful as Shulamite.

She wore an ash-gray squirrel fur
and a pert little cap
and round her neck she'd tied a scarf
the colour of pale smoke.

Hendele, how well this suits you!
I thought that you were dead
and meanwhile you have grown more beautiful.
I am glad you've come!

How wrong you are, dear friend!
I've been dead twenty years,
and very well you know it.
I've only come to meet you.

ST GEORGE'S BASILICA

If in the white Basilica of St George
fire broke out,
God forbid,
its walls after flames would be rose-coloured.
Perhaps even its twin towers: Adam and Eve.
Eve is the slimmer one, as is usual with women,
though this is only an insignificant glory
of their sex.
The fiery heat would make the limestone blush.

Just as young girls do
after their first kiss.

PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE

After a long journey we awoke
in the cathedral's cloisters, where men slept
on the bare floor.
There were no buses in those days,
only trams and the train,
and on a pilgrimage one went on foot.

We were awakened by bells. They boomed
from square-set towers.
Under their clangour trembled not only the church
but the dew on the stalks
as though somewhere quite close above our heads
elephants were trampling on the clouds
in a morning dance.

A few yards from us the women were dressing.
Thus did I catch a glimpse
for only a second or two
of the nakedness of female bodies
as hands raised skirts above heads.

But at that moment someone clamped
his hand upon my mouth
so that I could not even let out my breath.
And I groped for the wall.

A moment later all were kneeling
before the golden reliquary
hailing each other with their songs.
I sang with them.
But I was hailing something different,
yes and a thousand times,
gripped by first knowledge.
The singing quickly bore my head away
out of the church.
In the Bible the Evangelist Luke
writes in his gospel,
Chapter One, Verse Twenty-six
the following:

And the winged messenger flew in by the window
into the virgin's chamber
softly as the barn-owl flies by night,
and hovered in the air before the maiden
a foot above the ground,
imperceptibly beating his wings.
He spoke in Hebrew about David's throne.

She dropped her eyes in surprise
and whispered: Amen
and her nut-brown hair
fell from her forehead onto her prie-dieu.

Now I know how at that fateful moment
women act
to whom an angel has announced nothing.

They first shriek with delight,
then they sob
and mercilessly dig their nails
into man's flesh.
And as they close their womb
and tense their muscles
a heart in tumult hurls wild words
up to their lips.

I was beginning to get ready for life
and headed wherever
the world was most exciting.
I well recall the rattle of rosaries
at fairground stalls
like rain on a tin roof,
and the girls, as they strolled among the stalls,
nervously clutching their scarves,
liberally cast their sparkling eyes
in all directions,
and their lips launched on the empty air
the flavour of kisses to come.

Life is a hard and agonizing flight
of migratory birds
to regions where you are alone.
And whence there's no return.
And all that you have left behind,
the pain, the sorrows, all your disappointments
seem easier to bear

than is this loneliness,
where there is no consolation
to bring a little comfort to
your tear-stained soul.

What use to me are those sweet sultanas!
Good thing that at the rifle booth I won
a bright-red paper rose!
I kept it a long time
and still it smelled of carbide.

THE PLAGUE COLUMN

To the four corners of the earth they turn:
the four demobilized knights of the heavenly host.
And the four corners of the earth
are barred
behind four heavy locks.

Down the sunny path the ancient shadow
of the column staggers
from the hour of Shackles
to the hour of Dance.
From the hour of the Rose
to the hour of the Dragon's Claw.
From the hour of Smiles
to the hour of Wrath.

From the hour of Hope
to the hour of Never,
whence it is just a short step
to the hour of Despair,
to Death's turnstile.

Our lives run
like fingers over sandpaper,
days, weeks, years, centuries.
And there were times when we spent
long years in tears.
I still walk around the column
where so often I waited,
listening to the water gurgling
from apocalyptic mouths,
always astonished
at the water's flirtatiousness
as it splintered on the basin's surface
until the Column's shadow fell across your face.

That was the hour of the Rose.

You there, young lad, do me a favour: climb
up on the fountain and read out to me
the words the four Evangelists are writing
on their stone pages.

The Evangelist Matthew is first.
And which of us from pure joy
can add to his life's span
one cubit?

And what does Mark, the second, write?
Is a candle bought
to be put under a bushel
and not to be set on a candlestick?

And the Evangelist Luke?
The light of the body is in the eye.
But where many bodies are
thither will many eagles be gathered
together.

And lastly, John, the favourite of the Lord,
what does he write?
He has his book shut on his lap.
Then open it, boy. If needs be
with your teeth.
I was christened on the edge of Olsany
in the plague chapel of Saint Roch.

When bubonic plague was raging in Prague
they laid the dead around the chapel.
Body upon body, in layers.
Their bones, over the years, grew into
rough-stacked pyres
which blazed
in the quicklime whirlwind of clay.

For a long time I would visit
these mournful places,
but I did not forsake the sweetness of life.

I felt happy in the warmth of human breath
and when I roamed among people
I tried to catch the perfume of women's hair.

On the steps of the Olsany taverns
I used to crouch at night to hear
the coffin-bearers and grave-diggers
singing their rowdy songs.

But that was long ago
the taverns have fallen silent,
the grave-diggers in the end
buried each other.

When spring came within reach,
with feather and lute,
I'd walk around the lawn with the Japanese cherries
on the south side of the chapel
and, bewitched by their aging splendour,
think about girls
silently undressing at night.
I did not know their names
but one of them,
when sleep would not come,
tapped softly on my window.

And who was it that wrote
those poems on my pillow?

Sometimes I would stand by the wooden bell tower.
The bell was tolled
whenever they lifted up a corpse in the chapel.
It too is silent now.

I gazed on the neo-classical statuary
in the Malá Strana cemetery.
The statues were still grieving over their dead
from whom they'd had to part.
Leaving, they walked slowly
with the smile of their ancient beauty.

And there were among them not only women
but also soldiers with helmets, and armed
unless I'm mistaken.

I haven't been here for a long time.

Don't let them dupe you
that the plague's at an end:
I've seen too many coffins hauled

through this dark gateway,
which is not the only one.

The plague still rages and it seems that the doctors
are giving different names to the disease
to avoid a panic.
Yet it is still the same old death
and nothing else,
and it is so contagious
no one alive can escape it.

Whenever I have looked out of my window,
emaciated horses have been drawing that ill-boding cart
with a gaunt coffin.
Only, those bells aren't tolled so often now,
crosses no longer painted on front doors,
juniper twigs no longer burnt for fumigation.

In the Julian Fields
we'd sometimes lie at nightfall,
as Brno was sinking into the darkness,
and in the branches of the Svitava
the frogs began their plaint.

Once a young gipsy sat down beside us.
Her blouse was half unbuttoned
and she read our hands.
To Halas she said:
You won't live to be fifty.
To Artus Cherník:
You'll live till just after that.
I didn't want her to tell my fortune,
I was afraid.

She seized my hand
and angrily exclaimed:
You'll live a long time!
It sounded like a threat.

The many rondels and songs I wrote!
There was a war all over the world
and all over the world
was grief.
And yet I whispered into jewelled ears
verses of love.

It makes me feel ashamed.
But no, not really.
A wreath of sonnets I laid upon
the curves of your lap as you fell asleep.
It was more beautiful than the laurel wreaths
of speedway winners.

But suddenly we met
at the steps of the fountain,
we each went somewhere else, at another time
and by another path.

For a long time I felt
I kept seeing your legs,
sometimes I even heard your laughter
but it wasn't you.
And finally I even saw your eyes.
But only once.

My skin thrice dabbed with a swab
soaked in iodine
was golden brown,
the colour of the skin of dancing girls
in Indian temples.
I stared fixedly at the ceiling
to see them better
and the flower-decked procession
moved round the temple.

One of them, the one in the middle
with the blackest eyes,
smiled at me.
God,
what foolishness is racing through my head
as I lie on the operating table
with drugs in my blood.

And now they've lit the lamp above me,
the surgeon brings his scalpel down
and firmly makes a long incision.
Because I came round quickly
I firmly closed my eyes again.
Even so I caught a glimpse
of female eyes above a sterile mask
just long enough for me to smile.
Hallo, beautiful eyes.

By now they had ligatures around my blood vessels
and hooks opening up my wounds
to let the surgeon separate
the paravertebral muscles
and expose the spines and arches.
I uttered a soft moan.

I was lying on my side,
my hands tied at the wrists
but with my palms free:
these a nurse was holding in her lap
up by my head.
I firmly gripped her thigh
and fiercely pressed it to me
as a diver clutches a slim amphora
streaking up to the surface.

Just then the pentothol began to flow
into my veins
and all went black before me.
There was a darkness as at the end of the world
and I remember no more.

Dear nurse, you got a few bruises.
I'm very sorry.
But in my mind I say:
A pity
I couldn't bring this alluring booty
up with me from the darkness
into the light and
before my eyes.

The worst is over now,
I tell myself: I'm old.
The worst is yet to come:
I'm still alive.
If you really must know:
I have been happy.

Sometimes a whole day, sometimes whole hours,
sometimes just a few minutes.

All my life I have been faithful to love.
And if a woman's hands are more than wings
what then are her legs?

How I enjoyed testing their strength.
That soft strength in their grip.
Let those knees then crush my head!

If I closed my eyes in this embrace
I would not be so drunk
and there wouldn't be that feverish drumming
in my temples.
But why should I close them?

With open eyes
I have walked through this land.
It's beautiful -- but you know that.
It has meant more to me perhaps than all my loves,
and her embrace has lasted all my life.
When I was hungry
I fed almost daily
on the words of her songs.

Those who have left
hastily fled to distant lands,
must realize it by now:
the world is terrible.
They do not love and are not loved.
We at least love.
So let her knees then crush
my head!

Here is an accurate catalogue of guided missiles.

Surface-to-air
Surface-to-surface
Surface-to-sea
Air-to-air
Air-to-surface
Air-to-sea
Sea-to-air
Sea-to-sea
Sea-to-surface

Hush, city, I can't make out the whispering of the weir.
And people go about, quite unsuspecting
that above their heads fly
fiery kisses
delivered by hand from window to window.

Mouth-to-eye
Mouth-to-face
Mouth-to-mouth
And so on

Until a hand at night pulls down a blind
and hides the target.

On the narrow horizon of home
between sewing box
and slippers with swansdown pompoms
her belly's hot moon
is quickly waxing.

Already she counts the days of the lark
though the sparrows are still pecking poppyseed
behind frost-etched flowers.
In the wild-thyme nest
someone's already winding up the spring
of the tiny heart
so it should go accurately
all life long.

What's all this talk of grey hair
and wisdom?
When the bush of life burns down
experience is worthless.
Indeed it always is.

After the hailstorm of graves
the column was thrust up high
and four old poets
leaned back on it
to write on the books' pages
their bestsellers.

The basin now is empty,
littered with cigarette stubs,
and the sun only hesitantly uncovers
the grief of the stones pushed aside.
A place perhaps for begging.

But to cast my life away just like that
for nothing at all -- that
I won't do.

A CHAPLET OF SAGE

for Frantisek Hrubín

Noon was approaching and the quiet
was cut by the buzzing of flies
as though with a diamond.
We were lying in the grass by the Sázava,
drinking Chablis
chilled in a forest spring.

Once at Konopiste Castle
I was allowed to view
an ancient dagger on display.
Only in the wound did a secret sprig
release a triple blade.
Poems are sometimes like that.
Not many of them perhaps
but it is difficult to extract them from the wound.

A poet often is like a lover.
He easily forgets
his one-time whispered promise of gentleness
and the most fragile gracefulness
he treats with brutal gesture.

He has the right to rape.
Under the banner of beauty
or that of terror.
Or under the banner of both.
Indeed it is his mission.

Events themselves hand him
a ready pen
that with its tip he may indelibly tattoo
his message.
Not on the skin of the breast
but straight into the muscle
which throbs with blood.
But rose and heart are not just love,
nor a ship a voyage or adventure,
nor a knife murder,
nor an anchor fidelity unto death.

These foolish symbols lie.
Life has long outgrown them.
Reality is totally different
and a lot worse still.

And so the poet drunk with life
should spew out all bitterness,
anger and despair
rather than let his song become a tinkling bell
on a sheep's neck.

When we had drunk our fill
and rose from the flattened grass,
a bunch of naked children on the bank
hopped into the river below us.
And one of the young girls,
the one who on her straw-blonde hair
wore a chaplet of wet sage,
climbed up on a large rock
to stretch out on its sun-warmed surface.

I was taken aback:
Good Lord,
she's no longer a child!

LOST PARADISE

The Old Jewish Cemetery
is one great bouquet of grey stone
on which time has trodden.
I was drifting among the graves,
thinking of my mother.
She used to read the Bible.

The letters in two columns
welled up before her eyes
like blood from a wound.
The lamp guttered and smoked
and Mother put on her glasses.
At times she had to blow it out
and with her hairpin straighten
the glowing wick.

But when she closed her tired eyes
she dreamed of Paradise
before God had garrisoned it
with armed cherubim.
Often she fell asleep and the Book
slipped from her lap.

I was still young
when I discovered in the Old Testament
those fascinating verses about love
and eagerly searched for
the passages on incest.
Then I did not yet suspect
how much tenderness is hidden in the names
of Old Testament women.

Adah is Ornament and Orpah
is a Hind,
Naamah is the Sweetness
and Nikol is the Little Brook.

Abigail is the Fount of Delight.
But if I recall how helplessly I watched
as they dragged off the Jews,

even the crying children,
I still shudder with horror
and a chill runs down my spine.

Jemima is the Dove and Tamar
the Palm Tree.
Tirzah is Grace
and Zilpah a Dewdrop.
My God, how beautiful this is.

We were living in hell
yet no one dared to strike a weapon
from the murderers' hands.
As if within our hearts we did not have
a spark of humanity!

The name Jecholiah means
The Lord is Mighty.
And yet their frowning God
gazed over the barbed wire
and did not move a finger --

Delilah is the Delicate, Rachel
the Ewe Lamb,
Deborah the Bee
and Esther the Bright Star.

I'd just returned from the cemetery
when the June evening, with its scents,
rested on the windows.
But from the silent distance now and then
came thunder of a future war.
There is no time without murder.

I almost forgot:
Rhoda is the Rose.
And this flower perhaps is the only thing
that's left us on earth
from the Paradise that was.

STRUGGLE WITH THE ANGEL

God knows who first thought up
that gloomy image
and spoke of the dead
as living shades
straying about amongst us.

And yet those shades are really here --
you can't miss them.
Over the years I've gathered around me
a numerous cluster.
But it is I amidst them all
who is straying.

They're dark
and their muteness keeps time
with my muteness
when the evening's closing in
and I'm alone.
Now and again they stay my writing hand
when I'm not right,
and blow away an evil thought
that's painful.

Some of them are so dim
and faded
I'm losing sight of them in the distance.
One of the shades, however, is rose-red
and weeps.
In every person's life
there comes a moment
when everything suddenly goes black before his eyes
and he longs passionately to take in his hands
a smiling head.
His heart wants to be tied
to another heart,
even by deep stitches,
while his lips desire nothing more
than to touch down on the spots where

the midnight raven settled on Pallas Athene
when uninvited it flew in to visit
a melancholy poet.

It is called love.
All right,
perhaps that's what it is!
But only rarely does it last for long,
let alone unto death
as in the case of swans.
Often loves succeed each other
like suits of cards in your hand.

Sometimes it's just a tremor of delight,
more often long and bitter pain.
At other times all sighs and tears.
And sometimes even boredom.
That's the saddest kind.

Some time in the past I saw a rose-red shade.
It stood by the entrance to a house
facing Prague's railway station,
eternally swathed in smoke.

We used to sit there by the window.
I held her delicate hands
and talked of love.
I'm good at that!
She's long been dead.
The red lights were winking
down by the track.

As soon as the wind sprang up a little
it blew away the grey veil
and the rails glistened
like the strings of some monstrous piano.
At times you could also hear the whistle of steam
and the puffing of engines
as they carried off people's wretched longings
from the grimy platforms
to all possible destinations.
Sometimes they also carried away the dead
returning to their homes
and to their cemeteries.

Now I know why it hurts so
to tear hand from hand,
lips from lips,
when the stitches tear
and the guard slams shut
the last carriage door.

Love's an eternal struggle with the angel.
From dawn to night.
Without mercy.
The opponent is often stronger.
But woe to him
who doesn't realize
that his angel has no wings
and will not bless.

THE ANCIENT JEWISH CEMETERY AT THE LIDO IN VENICE: On the Photographs of Claire Turyn

STEFANO LEVI DELLA TORRE

tr. FRANCA VARINI *and* JAMES WINTNER

The Jewish cemetery at the Lido di Venezia has the reserve of a fenced wood and, at the same time, the enduring quality typical of an archaeological site. It is a characteristic common to other Jewish cemeteries in Italy and in Europe, where the alternation of care and abandonment over the span of many centuries, reflects the historical record -- bad and good -- of their communities. The gravestones emerge from a sea of overgrown grass, inclined or flat, or leaning against the brick wall, in the shadow of trees that have grown wild: some have grown so as to embrace the edge of a stone or to have split it. We find not only the funereal cypresses, but plants of many species, casually or intentionally left as a sign of life (*Bet ha-Khaiim*, "house of the living" is, in Hebrew, the euphemism which designates the cemetery). The light of the lagoon filters through the leaves. Traces of an order -- a garden, efforts of an earlier age -- are now confused by the wild vegetation, and the half-submerged tombs recall a return to the earth, leaving on the surface a residue of white stone -- a silent disorder -- or, on the contrary, a re-emergence of memory.

The photographs of Claire Turyn convey this sense of a memory alternating between the enduring and the impermanent. Up close, the blotches of shadow and light obscure the carved inscriptions and decorations; the erosions of water and sea air, and the lichen stains, intertwine with the inscriptions like another inscription superimposed on the original. From a distance, the monuments of chalk-white Istrian stones appear like apparitions in the middle of the forest, vivid signposts in the indifferent vegetation.

The cemetery grounds have their origins in a vineyard adjacent to the Benedictine monastery of San Nicolo di Mira. It was given to the Jews in perpetuity for the purpose of burial in 1386, in a period when the relationship between the Jews and the Serenissima was becoming more organic and formalized. (In fact, one year earlier, 1385, the *candotta de banco* , banking license, was granted to certain Jewish families in Mestre.)

The Jewish community on the lagoon, documented since the 11th century, developed through highs and lows, restrictions and concessions. The increasing dominance of Venice throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, both economically and politically, made it a magnet for immigration. Jews from all over Europe and the Mediterranean flocked there. Religious and

social tensions arose. In 1516 the Senate created the ghetto in Cannaregio: *"siano (gli ebrei) tenutj et debino andar immediate ad habitar unidj in la corte di case che sono in* geto *apresso San Hieronymo: loco capacisimo per sua habitacione."*

(The *geto*, from which it is believed the word "ghetto" derives, was a foundry zone -- *getto* (jet) of copper. . .). Jews were gathered and segregated there. They were initially seven hundred in number, but their population in Venice kept growing, reaching a maximum of five thousand (out of a total population of one hundred fifty thousand) around 1630, immediately before the Plague. (In the cemetery there is a communal grave, recalling the Plague, with the inscription "Hebrei 1631.") Living together in the ghetto were the many Jewish "nations": Italians, as well as those coming from other regions of Europe and of the Mediterranean; the Ashkenazi from Germany, Poland, or Russia; the Sephardim expelled from the Iberian Peninsula; Westerners; Easterners; etc. Each nation had its own rituals and synagogue, but all were joined as Jews and as Venetians.

Later on, the Jewish population began to decline in number and economic force, pushed down little by little, like many other minorities subject to the Serenissima, by restrictions and prohibitions.

This evolution is reflected in the history of the cemetery, first in its expansion and its decoration, then in its decline. Towards the end of the 1700s, it stands abandoned on an almost deserted island. The sand accumulates, carried by the winds. The wild vegetation invades and covers the cemetery grounds. The solitude of this place, expected perhaps, for it was isolated like a ghetto of the dead, did not guarantee its tranquillity: situated on the strip of land between sea and lagoon, at a strategic opening of the harbor, the cemetery has endured (starting in the 1600s) successive works of fortification.

When, during the course of the 19th century, a new cemetery was opened in an adjacent area, and the Lido was urbanized, the excavations revealed many graves long hidden from sight. The tombstones are reunited on a small site in the old cemetery, once again enclosed. Many stones have lost their original place, and the many Jewish "nations," once distinct, now find themselves strewn together in the entrance area (originally reserved for the Sephardim) facing towards Venice. On that shore landed the funeral gondolas of the *Hevrat Ghemilut Hassad'm*, the Jewish burial society. Leaving from the ghetto, the cortege of boats traversed the lagoon, taking a route which avoided passages and bridges from which someone could have thrown objects and trash in mockery of the Jews.

The photographs of Claire Turyn testify to this tranquil ruin, this mixture of "nations." Groups of stones in their disarray sway back and forth as if in ritual oscillation; grassy fissures traverse the stones; carved figures reject a too-rigid interpretation of the prohibition against images ("Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image..." *Deut. 5*). In fact, the gravestones are covered with sculpted images, particularly beginning in the late 1500s, the imagery a mix of Hebrew and Venetian references.

There is the Lion of San Marco -- perhaps the one of Judah: "Judah is a lion's whelp;/ On prey, my son, have you grown./ He crouches, lies down like a lion,/ Like the king of beasts -- who dare rouse him?" (*Gen. 49:9*). (Perhaps deriving from San Marco is the family name of emigrants to Germany: Marx). In a vortex of ivy appears a siren, half woman, half creature of the sea, again a possible allusion to Venice. There are Baroque volutes, which frame Hebrew inscriptions, and there is a large gravestone of a Dutch Sephardic Jew with stone drapery held by small *putti*. Here we see a plumed helmet of the Spanish Hidalgos, not in memory of the Sephardic Jews' warrior past, but, rather, nostalgia for the respect and lost protection of a land from which we were expelled. There is the imperial eagle with two heads, perhaps an homage to an empire whose pluralistic dominion had granted less confining living conditions to the Jews.

But more common are the symbols, or Rebuses, more specifically Jewish: the stele divided into two vertical bands ending with two lobes at the top, like the "Tablets of the Law," refer to a married couple. The deer in the basket, in one interpretation an allusion to Moses saved from the waters of the Nile (or perhaps from the lagoon?) is a symbol of the Serravalle. The moon, the stars, and the rock, sometimes with a palm branch clutched in its claws, is from the Luzzatto family of ancient Ashkenazi derivation. The hands in benediction with the fingers joined two by two and the thumbs extended out (the three parts of the benediction) above the crown (the Torah, the Scriptures) represent the Kohane, the high priests.

The pitcher which pours the water into the bucket for the ritual cleansing is from Levi, being the Levites, the ancient tribe assigned to the cult. The ladder, similar to the one in the dream of Jacob (*Gen. 28:12-15*) belongs to the Sullam (which in Hebrew means ladder). The scorpion, which in truth looks like a spike, is from the family Copio (scorpio). The moon is Lunuel di Francia (of France) o Jarach (*jar*akh* means "moon" in Hebrew), while the moon inside the sun belongs to the Habib.

Here is the tree of life rising from a vase or from a mountain. The crenelated tower which has at its top the figure of a woman holding a sword in one hand and a palm branch in the other, is in praise of woman, who is fortress and peace according to the last chapter (31) of the Biblical Book of Proverbs: "A woman of valour who can find? For her price is far above rubies . . . Strength and dignity are her clothing; And she laugheth at the time to come."

The wall of large ashlar surmounted by columns invokes the memory of the *Kotel ha-ma'rav*, the Western Wailing Wall, remnant of the Temple of Jerusalem destroyed by the Emperor Titus in 70 A.D., but it is not only a memory, it is also the aspiration to return to the promised land. Many in their old age went there to die, others left as their final wish the desire to be buried there, and a legendary hope was that the dead would in any case reach the land of Israel through subterranean paths, in order to be there on the day of resurrection.

Among the illustrious graves there is the one of the Rabbi Leone da Modena, a great teacher and writer, but addicted to gambling, who died in poverty in 1648. His funeral was paid by the Hebrew "University" and his modest stone is, like many others, a fragment of a window sill in Masegna stone: in the back we see the mouldings, on the front we read the inscription made by Leone himself: "Words of the dead. Four arms' length of land in this enclosure, possessed for eternity were acquired from above for Giuda Leone da Modena. Be gentle with him and give him peace." There is the gravestone of Elia Levita, grammarian of the 16th century; and the one of Sara Copic Sullam, poet and the guiding spirit of a literary salon in the first half of the 17th century:

This is the stone of the distinguished
Signora Sara (. . .)
woman of great genius
wise among the wives
supporter of the needy
the unfortunate found in her a companion
. . . On the predestined day God will say: come back,
come back o Sulamita

Here, with a play of words, reference is made to the surname "Sullam" and to Sulamita, the beloved of the *Cantico dei Cantici* . But these tombs are modest, without any particular distinction, mixed in with the other stones.

In the variation of styles across time we read the relationship between the Jews and Venice: changes of fashion -- the sober classicism of the Renaissance, the excesses of the Baroque -- reflect the level of intimacy with "gentile" society. In the ghetto the synagogues from many eras are adorned with the finest that Venetian artisans could offer in the decorative arts.

The oldest stones are severe, characterized essentially by their inscriptions. Between the 1500s and 1600s there was an increase in the volutes and in the figurative puzzles (Rebuses) which we have already described. In the 1600s and especially the 1700s sarcophagi appear, such as the one captured by Turyn with the large open mouth, or the one in the new cemetery, marble covered by a high relief brocade.

In the 19th century, and thus in the new cemetery (which is still in use), the sepulchers start to resemble those of a Christian cemetery, seen in their similar monumental elements. By then the Biblical prohibition against the use of images is completely ignored --- portraits of the dead in low or full relief, in photographs and sometimes in mosaics like in the sepulcher of the Jesurum, decorated by lace carved in stone, celebrating what the family had done in the production and international trade of Burano lace. Not only the styles, but even the symbols borrow from those of the Gentile cemeteries of the same period: the urns veiled with marble drapery, the obelisks, the broken columns for premature deaths, the sculpted funeral wreaths, even the chapels. These forms represent the progressive social and economic

assimilation of many Jews after the emancipation. At the same time in Turin, Florence, and Rome, the grand synagogues of a united Italy were being erected as if they were "Jewish churches" with only a Moorish or Babylonian touch connoting a "difference" just a touch exotic.

Today, through the eyes of someone who has lived through or who knows the tragedy of the Jews in the 20th century, these "assimilated" and pathetically optimistic tombs stand now as testament to an illusion: that with the emancipation of the 18th century the tragedies of the Jewish people had come to an end. This, of course, was not to be. And thus in recent decades we have seen a return to the ancient sobriety: the tombs of the last decades are bare stones marked only with inscriptions.

The photographs of Claire Turyn linger especially on the ancient cemetery, with a glance towards the new: they are enigmatic portraits, traces of many different stories that are yet to be completely understood.

Milan, 1997

The photographs referred to in this essay, and the essay itself, can be viewed on the world-wide web at PhotoArts <http://photoarts.com/journal/claireturyn/venice>.

See also, "A Little String Game," *ARCHIPELAGO* Vol. 1, No. 2

THE REPETITION OF THEIR DAYS

KATHERINE McNAMARA

What follows took place in the Interior of Alaska, in Athabaskan country, in the late 1970s. McGrath exists by that name; the Kuskokwim and Yukon and Stony Rivers are real; but I have disguised the names of the Dena'ina (Athabaskan) villages, calling them 'Hungry' and 'Village Below', to respect the privacy left to their people. 'Mary' and 'Tom Charles' and their children, 'Efrem,' 'Fyodor,' their sisters: all were as I've described them, but these are not their real names. The narrator, who is myself as I was then, was an itinerant poet who lived in Alaska for a number of years and, with the help of many people and a gift of luck, or grace, learned a way to see the country.

From Hungry Village, Mary and Tom Charles sent me two fat red salmon, packed in bundles of the tall grass the grew on the river banks. In late summer people scythed the grass and used it to absorb fish blood. After breakup, after the last snow had gone, they burned off the straw; within a day of the first rain, green shoots were poking through the stubble. The grass grew broad-leafed and tough. In August, by the time the reds came that far up the Stony, the men cut the high summer growth and laid it down on the beach under the tables where the families cut fish.

I was away from home the day the gift arrived. The pilot left it with my neighbor, who stored the unopened box on her porch in a refrigerator that stopped working. I got back a week later; the fish were already stinking. I gave them to Mick Hannigan, who fed them to his dogs.

It was too bad about the fish; I liked them, and red salmon didn't spawn in the Kuskokwim. There was an empty seat on a chartered plane going to Hungry, I heard; and I could have it. It was the last week in August: the days were warm; the nights were cool enough for a parka. I gathered up my parka and a sleeping bag and a small pack. The plane was waiting, its freight loaded; most of it was grocery orders from the McGrath store.

For about an hour we flew south over the Kuskokwim Mountains and into the Stony River country, behind where the Alaska Range curved inland

from the coast. The mountains were green with Alpine tundra, or thick with birch and alder. It was moose country, the pilot noted, though a few caribou also ranged in the higher areas.

In Hungry lived a family of people I had come to know in the past year, the brothers Fyodor and Efrem and their sisters Alice and Emma. They were Dena'ina, and I had known their relatives in Village Below. A number of their grown children remained near them. The daughters had married white men, and the young families had built new homes across the river from the old settlement. Of all of them, I was closest to the Charleses. Tom taught school; Mary was Efrem's daughter.

And so, I came walking over the hill from the village and down the trail to the house where the seven Charleses lived. Nothing stirred but wood smoke drifting away into the trees. They had built the cabin into a steep bank on a small, swift creek, just upstream from where the creek joined the river: its new tin roof flashed in the sun. Directly below, at the edge of the water, stood the smokehouse; and off toward the trees a summer tent had been rigged up out of mosquito netting, where the children could laze about and read. Seven sled dogs lay by their houses at the edge of the woods. One of them rattled his chain and looked toward me, questioning, as I approached.

The two youngest children were up on the roof of the smoke-house. They hallooed through the quiet woods! Mary appeared, smiling, at the door, and Tom waved from the river bank. I was in time for lunch.

Afterward, Mary and I settled into comfortable chairs with our tea. Efrem, her father, had come to visit: he and Tom sat in the sun talking about a fly-wheel wood splitter Tom had seen at the Alaska State Fair. Tom Junior, with his dirty, impish face, was tootling away on a recorder and trying to catch my eye. Mary, to distract him, suggested he wash his face and hands. He stopped tootling and looked at her, innocence itself: "Why? Don't you like dirt? What's wrong with it?" Rebecca, who was about eight, came in and curled up under her mother's arm.

"She's my grandma," Mary said fondly. "When she was a little, little girl my grandma died. They had the forty days give-every-thing-away, you know, and my auntie was handing out everything. Rebecca stood up on a table and said, 'I'm Grandma! You stop giving all my things away and give some to me!' My auntie just dropped everything, she was scared. That's why she likes Rebecca so much." Rebecca said, "I was just little then, I don't remember." A sweet, sly smile slipped around her mouth.

The afternoon had declined to a hush. Mary was sewing, and the children, including the two oldest girls, finished their chores outdoors. Efrem had gone home.

"He used to find moose when everyone was hungry and had no luck," Tom said gently of his father-in-law. We were sitting on the front steps, watching the creek tumble by. "He could feed the whole village. Now he's just about the only one who can't make out a grocery order."

Tom was small and quick, and had kept his Down East accent, even after a dozen years in the bush. He had met Mary and her three young children when he worked in the cinnabar mine at Red Devil; they married not long afterward and had two more children. He was still confused at times by the deep and ancient relationships in her family. Outsiders could not help but be confused, he thought; everything was subtle, subtle.

Chida and Chada had run the village until their very old age. Now they were gone, and things were falling apart. Fyodor, with his wrinkled face and cunning grin, was known for playing the fool in the white man's world: he hustled up to the mail plane and introduced himself and asked all the young women from the school district to marry him, he needed a new wife. Visiting lobbyists and corporation men knew he was partial to whisky, and they had bought his support, or his vote, more than once.

Efrem was a silent man, not given to public talk; but lately he and Fyodor had been arguing with one another, and their aging sisters took positions, further dividing them, or remained neutral. He stayed in a tiny cabin half-buried in the ground, living without a wife, as he had lived since Mary's mother passed away, when Mary was very young. After Chida went, when Rebecca was little, he had begun to lose heart. A summer ago, two of his favorite nephews, who lived at the mouth of the Stony, drowned. He had put off making his annual visit to their family. His sadness would not go away.

"We're going to move," Tom said after a while. "At the end of the month." He named a village further north; he would be the only teacher there.

Surprised, I asked why.

"Family politics. It's too much for us, and the older girls want to try something new."

Most of the young cousins, the schoolchildren, had asked to go along with them.

"Everybody thinks we're going to a better place," Tom said. "They ask to come along: I say 'Yes; you don't have to give money or anything.' This lets them think it over, then decide to stay. But they can always say, 'I decided not to go.' Keeps the local balance."

Mary's grandparents, Chada and Chida, had brought her up. Her chida, who came from a Yukon tribe, had first taken her out to the woods. Whenever they had gone to pick berries, the old lady had instructed the little girl about birds and animals.

"My grandma could understand them," Mary said, as we sat together after dinner. "Especially camprobber. She taught me how to hear him."

"He spoke English?"

"I'm not sure," she said, considering. "I can't explain it. Maybe owl, though, speaks any language.

"Camprobber always announced visitors. He would land on a bush outside our door and tell his tale. I would say to Tom that someone was

coming, and someone always came. He learned not to laugh when this happened.

"When we lived downriver, near the mine, camprobber kept visiting, announcing. But no one came. I got worried that something was going to happen. One day I heard him again and I went upstairs to lie down. Then Tom came home and told me about that air crash." The crash had happened in Village Below, a few years before I was there: Mary's aunt and the aunt's son-in-law were killed; the son-in-law, a white man, was the pilot. Just after takeoff, before the shocked eyes of the watching village, the plane had plunged into the ice. In memorium, the wreck had been left untouched; it stood, rusting, a scrap-heap monument, its nose buried in the snow.

"I listened," she said, "and just lay there for a long, long time. I didn't speak, I just stared at the ceiling. The kids thought something was wrong with me."

Her grandfather had offered to teach her animal songs so she could call the animals and ask them favors. She had refused him.

"I wasn't a good enough person to have that power," she said. "My dad was a good person, until lately. He drinks more than he should. He gets angry sometimes.

"When I was young, my cousins always teased me, because I stayed with my grandma. Maybe they thought she liked me better than she liked them. My mama was gone, and I didn't have anybody else. My dad worked hard; I didn't complain. But then I got older, and I got angry. I snapped back at them, and complained about them. It's better not to have the power of the animals when you feel like that."

"Be wary of power," Tom had suggested. "It was bum how they used it here. Efrem threw away what he had of it, and he's happier now. People are afraid, and that's why Christianity looks good to them."

In the morning everyone rose in a leisurely way. Mary fried hotcakes and boiled whitefish for breakfast. The fish was for Efrem, who had come up from the village in his boat, and who preferred Native food. Tom had promised: "When you come, we'll take you out for a boat ride." After breakfast we set out: four adults and the youngest ones, Tom Junior and Rebecca, in a leaky aluminum boat, heading down the creek and up the river for The Gorge.

Earlier in the summer, Sara, their teen-aged girl, had navigated the family boat through that difficult canyon (none of the village boys had done it yet, said Tom cheerfully); along the way she had dropped a moose at two hundred yards. Because the village always needed meat, he had taught her how to poach, on the theory that an underaged girl would not be prosecuted for taking a moose out of season.

The summer had been rainy, the water high; but the rivers now were dropping fast. Berries were scarce everywhere. The bears were hungry, people said. The week before, pilots had reported seeing sixteen black bears along the bank near one village on the Yukon. In McGrath, people warned that bears

were coming near the dump. Everyone was more careful; no one walked out without a gun. On an outside wall of Tom and Mary's house two new black-bear skins were stretched to dry.

We passed the fish camp where Efrem's sister Alice had fished with her sons that summer. Their tents were still up, although no one was camped there.

A golden eagle soared over the hills.

Tom pointed to a Russian church and graveyard, a few grave markers near the ridge of the hill. There had been a village once. It was unclear why the people had left: a flood after breakup? Tom did not know.

Up on a high bank sat a fish camp, stark against the sky. The fish box and cutting table stood down near the shoreline. A fish-wheel had been drawn up on the bar. Mary said her father claimed the place; Tom had helped built the smokehouse. Emma and her husband Alec Ivan had used it that summer.

Tom waved toward the spot where Sara had shot her moose.

It took a long time to go upriver. Efrem sat easily at the 'kicker', his back firm and upright. When he was a boy and young man, no one had used boats with kickers: his relatives had walked through the country, or had built canvas or bark canoes; they had speared fish and bear, and had hunted game with bows and arrows. His sister in Village Below had told me how she, too, had hunted that way with her brothers.

Tom had said of Efrem, as he traveled through the day he was ready: he had that quality of alertness, of acute attention given to his surroundings, that fathers taught their sons was needed for the hunt. Sons, Tom suspected, did not often know what being ready required of them. The older man set up his day: he checked its possibilities, and set useless information to one side. Young people, without the long years of discipline behind them, watched him, and thought he passed through time in a leisurely way; they saw him seem to saunter along, or to lie back against the wall, dreaming, and called him relaxed, spontaneous. They were wrong, Tom said earnestly: the man's discipline was not only muscular; it was spiritual.

Tom had practiced his lecture on his young brother from back East, who had spent part of the summer with them: Tom thought he had nonsensical ideas about life in the bush. Mary had told me about that brother; she thought he was lazy.

She had said that her father still saw well, though not so far as he used to; he was slower, but still quick to spot an important thing. He read the river and steered around rocks and snags. His face was immobile: his dark eyes moved, without seeming to move.

Above the place on Tin Creek where Sara had shot her moose, we entered The Gorge. All at once the banks soared about us and shaded the light. The boat bounced on the choppy current and carried us between slate and shale walls sloping, jagged, into the river: the water had eaten them in and out, in and out. Efrem maneuvered close to their sharp edges, following the channel.

One bluff stood out from those around it. The children, delighted, shouted: "Where Nick found the hawk!"

Nick was their handsome older cousin. On Sara's birthday, a group of the cousins had gone on a boat ride up to The Gorge; Nick, daring, had scaled the cliff and carried down a fledgling fish hawk for Sara. At home she fed it meat and dried fish. One night around midnight she had heard it call, and had gone outside. She had watched the hawk circle; swoop to the edge of the water; skim off.

The hawk was gone. The children had teased her, saying she had spoiled it. Maybe it learned to hunt, Nick had said, to comfort her.

I never saw slate walls like those anywhere else in that country. They rose twenty and thirty feet above the water; and sent forth protection, as mountains do. They were a test of rock, a face that appeared immobile, until the watcher looked back, across time, and saw the seams graven in it. I saw green growth clinging to edges; owls' nests; *the hawk*; the fast lime water. Mary remarked that the walls were changing, that the shale broke off easily. Tom told his son to pay attention, he would have to navigate before very much longer. Efrem kept us off the rocks.

Above The Gorge, he and Tom glanced at one another. He spoke; Tom nodded once. He cut the boat cross-channel to the point of an island, and we tied up noiselessly.

Now everyone whispered, and Efrem, Tom, and Mary each carried a 30.06. We split into pairs. Mary and I moved off to the left; Tom and Tom Junior, Efrem and Rebecca were going to try to drive a moose our way.

"Holler like hell!" Efrem instructed.

Mary and I cut through willows and birches. I saw plenty of moose sign, and she pointed to recent tracks. We had to cross a silty little stream. Mary stepped into quicksand and, surprised, managed to scamper across it. She grinned, and imagined the moose's surprise when he stepped into that stuff.

We came upon some old, cut willows spread neatly on the bank: someone had butchered a moose. (We learned that Tom and Alec Ivan, Emma's husband, had done it, months before.) We saw no fresh sign and heard no sound from the others.

"Keep looking," Mary said, and I moved downstream, cutting in through the brush. I saw plenty of old sign, but nothing fresh. Where the brush grew down to the water was an old track, where a moose had once crossed.

I circled back to the noisy stream. We traded places.

Almost at once Mary moved her head, waving me back, and whispered she had just found a fresh print, a caribou's. It was so fresh she figured I had missed him by minutes; he may even have crossed the stream behind me. I stood still. She considered the next move.

When she was a little girl, she said softly, her dad and her grandpa had brought her here. She had never seen a moose, it was all new to her. "I looked hard at a stump, like the ones kids used to play airplane on: it was

walking toward me! I shouted to my grandpa, 'That stump's moving!' He shot it. My first moose." She smiled.--

A bump; then another. Both of us started: a shot? Too muffled; what, then? Two planes came into sight, Supercubs. She watched them closely as they flew by. Hunters, she supposed, coming from Anchorage through Merrill Pass; spotters. Moose season would open the next week.

A clacking sound, stone struck on stone: Efrem and Rebecca (with her stones) appeared. Tom and Tom Junior walked out of the brush across from them. The adults compared notes. Mary described the fresh track, and the men moved out to check, circling back into the trees, this time inside a shorter radius. Mary and I again were the lookouts. We found nothing more, no animals; no other sign than the caribou's print.

We regrouped. Indelicately, Tom remarked that he could taste the meat in his mouth. His father-in-law said nothing and turned back to the boat.

In the file, Tom walked ahead of me. He murmured, an aside, that we had missed our only chance, and we probably would not sight game. Efrem, who heard without seeming to listen, said mildly, "We could try another place." Tom looked surprised, and blushed.

Upriver, Efrem guided the boat to a spot below some rapids. We landed on a gravel bar, and made a fire for tea. Tom and Mary recalled a party of Swedes who had tried running the rapids that summer and been forced to portage most of the stretch. Downstream, later, people found some of their floating gear.

Efrem and Tom took rifles and set off up the beach, and soon passed out of sight. Within minutes a couple of empty gas cans, lashed together, came bobbing down the river toward our camp. A shout, a scramble; Mary snagged them. The children danced around the find and made up a song. Mary thought her father must have come across the cans, and had not cared to pack them.

As Tom Junior and Rebecca played on the beach, she told me a little more about their coming move: they were going to leave Hungry before the autumn set in. She was for it, if only to let the older girls have more experience among other people; they needed to meet boys who were not their cousins. She smiled, a little sadly, and remarked that this would be their last ride to The Gorge for a while.

While the children built a cabin out of driftwood, I climbed a hill above the bank. I was careful to stay within sight of Mary on the beach; and she kept her rifle handy. I found a few, very few, blueberries. When Efrem and Tom appeared, I scrambled down, and reached them just as they were drinking the last of their tea. The fire had been covered and the gear packed up. We gathered in the boat, and Tom shoved off. Efrem turned the boat downstream and we headed home.

All day the sky had been heavy with the clouds of a weather front that extended almost as far as the eye could travel. Suddenly, splendor broke

through the gray cover and shards of light glinted off the rippling water. Shadows of the late day lengthened across the river. It was as if the boat had brought us this far in a dream-moment, and, without our knowing time had passed, signs of autumn had appeared between our going up and our coming down. Already, cottonwoods glowed as if lit from within; on the alders shimmered a few golden leaves. The green-browns of the brush had deepened; now, near evening, a breath of crisp air against the skin anticipated snow: soon, on the mountains. I looked back at the mountains above The Gorge. Clouds were closing down on their summits. That was how the snow would come: there would be a frost, and then another frost; ravens; low clouds lying on the mountains. One dawn, very soon, the first white line would be drawn across the peaks.

When Efrem's fish camp came into sight, he landed the boat and walked uphill ahead of us, to look the place over. For a long minute his silhouette was small and dark against the sky. Then, it was moving again; and we followed.

The camp held the peace of recent habitation. The remains of human movement -- a tent frame, a pole-bed frame, a small piece of tin tacked up as a bedside table, a fire pit -- lightened the huge country around us and told us tales of activity. Someone had been lying on the bed: perhaps he had lain under a canvas roof, reading by candlelight on a cool night, with warm embers glowing in the pit. Nearby was a little cabin shingled with spruce bark: a story of warm days, people cutting fish down by the water, a daughter boiling spaghetti over the outdoor cook-fire near the doorway. Over there stood a big double smokehouse, the sun fuzzing the gaps in its planked sides, the interior cool and dim. The stoves had been set back against the walls; fish-skin boots had been folded and hung over rafters, sheets of Visqueen folded and piled high off the floor. The throaty smells of alder smoke and fish oil smoldered in the wooden boards.

Outside, four stakes stood driven into the ground, for measuring dryfish into bundles of forty. A wash basin had been turned over to drain. A few tin cans lay about; a pile of Pampers and a faded box had not been burned. Mary was irked at the trash left behind.

Tom walked further uphill to examine the tipi poles: during the summer his two boys had camped there. Rebecca and Tom Junior uncovered a length of antler and took turns pretending they were caribou, holding the antler against their head, tossing it as they charged around in a circle. Mary decided to carry it home and saw it up for a buckle. Her father moved deliberately around the camp, checking equipment, testing the lock on the cabin door, settling small things back into place.

The sun began to dip. We pushed off again; there was still the chance of a moose.

A distance below the camp we neared another island. Tom and Efrem nodded to one another: Efrem touched the boat ashore and put Tom off in the brush, then drove us fast around the point to the other side. Mary, the children, and I waited on the beach; Efrem sat in the boat, watching, holding

the motor on low idle. It sounded like a soft warning growl. He sat at ease, hunched over his gun. His head turned slowly as he studied the stream. When the children made more noise than necessary, he ignored them and left it to Mary to quiet them. Behind us, the brush was still.

Tom reappeared on the bank. Within moments we were back in the boat; Efrem had gunned the motor; and we were landing again, when a shout went up: "A porcupine!"

The children jumped out and went splashing ashore after the animal. Up a hill it ran, the children running close behind it, and then come the rustle of bodies thrashing about in the brush. "I got it! I got it!" Tom Junior cried.

At once his father was standing beside him and calmly reminding both youngsters not to get in the way of the lashing tail. The porcupine stirred: Tom prodded it with a heavy stick and turned it over. Tom Junior held the axe as if it were a club and -- thud -- hit the stunned animal between the eyes.

Tom Junior and Rebecca bent their heads together, figuring out how to drag the *ninny* downhill. Tom nudged me and said, "Want to see my favorite place?"

He turned on to a path into the brush and trotted up a hill covered with muskeg. I followed more slowly, stepping from tussock to tussock to avoid the damp low spots. The music of water filled the air. We climbed over the top of a bank and made a half circle along its lip, until we came upon a small waterfall in a pretty mountain stream. The air was cool; autumn was further along in the higher elevation. The stream tumbled away over stones.

Tom scrambled down the rock face and crouched on a ledge, looking out over the country, wrapped in his own thoughts. I lifted my head, and caught my breath: across the canyon, a wall of purple mountains; beyond it, wall upon wall of blue-green mountains, falling away to the horizon like a long, rolling ocean.

The sun was dropping. Quickly we got underway. Rebecca and Tom Junior had curled up, little eaglets, in a nest of down coats, where they giggled and talked to each other as the boat carried us steadily down the river. There was one last flurry of excitement: a shout of "Porcupine!", a fast beaching, and it was Rebecca's turn to take the animal; a fat one.

"Umm," she said, "I LOVE porcupine." She and her brother compared kills for a while, and decided the next one would be mine. But there was no next one; and darkness settled down on us as we reached the cabin.

At home, the two older girls had cooked dinner. We were hungry and chilly and had wet feet, and were glad for the ease of the table. Efrem ate heartily; he had taken little food all day. The good meal was boiled fish, dryfish and dry meat, and rice, stirred with green peppers I had brought to Mary. Afterward the adults talked for a little while, then headed to bed.

By the light of a lard lamp, a lump of Crisco stuck in a small tin, with a piece of string for a wick, I read "Bach's Concerto No. 1 in C Minor," by the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet.

. . . . . .
The repetition of my days
that are alike,
that are not alike.

The repetition of the weave in the weaving,
the repetition in the starry sky,
and the repetition of "I love" in all languages.
The repetition of the tree in the leaves
and of the pain of living, which ends in an instant
and on every deathbed. . . .

I slept deeply. The quiet was broken only by the rustle of the cat, who daintily, thoroughly, ate a piece of dryfish. I stirred, and a sweet memory returned, of the end of the day on the water.

Just before we entered Mary's creek, not far below the cabin, I looked up and saw a hawk against the limpid evening sky. It circled and swooped toward the bank. No one else saw it.

*

My thirst too great :the bridge
higher, higher --under my windowsill
a pail, dented as if my lips
tasted its sweetness and I would drink
for two, stunned

still alive. Or dead --all the way down
pouring water across my throat
--fall loose --I am somewhere near
--you wanted rain. I never wept enough

and against this windowpane, over and over
a soft rain washes over the iron pail
surprised, picked up and cradled

--I am drinking from your arms
tracing in the river
half waterfall --under this window

your reflection calls out
as in those stories where the apple is filled
with a girder and death and a love
boundless, asleep, lowered
from some old crone's tree

--it's not enough to lift
--this rumpled glass :lace and folds
and hem and every bridge in the world
wants to leap for two --it's that you want

rain, that the sun left soaring alone
be cooled, be higher and higher, reaching for
you, for the shattered river.

SIMON PERCHIK

ON LOVE

On Love (1)

In poetry lives a language that may nearly be lost to us in the ordinary world, the language of feeling. So much trumped-up emotion, or was it the phrases people used? Spectacles of grief, betrayal, tenderness, deception unfolding via the public media: who knew how to speak of them properly? Only art, or perfect artlessness, speaks truly of emotion; or how should I know accurately what I feel? In the roar of the world's prose the expression of emotion is easily falsified; emotion, readily denied.

On the computer screen appears the face of Goethe. This is a wonder. A presence is here. Robert Kelly wrote, elated, that he loved it "because of the light that seems to stream forward through the image towards the viewer. Goethe comes at me, his face alive with light -- that famous '*Mehr Licht!*' of his dying words rather gorgeously obeyed."

Goethe, in the image of Gabriele Leidloff's radiograph of his Life Mask, presides over this issue.

Imagine a flock of crows sweeping across the European land mass.

Auden wrote a funny, exasperated little essay about *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Goethe's first novel, the one which made him a world-wide literary sensation. "When he wrote *Werther* he was probably in a disturbed state," said Auden, "for, a year after its publication he wrote: 'I am falling from one confusion into another.'" And so, to clear his mind (perhaps of the woman he loved without hope), Goethe became a civil servant, of high rank, at the court at Weimar. Reading the novel now, Auden suggested, we are still fascinated, but not in the way Goethe's contemporaries would have been. "To us it reads not as a tragic love story, but as a masterly and devastating portrait of a complete egoist, a spoiled brat, incapable of love because he cares for nobody and nothing but himself and having his way at whatever cost to others. The theme of the egoist who imagines himself to be a passionate lover evidently fascinated Goethe, for, thirty years later, he depicted a similar character in Edouard, the husband in *Elective Affinities*."

Auden has no sympathy for a such a character, who might, faintly, have resembled the young Goethe in the misery of his unrequited love for Charlotte Buff; he cannot think Goethe would have wanted his readers to admire the self-centered narcissist he created in Werther. "What a horrid little monster!" Auden calls that archetype of the Romantic lover.

Literary life is not short of narcissists. They are the hero of their own books! In a recent issue of *The Nation*, Patrick Smith, an author, looks soberly

and critically at the publishing fad of 'memoir' of the last decade, and finds it annoying and trivial ("because everyone has a story and, as with the harmonica, anyone can make noise"); he excepts the -- necessarily, few -- books which attain literary stature. He proposes that too many of these lesser memoirs have been written from mere personal reasons, for exposing secrets and confessions ("voyeurism") rather than exploring the growth of the *writer's* self in the larger historical world. He thinks this peculiarly American trend began during the cold war, because of "our inability as a nation to come to terms with what we have done -- at home and abroad, to ourselves and others -- over the past half century.... Having departed so far from our ideals, we are losing our ability to converse honestly among ourselves. Ours, then, is the problem of history without memory.... And in privatizing history, what are many memoirists doing if not acquiescing in this travesty?"

When we recognize this distinction,"[w]e arrive at a curious, unexpected truth," he concludes: "that the purely personal is not the stuff of the memoir but its enemy."

Criticisms well-founded and -aimed: but for the moment I am drawn to Patrick Smith's comment about our "losing our ability to converse honestly among ourselves." Who can disagree with him? Will it be thought frivolous of me for calling on Goethe to complete the thought? He, too, considered the triviality of self-involvement, or narcissism in literature, but from the perspective of Poetry. (He thought Prose marked a late stage of human development, and defined it as "dissolution into the Ordinary," marked by "Common Sensuality"; imagine the delight of conversing with this man). In a fragment of 1832, called "Advice for Young Poets," he wrote:

"The German language has now reached such a high level of development that anyone can express himself according to his ability; he can do this in prose or poetry, and in any way appropriate to the subject or feeling he wishes to convey. As a result, anyone who has reached a certain level of education through listening and reading and has attained some clarity about himself, may soon feel the urge to communicate his thoughts and opinions, his insights and feelings with a certain eloquence.

"However, it might be difficult, if not impossible, for the young person to realize that by so doing little has, in fact, been accomplished....

"Unfortunately, a sympathetic observer will soon notice that the youthful enthusiasm suddenly begins to diminish. The clear, fresh spring is muddied by sadness over lost joy, by pining for what is lost, yearning for the unknown and unobtainable, by discontentment, railing against any and all obstacles, and the struggle against ill-will, envy, and hostility. The happy group disbands and scatters as misanthropic hermits.

"How difficult it is therefore to explain to someone with any degree of talent in any field that the muses are glad to accompany life but are totally unable to guide it."

Though in public he addressed them gently, privately he had spoken more sharply to Eckermann about the youthful poets of his day: "[They] all write as if they were sick and the whole world an infirmary.... That is a real

misuse of poetry, which is given to us after all to reconcile the differences in life and to make human beings accept the world and their condition."

Insufficient; his counsel was again sought, and so he offered "Further Advice for Young Poets":

"The most important point can be briefly stated: The young poet should give voice only to what lives and can and will live on, whatever its shape or form. He should refrain from all contrariness, all antagonism and condemnation, anything which merely negates, because that is unproductive.

"I cannot recommend to my young friends emphatically enough that they see to it that as their poems acquire a certain facility in rhythmic expression they also gain significantly in content.

"Poetic content, however, is the content of one's own life. That content cannot be given us by anyone; others may mar it perhaps, but not spoil it. Vanity, that is, every form of complacency without merit, will be treated as the worst offense."

Poignantly, he added: "You will not grow if you keep on mourning a beloved whom you have lost through separation, unfaithfulness or death. It is a useless poetic pursuit, no matter how much skill and talent you may lavish on it."

On Love (2)

Oh what do I know about love? I think I've known love; but what did I know? I confess I do not know what my feelings are; this may have always been so. Often I find that I think one thing and feel another, I act on some other thing that is unknown beforehand and a mystery to me.

On Love (3)

Anna Maria Ortese: "I meant to say that love contains nothing real (as reality is currently defined). It consists wholly of the pain and splendour of incipient knowledge."

KM

Patrick Smith, "What Memoir Forgets," *The Nation* (July 27 / August 3)
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ESSAYS ON ART AND LITERATURE, in THE COLLECTED WORKS ed. John Geary (Princeton University Press)
_____ , THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER and A NOVELLA, tr. Mayer and Brogan, poems translated and forward written by W.H. Auden (Modern Library)

> 'To be sure! To be sure!' exclaimed their brother. 'You have no faith.... Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetising. He knows perfectly well all the possible sources of income. Whatever he has to sell he'll get payment for it from all sorts of various quarters; none of your unpractical selling for a lump sum to a middleman who will make six distinct profits. Now, look you: if I had been in Reardon's place, I'd have made four hundred at least out of "The Optimist"; I should have gone shrewdly to work with magazines and newspapers and foreign publishers, and -- all sorts of people. Reardon can't do that kind of thing, he's behind his age; he sells a manuscript as if he lived in Sam Johnson's Grub Street. But our Grub Street of to-day is quite a different place: it is supplied with telegraphic communication, it knows what literary fare is in demand in every part of the world, its inhabitants are men of business, however seedy.'
>
> 'It sounds ignoble,' said Maud.
>
> George Gissing
> NEW GRUB STREET

Several writers and readers, friends of Archipelago, suggest some good books:

J**ohn Casey** (SPARTINA, Knopf; THE HALF-LIFE OF HAPPINESS, Knopf, 1998):

"Don DeLillo's newest book is the work of art about America that Oliver Stone must have dreamt of in his best dream." **Don DeLillo, UNDERWORLD (Scribner, 1997)**

"Another great American novel, by Russell Banks, about the same length as UNDERWORLD but reaching back to the life of John Brown as remembered -- and struggled with -- by his son Owen Brown. A great wooden ship of a novel." **Russell Banks, CLOUDSPLITTER (HarperFlamingo, 1998)**

"This book, now out of print, tells the last days of an Irish gentlewoman's full life. An unsentimental but acutely felt and perfect short novel." **Janet Johnston, THE CHRISTMAS TREE (o.p.)**

Robert Kelly (RED ACTIONS, Black Sparrow Press; THE TIME OF VOICE, Poems of 1994-1996, Black Sparrow, 1998):

"A hard mosaic of unsentimental precisions from that terrible place and time [Auschwitz]. Sarah Nomberg-Przytyk was a leftist, not a religious Jew at all -- and her distance from ordinary Judaism sharpens her glance. A book I find hard to stop reading, and then it hurts so much one puts it down." **Sarah Nomberg-Przytyk, AUSCHWITZ , TRUE TALES FROM A GROTESQUE LAND (UNC Press, Chapel Hill, 1985)**

"After all these years Ellingham's research materials on the life and work of Jack Spicer has been brought into joyous, sympathetic and detailed coherence by the poet Kevin Killian. A study of the most important of the neglected poets of the last half century." **Killian and Ellingham: POET BE WONDERFUL (Wesleyan, 1998)**

"Exciting and seemingly masterful treatise that proposes an important agenda of Dutch painting as (implicitly) a rejection of Italian Renaissance targets; Alpers studies the mapping of everyday reality, and is especially good in bringing forward the work of that great painter Pieter Saenredam, whose work astonished me when I first saw it in Amsterdam." **Svetlana**

Alpers, THE ART OF DESCRIBING Dutch Painting in the 17th Century. (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983)

"I hadn't known Woelfli until this book was recommended to me, and I find myself amazed by the man's oeuvre -- one carried out in the very same Swiss madhouse in which the writer Robert Walser was confined. Woelfli's work came to the art world (I guess) via 'art brut' and Dubuffet's famous exhibition. Adolf Woelfli's work is powerful indeed, intricate, inveigling. And bears comparison with 'our own' Henry Darger, the Chicago loner who wrote the world's longest novel (REALMS OF THE UNREAL --- 15,000+ single-spaced legal pages) and acres of paintings -- a kind of *naif* Balthus, and with an almost identical focus on images of the child. Darger's work, as far as I know, is discussed only on the Web, but well worth checking at the several sites." **Elka Spoerri, ADOLF WOELFLI, DRAFTSMAN, WRITER, POET, COMPOSER (Cornell, 1997)**

Janet Palmer Mullaney (editor and publisher of *Belles Lettres: A Review of Books by Women*, from 1984-1996, and currently endeavoring to re-create the magazine on the internet):

"I devour everything by Lorrie Moore, usually twice (seven of the stories in her latest, BIRDS OF AMERICA, have appeared in *The New Yorker*). If she has any faults as a writer, I don't want to hear about them. With every new work her humanity deepens, as well as her artistry. With her agile mind and inimitable wordplay she faces down the terror, pain, and desolation churned up by modern life." **Lorrie Moore, BIRDS OF AMERICA (Knopf, 1998)** NB: "People Like That Are the Only People Here," from the book, has just won the O'Henry Award as the best short story of the year.

"ALMOST HEAVEN is the latest novel by another extremely intelligent writer and master stylist: Marianne Wiggins. Two tragedies engendered by violence -- one by nature and the other by people -- connect her two protagonists, each of whom seeks oblivion via different paths: 'The conscious mind can't induce forgetfulness except by way of mind-altering substances, but the unconscious mind can and does. The unconscious mind is always ticking, ever tidal, never tidy. A dark sea through which shifting floes of pale remembrances loom and groan, wordlessly, like ice.'" **Marianne Wiggins, ALMOST HEAVEN (Crown, 1998)**

Carol Troxell <ndb@cstone.net> (New Dominion Bookshop, 404 E. Main St., Charlottesville, Va. 22902; 804-295-2552):

"The conclusion of Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy is out. When it appeared, I went back to read the second one; I was compelled by it. Why he is worth reading: In ALL THE PRETTY HORSES, the prose alone carries the book for me; while, in THE CROSSING, I thought the part with the wolf was beautiful, standing alone. It was one of the best things I've ever read about loss. The first book is about coming of age; the second is about the big issues, love and loss, mainly loss; I am very curious to see what he does with the third." **Cormac McCarthy, ALL THE PRETTY HORSES, THE CROSSING, CITIES OF THE PLAIN (Knopf, 1993, 1994, 1998)**

"Anne Michaels' FUGITIVE PIECES, too, is a coming of age story, about the big issues of love and loss. But here, they turn on a man's growing through the trauma of the Holocaust, and learning to love. The prose is particularly beautiful: it is the first novel of this Canadian poet. The opening scene, of the young boy coming out of the mud, is one of the most moving I've read, and is particularly important to this book." **Anne Michaels, FUGITIVE PIECES (Knopf, 1997; Vintage, 1998)**

"I'm taking Roxana Robinson's novel on vacation to read, because I've been impressed by her short stories, and because, to my pleasure, she will be reading here, in the bookshop, on November 6." **Roxana Robinson, THIS IS MY DAUGHTER (Random House, 1998)**

Jim Crace (ARCADIA, Atheneum; SIGNALS OF DISTRESS, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996; QUARANTINE, Farrar, Straus, 1998):

"**Robert Frost** is somewhat out of fashion at the moment. Readers find him too unyielding and grumpy, a New Hampshire smallholder and countryman who would gladly scatter any trespassers with his twelve-bore couplets. He's also too conservative as a poet

('Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down.') But I like grouchy Farmer Frost. I continue to admire his cantankerous love of the land and his solid, intimate understanding of weather, water stone. Thre is nothing Wordsworthian about his experience of nature. He has fixed that dry stone wall himself, walked 'the sodden pasture lane,' snagged his own axe in the alder roots. **Robert Frost, THE COLLECTED POETRY (Henry Holt)**

"**WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS**, by **J.M. Coetzee**, is the modern novel I would most like to have written, and Coetzee is the novelist who has most directly influenced my own books. His works are sparkling, disconcerting allegories about exploitation, opression and imperialism both in and beyond his native South Africa, but written with immense narrative drive and great clarity. BARBARIANS is the story of an ineffectual magistrate, banished to the frontiers of Empire and only realizing too late that waiting for the barbarians to arrive has blinkered him from noticing that the real barbarians are already in command. Could be anywhere.

"**THE SONG OF THE DODO**, by **David Quammen**, is a recent personal favorite, my fantasy book in fact. If I hadn't been a novelist I would have wanted to be a naturalist, an adventurer or a traveller. Quammen is all of these. His book is subtitled "Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction" and is ostensibly a painstaking -- almost 700 pages! -- report on the distribution of animal and plant species on islands. This could have been a work of armchair scholarship, but Quammen has the nature of a prowler and the eye of a novelist. We end up hunting dodos, marsupial tigers, dragons and a pestilential outbreak of snakes in Mauritius, Tasmania, Komodo and Guam while Quammen reveals his Theory of Everything. I have never before been so completely captivated by a work of non-fiction. A masterpiece of natural history."

Jeanette Watson (owner of the late Books&Co., NY, and publisher of *Off the Wall* <http://colophon.com/offthewall>):

"As readers may know by now, I love erotic books and **Ted Mooney**'s latest novel, **SINGING INTO THE PIANO (Knopf, 1998)**, has the most erotic first chapter I've read in a long time.

"I was riveted by **Christa Wolf**'s new book, **MEDEA (Nan A. Talese/ Doubleday, 1998)**, an engrossing retelling of this classical tale which offers an important commentary on the power struggle between men and women and a new take on a familiar tragic figure.

"I thought **W.G. Sebold**'s **THE EMIGRANTS (New Directions, 1997)** was one of the great literary discoveries of last year -- a remarkable work of imagination, compassion, and intelligence, and so I'm very excited to see that May promises a new translation of this German writer's work entitled **THE RINGS OF SATURN (New Directions, 1998)**.

Interesting Sites and Resources

Independent Presses

Catbird Press <www.catbirdpress.com> publishes, among other notable books, a number of those by Czech writers in translation, including Jaroslav Seifert, a garland of whose poems appear elsewhere in this issue; and a volume of Czech fiction from the "post-Kundera generation," DAYLIGHT IN NIGHTCLUB INFERNO. Robert Wechsler, publisher of Catbird, has written an interesting book-length essay, PERFORMING WITHOUT A STAGE; THE ART OF LITERARY TRANSLATION; worth reading.

Interesting Czech sites include:

Radio Prague (with RealTime broadcasts): <http://www.prague.org>

The Czech Center / New York: <http://www.czech.cz/newyork>

The Prague Post: <http://www.praguepost.cz>

Central Europe Online: <http://www.centraleurope.com>

Chelsea Green Publishing Company <www.chelseagreen.com> in White River Junction, Vermont, specializes in books about sustainable living, with selections of environmentally friendly, thoughtful, and hopeful books. The editor in chief, Jim Schley, wrote us about our conversation with the Bessies, in recent issues: "As a younger editor who has every intention of emulating such ... predecessors, I find this conversation to be truly illuminating." This press has high standards.

The Harvill Press <www.harvill-press.com> publishes, among many estimable authors, Richard Hughes, Richard Ford, and in translation, Anna Maria Ortese (THE LAMENT OF THE LINNET), Ismael Kadare, Javier Marías. Many of their titles are available in the U. S., particularly at independent bookstores. We urge our Readers to look for their books.

The Lilliput Press <http://indigo.ie/~lilliput> is an Irish publisher founded in 1984 by Antony Farrell. Some 150 titles have appeared under its imprint: art and architecture, autobiography and memoir, biography and history, ecology and environmentalism, essays and literary criticism, philosophy, current affairs and popular culture, fiction, drama and poetry – all broadly focused on Irish themes. Since 1985 they have brought out four volumes of the essays of the late Hubert Butler. Hubert Butler's "The Artukovitch File" appears, with their permission, in Archipelago, Vol. 1, No. 2.

McPherson & Co <www.mcphersonco.com> publishes such writers as the fascinating Mary Butts (THE TAVERNER NOVELS), Anna Maria Ortese (A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, Selected Stories Vol. 2, just published), and the performance artist Carolee Schneeman. A beautiful story by Ortese, "The Great Street," appeared in our inaugural issue.

Mercury House <www.wenet.net/~mercury> is a not-for-profit literary press in San Francisco. Members of the staff used to be associated with the respected North Point, before that imprint closed its doors. Alfred Arteaga's HOUSE WITH THE BLUE BED is out now; "Beat," from that volume, appeared in our Vol. 1, No. 3. They are to publish NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH, a non-fiction narrative by Katherine McNamara; a chapter of it appears in this issue.

Online Originals <www.onlineoriginals.com> is an internet publisher of literature who take the position, one we find ourselves much in agreement with, that "Conventional book publishing has changed dramatically in recent years. Most of the world's publishers are now owned by a handful of media conglomerates, ruled in turn by their finance and marketing departments. To guarantee high profits, they tend to accept manuscripts only by celebrity writers than authors whose output conforms to the conventional mainstream market. ... We believe that the Internet is the way forward for all kinds of publishing. But for the benefit of our authors, we do not prevent them also publishing printed versions of their works at a later date." They deliver "book-like" texts by e-mail.

Fine Arts

The Colophon Page <http://colophon.com> and Photo Arts <http://photoarts.com> are two beautiful sites devoted to the fine arts. They are directed by the fine-arts book publisher James Wintner, of JHW Editions. Colophon Page is devoted to artists' books, which are displayed as if in a gallery; there is an attendant shop, and review and forum pages. Photo Arts presents and offers for sale the works of fine-arts photographers and photojournalists. An on-line auction of photographs took place recently on the Photoarts site; the catalog, still up, is worth looking at. The design and quality of reproduction of these sites are excellent. See also, Jeanette Watson's 'Off the Wall,' her book reviews, at <http://colophon.com/offthewall>.

Fray <www.fray.com>. Strange. Cool. Heartbreaking. A delight.

Octavo <www.octavo.com> is a digital publisher committed to conserving books, manuscripts, and antiquarian printed materials via digital tools and formats. They make original works available to readers and book lovers through partnerships with libraries, individuals and institutions. Faithfully depicting the beauty and craftsmanship of these works, their editions incorporate all the modern day benefits of digital formats, such as live text, searching and bookmarking. Schools and libraries receive special discounts and generous site licenses from them. As a sample, they offer a PDF download of William Shakespeare Poems. We are always pleased when web publishers use PDF files, as we do for our Download edition.

Literary Reviews

The Barcelona Review <www.web-show.com/Barcelona/Review>, Jill Adams, Editor. Their first anniversary issue is on-line with short fiction by Douglas Coupland, Elissa Wald, David Prill, and an English translation from Catalan, some playful Catalan porn, taken from one the biggest selling books in Catalunya, a collection of "comic-erotic" stories by the Miranda Brothers.

Jacket <http://www.jacket.zip.com.au> was founded and is edited by John Tranter, an interesting Australian poet. "For more than thirty years he has been at the forefront of the new poetry, questioning and extending its procedures," according to his biographical note. His own work has been published widely and deeply; and in this quarterly literary journal he publishes the work of other writers generously.

The Richmond Review <www.demon.co.uk/review/> received approving notice (along with Archipelago) in the *TLS* last year. The founding editor, Steven Kelly, "lives and breathes" literature as an editorial consultant for various English publishers. He set up this site in October 1995, "when it was the UK's first lit mag to appear exclusively on the World Wide Web." Each issue carries short stories, feature articles, book reviews and poetry, and it comes out around ten times a year.

Bookstores

Politics and Prose <www.politics-prose.com> is the largest independent bookshop in Washington, D.C., with a full and beautifully-chosen stock-list and a nicely-arranged web site.

The Village Voice Bookshop <www.paris-anglo.com> lives in the heart of Paris, and makes American and English books available to customers on several continents, via phone, fax, post, and e-mail <vvoice@europost.org>. Odile Hellier, the proprietor, is a Contributing Editor of this publication.

The Media

C-Span 2 <www.booktv.org> : C-Span 2 now offers its complete weekend programming to books, and matters related directly to books; their host, and a founder of C-Span, Brian Lamb is particularly interested in non-fiction.

The Financial Times <www.FT.com>: For those who want to watch intelligently not merely the movement of stocks but the expansion of capital, this newspaper (on-line; in print) is essential. We are told that Alan Greenspan reads the FT; his assistants do not.