ARCHIPELAGO

An International Journal of Literature, the Arts, and Opinion
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Contents

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Letters to the Editor are welcomed, by post or via the Internet.
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All submissions must be typed and double-spaced and sent by post with SASE or envelope and International Reply Coupon. An e-mail address is appreciated. No electronic submissions will be accepted unless Editor is queried beforehand.

Acknowledgements/permissions: Jawbreaker Layers ©Larry Woiwode, 2000. An excerpt from WHAT I THINK I DID, due out in April 2000, from Basic Books. The Rooms of Memory ©Translation Isabel Cole. From DIE ZIMMER DER ERINNERUNG. ROMAN EINER AUFLÖSING, published by Das Arsenal, Verlag für Kultur und Politik GmbH, 10589 Berlin. Song of the Road ©Sándor Kányádi, 2000. Translation Paul Sohar. From THE LITTLE GLOBE-TROTTING MOUSE, Holnap Publishing Co., Budapest

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Contributors

James Broughton (1913-1999), poet, filmmaker, man of joy, was the author of, *inter alia*, PACKING UP FOR PARADISE, SELECTED POEMS 1946-1996 (Black Sparrow Press), MAKING LIGHT OF IT, THE ANDROGYNE JOURNAL, COMING UNBUTTONED, and 23 films. He received lifetime achievement awards from the National Poetry Association and the American Film Institute. A tribute to his work, with a selection of his poetry, exists on the web at www.geocities.com/Paris/Metro/1170/broughton.html.

Isabel Cole <h0444sbx@student.hu-berlin.de>, translator of Christine Wolter and other German writers, has lived in Berlin since graduating from the University of Chicago in 1995. Her website http://www.andere-seite.de/index.htm contains her portfolio and curriculum vitae.

Susan Garrett <gpg@virginia.edu> is currently at work on a memoir about photographers in the early 20th century. She is the author of TAKING CARE OF OUR OWN: A Year in the Life of a Small Hospital (Dutton) and MILES TO GO: Aging in Rural Virginia (University Press of Virginia). She is married to the novelist, poet, and man of letters George Garrett, who spoke about publishing in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 2.

Martin Goodman <ReachMartin@cs.com> is the author of IN SEARCH OF THE DIVINE MOTHER (Thorsons), a frank portrayal of the life of the Indian holy woman Mother Meera, a prominent figure in the last years of James Broughton's life. Goodman's next book, I WAS CARLOS CASTAÑEDA, is due from Harmony, Spring 2001. His story "When Toffee Apples Turn to Juice" appears in *Richmond Review*: http://www.richmondreview.co.uk/library/goodma01.html.

Lucy Gray <lucygray@sirius.com> lives in San Francisco. "Naming the Homeless" opened for the second time, in September 1999, at City Hall. She is working with Mayor Willie Brown to enlarge the project. Simultaneously, 55 of her photographs of Nevada, taken to accompany IN NEVADA: The Land, the People, God and Chance, by David Thomson (Knopf), opened at Jernigan Wicker Fine Arts. She is at work on a book and exhibition called "Mom Is a Ballerina," about which she writes: "Most of us assume prima ballerinas cannot be mothers, too – not while they are dancing. It is a rare occurrence. But in San Francisco we have three. When I began I imagined I would be illustrating the clash between the dancers' personal and professional lives. Instead, I am finding more and more ways in which being a ballerina is just the right training for being a mother." Her photographs are represented by Jernigan Wicker Fine Arts 161 Natoma Street San Francisco, CA 94105, (415) 512-0335: and on the internet by nextmonet.com <http://www.nextmonet.com>. She is married to the writer and film critic David Thomson. They have two sons.

Sándor Kányádi was born in 1929 in Transylvania, Rumania. His parents belonged to the sizeable Hungarian minority, among whom he received his education and has spent his working life as a writer, poet, and editor of Hungarian-language publications. His volumes of poetry and translations (from Rumanian, German, and French) are more than two dozen. His poetry has appeared in translation in the Scandinavian countries and Germany, France, and Austria. In 1995 he was given the Herder Prize in Vienna. "A Song for the Road" is from his book for children, THE LITTLE GLOBE-TROTTING MOUSE, is to be brought out in English by Holnap Publishing (Budapest; tel. 361 365-6624). "All Soul's Day in Vienna," the poem considered his masterpiece, appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 4, for the first time in an English-language publication.

Paul Sohar <soharpal@hotmail.com> (translator) was born in Hungary and educated in the U.S. He works full-time as a literary translator. His poetry and translations can be read now in, or in future numbers of, *Chelsea, Hunger, Long Shot, Malahat Review, Seneca Review*, and will appear in *Antigonish Review, Kenyon Review, Many Mountains Moving, Sonora Review*. etc. His translation of THE LITTLE GLOBE-TROTTING MOUSE, a book for children, by the Transylvanian Hungarian poet Sándor Kányádi, is due out in English from Holnap Publishing (Budapest; tel. 361 365-6624). A selection of his translations of Kányádi and Arpad Farkas is to appear in *Peer Poetry Review*, England; his own poems will appear in a later issue. His translations of poems by Kányádi appear in *Zimmerzine* <http://www.nhi.clara.net/z59.htm>.

Larry Woiwode's fiction has appeared in *The Atlantic, Esquire, Harper's, The New Yorker*, and many other publications. His first novel, WHAT I'M GOING TO DO, I THINK, received the Faulkner Award; his second, BEYOND THE BEDROOM WALL, was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and he was honored in 1995 for the art of the short story by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is also the author of INDIAN AFFAIRS, SILENT PASSENGERS (both from Atheneum), and WHAT I THINK I DID; the latter will be published in April by Basic Books. He lives with his wife and family in North Dakota. He is a contributing editor of *Archipelago*.

Christine Wolter <http://web.tiscalinet.it/c_wolter/>, author, publisher, and translator, was born in 1939 in Königsberg, East Prussia, where her father, the architect Hanns Hopp, constructed important public buildings in the spirit of the New Objectivity. The East Prussian landscape of her early childhood on the Samland coast left an indelible impression. After fleeing East Prussia the family lived in Radebeul (near Dresden), then in Halle. In 1950 they moved to East Berlin, where her father took part in the planning of the "Stalinallee," the "first socialist street." Christine Wolter studied Romance Languages and worked as

editor, interpreter, translator and publisher. In 1978 she left the GDR and settled in Italy. In the GDR, Christine Wolter was known for her feminist stories, which were published in 1973 under the title *Wie ich meine Unschuld verlor* (HOW I LOST MY INNOCENCE) and were reprinted many times. Cult book for women and yachts(wo)men, *Die Alleinseglerin* (THE YACHTSWOMAN ALONE) became an insider-tip in the GDR. Read superficially (and as filmed by the DEFA), it was an ironic fable about the everyday life of a yachtswoman and single mother; on a deeper level, it is a declaration of free individualism against all official and unofficial dogmas. Italy is a central theme of many of Christine Wolter's books. Living near Milan and still describing herself as a Berliner, the author travels the Appenine Peninsula with an impressionistic and ironic gaze. *Strasse der Stunden* (STREET OF HOURS), published in 1988 (appeared in Italian as VIA DELLE ORE, Rubettino Editore, 1999), collects glimpses by a "flaneuse" of the hidden sides of Milan. She has translated works by Leonardo Sciascia, Claudio Magris, Alberto Savinio, Eugenio Montale, Vittorio Sereni, Giovanni Raboni, Patrizia Valduga into German.

News of our Contributors

Moshe Benarroch < moben@internet-zahav.net> has just published a novel in Hebrew, and participated in a discussion on social matter and art in *Salon d'arte* http://shell10.ba.best.com/~ggibbs/salon/. His poems appear in *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 1.

Daniela Fischerová is the author of "A Letter to President Eisenhower," which appeared in Archipelago Vol. 3, No. 1. A collection of her stories, FINGERS POINTING SOMEWHERE ELSE, tr. Neal Bermel, has just been published by Catbird Press http://www.catbirdpress.com, who have a remarkable list of Czech writers in translation.

Letters to the Editor

From Stella Snead, New York:
Another letter so soon & I'll tell you why, had a special day yesterday really perusing *Archipelago* for the first time. A wonderful thing sometimes to have time on one's hands. So I read first "Letter from Surrey": "the road from Leatherhead to Dorking" "at the foot of Boxhill." To my mother and me, living in Sutton, Surrey, these places were our extended backyard. We both had our own cars, my mother's was rather large & yellow, mine an Austin 7 sports model, tiny & red. Of a Sunday morning my mother liked me to accompany her for midmorning coffee to a "small hotel." No I don't believe it was Juniper Hall (dammit I cannot bring up its name) but it was almost certainly on the above mentioned road & it was where Nelson & Lady Hamilton spent some of their nights. What a fascinating piece & the author found part of it in a "wonderful antiquarian bookstore" in Nova Scotia. Then I went fastforward to "the Double" by you. I've never been to Vienna, not had much interest in it & you bring it alive with ideas and comments far & wide, even Alaska. It makes me wish I'd had a double. Perhaps you usually write the Endnotes – I'll look & see & read them all.
Stella Snead
P.S. The yellow envelope perhaps about the color of my mother's car, but it was not shiny paint but of some matt material.
See Archipelago, Vol. 3, No. 4, "Stella in India"; Vol. 3, No. 1, "Early Childhood and Before."

George Raphael <octave56@hotmail.com> *replies by e-mail:*
You might also wish to mention Linda Kelly's book [JUNIPER HALL: AN ENGLISH REFUGE FROM THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, n.d.], a source I used. The most important source, however, was JUNIPER HALL [Constance Hill, JUNIPER HALL, A RENDEZVOUS OF CERTAIN ILLUSTRIOUS PERSONAGES DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, London: John Lane, 1904], which my wife got for me out of the Kensington branch library; Kelly takes a lot from

that one. (The book also has a chapter on a character I like to think was a distant relation of mine, Samuel Crisp, better known as Daddy Crisp, Fanny Burney's mentor).
See Archipelago Vol. 3, No. 4, "There's a Small Hôtel: The Home Away from Home of Talleyrand & Mme de Staël."

From Don DeLillo:
3/1/00
I just came across the reminiscence of Lee that you sent some time ago and I read it again. Looking at the list of writers at the end of the piece I'm prompted to wonder what happened to some of them. Lee went away: I guess that's what happened.
Best,
Don DeLillo
See "Reminiscence," *Archipelago* Vol. 3, No. 3.

From Norman Lock via e-mail:
18 Mar 2000
I have been thinking about on-line journals. Since appearing in *Archipelago*, I have been published, or soon will be, in several others. Frankly, it feels not quite real, publishing electronically – as evanescent and insubstantial as cyberspace. And I dislike being dependent on a utility – the electricity, the media. If a dark age of technology comes, what then? (Though I confess I do not believe anything of mine has lasting value.) And the lack of portability is a problem. I'm 50 next month and have been slow "to embrace the technology," liking the feel and smell of paper, book shelves, bookstores – all that olfactory stuff Duchamp railed against, in art.

I will tell you this: *Archipelago* is the best I've visited. The things you do publish have importance, have literary value; the standards are high – and I like the international commitment very much. I feel the presence of an editorial intelligence in the selection of the works on view. I like that *Archipelago* feels like a traditional print journal (despite its single concession to the new media: the surf sfx).
Regards,
Norman Lock <HNLOCK@aol.com>
Norman Lock's "The Elephant Hunters" appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

A Song for the Road

Sándor Kányádi
tr. Paul Sohar

Come spring just like a tiny mouse
the creek skips out and stops a bit
and scampers up from underneath
the ice to run on top of it
squeaks and sniffs and takes a breath
until it seems quite safe to say
at last I've broken through the ice
from night into the bright of day

Sets out to meander babbling
ditties at first no one knows
for a moustache mouse-style
sticks a straw beneath the nose
twists and turns but singing still
the same tune he will reappear:
the highest peaks of happiness
are reached by living free of fear

soon it's buzzed by spry mosquitoes
picked up and blown by the wind
to a scavenger-type gale
that will quickly have it pinned
to every corner of the sky
till there's nothing else to hear:
the highest peaks of happiness
are reached by living free of fear

border crossing gates are stuck
in up positions and a pair
of storks construct a nest on top
where they can sit and boldly stare
up at the sky and sing the song
that every frog just loves to cheer:
the very heart of happiness
beats in living free of fear

It's whistled by the power-lines
and the linemen on the poles
by the robins on the line and
the rain that from the gable rolls
it's blasted by the mountain peaks
and shrieked with full force by the stark
attempt at flight unaided for
the first time by a fledgling lark

As the Sun ignores its route at noon
to hum the little tune oh dear oh dear
the highest peaks of happiness
are reached by living free of fear
and pours its brightness amply so
at least a slender ray can clear
its way to shadowed cracks where life
is still lived in the grip of fear

to places where the soul can only
dream of living free of fear

JAWBREAKER LAYERS

Larry Woiwode

from WHAT I THINK I DID

1

It wasn't my head or even my hat I forgot but my gloves. This habit of getting words in lines on scraps of paper with pens or pencils or at a keyboard (where I now tap) has my hands so used to the task they turn transparent. I hardly see them. So gloves don't register on the drive to Elgin – four on gravel, fifteen on blacktop – until I'm almost there and glance at the seat.

A checkbook where my gloves should be, surfaces edged with a crystalline light that shimmers everywhere from the snow-layered landscape like fire on foil. Just as when you drive up a glaciated mountain above clouds, struggling with the effort to see, so, too, here, you struggle and blink. There is no pollution and the sky is so purged of clouds on winter days that a silver-blue line grips the white horizon, welding the light in place: North Dakota.

In its brilliance a car is a greenhouse.

My mind is off on a race for the right arrangement to a set of paragraphs for a commissioned piece I have in my head. After thirty years of this I'm at the stage where I have to run to the bank once a week to hurry in a sum or shift another small one to keep an account above zero – a nuisance, not a deterrent, and the pressure of that sends an afterthought rolling in: *writer's hands extension of mind, so good at unpacking the purl prose forms they're feelers for words, burning to invisibility, sun on snow*.

I'm trying to write a memoir that gets beneath the self-consciousness of self. And as so often happens when I have work on the planks, I hear, at the border of sleep, the first sentence for it. The rest will follow like a curtain of snow threading its way over plowed fields toward me. Or that's the optimistic trend my thought tends to take and sometimes passages do fall in place in a cascade of inner recognition but more often the work is like shoving a plow single-handed through three-foot drifts.

I've spent most of my life listening, and if I have an enduring trait, that's it. But the hour always arrives when the listening has to be translated into words.

In the German-Russian village where I grew up my name was normal. Woiwode. I liked its look and sound, those vowels and wings and its trick of pronunciation – *Y*-woodie. The village was Sykeston, North Dakota, after Richard Sykes, from Cheshire, England. "In 1883 he established the town of Sykeston, erecting a store building and large elevator," a history from 1900 states. "Mr. Sykes retains large land interests in Foster, Wells, Stutsman, and LaMoure counties. . . . He has done much toward the settlement of those counties and has much land still to sell at three to ten dollars per acre. Mr. Sykes has made, at a cost of four thousand dollars, a beautiful lake within the town site of Sykeston, which is named Hiawatha Lake, and is eighteen feet deep in places and two miles long and about a fourth of a mile wide. The lake will be stocked with fish and boats will be supplied and the place become a summer resort."

It never became that, though people fish on it from boats and the temperature can be 100 in the shade on the 4th of July. When I was growing up the influence of Sykes was evident in an attentiveness to the English language, an influence that also came out of the British culture at Winnipeg. But by the forties Sykeston was largely German immigrants, some of them first-generation German-Russians – Germans the Czarist government persuaded to settle in southern Russia and then (mostly through the Bolshevik revolution) misused or purged. They spoke a yiddishie low German, interlaced with Russian, so that "no," for instance, came out not *nein* or *nyet* but *net*.

So Woiwode went well with them but elsewhere caused a clamor. I got a glimpse of the generational effect of this when our daughter, Newlyn (Welsh for "new spring") was three and people would ask her name. "Woiwode," she would say, pronouncing it *Y*-woodie, as the family has for generations, and then she would spell out each letter, as she heard us do, as if each were essential, too, to its pronunciation.

An impediment to the simplest meeting.

Wood, the name I use for restaurant reservations, would be simpler, and for a while I considered a change to that. But for the sake of my father and grandfathers and the vowels and distinction I first saw in it, I suspect, I never did. The name is Slavic, maybe Romanian, according to a scholar who worked on Romania's national dictionary.

"Dracula is the Voivoda of Valachia!" he said, happy to hit me with that. I had an inkling the name was Slavic, to bequeath such Tartar cheekbones, but the ancestors I heard about were German, or German-speaking.

Then the one who set me straight showed up. It was the spring of my junior year at the University of Illinois in Urbana, and I was studying the metaphysical poets, trying to place Marvell in the viewfinder of his mower poems, as in

When Juliana comes, and she,
What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me,

– scything apart the poet's state as a scythe scythes down grass. As I meditated on that I almost bumped into a tall woman beside a twiggy hedge, her arms in an X over the books at her chest, smiling at me in amusement. She invited me to the noisy basement cafeteria of the campus YMCA, called the K-Room, for a cup of coffee – I was headed there anyway, just down from the hedge – and once we sat in a beige and orange booth, with mugs on the table between us, she said, "More embarrassing than asking you for coffee, Larry, is how it shames me to say this: Will you screw me?"

Her fingers were white around her mug but she smiled, baring lipstick-flecked teeth in her mannish lower jaw – the fiery German actress I had watched in scenery-eating roles in campus productions. "I asked my divine director of late who to ask, after he said no – he's too gay to get involved, he told me – and he said, 'Woiwode.' So sorry about your awful name, love."

My lungs went flat, *I* did, at her accent that had a tinge of Brit onstage but was the accent of the women of Sykeston. My response is a blank. Later she came to the room I rented at the front of a private house, carrying a shopping bag, and sat on my only furniture besides a bed and desk – a Victorian couch with a coronet of maple trim across its back. She was an East German refugee who made it to England, then found an Illinois businessman willing to pay her passage to America and, with his wife, adopt her. Then he started having her at his office when she was fifteen.

She pulled a banana from her shopping bag and peeled it halfway down, in strips, her blond hair drawn from her domed forehead in a pompadour, a Nordic Doris Day of a basketball height. She had an entire bunch of bananas in the bag, it turned out, and after the first she removed her coat; the next, her jacket; blouse, though this didn't seem planned, judging from her nervousness and the grapes – also in the bag – which she ripped apart and held to me in a trembling hand.

She leaned back on the couch, near the end of the bed where I sat, its heavy upholstery raying around her hips in emerald wrinkles, and then stood in heels and paced past my knees as if she were onstage, one hand over a hip as she turned away, then pivoted back, her face streaked white with the emotion that was her forte and cried, "Larry!"

I put a finger to my lips to remind her of the quiet I must maintain, since the elderly folk I rented from sat in rockers on the other side of my wall, adopting a patient rock, it seemed, for my first university infraction.

Her face was so close I saw a glaze like greasepaint over the subtle pimples on her forehead, and she whispered in the accent of Sykeston, "Larry, poor fellow, Vyvoodie is Polish! It is no name a Cherman would want – a lousy name! It was a Voivoda that led the bastard Huns into Chermany, their chief! You do not know the ugly affront it is to a Cherman woman who hears Vyvoodie – they are now frigging little petty officials over there! – or anybody who knows their history! How truly evil were these Vojvodas! Evil, evil Huns, not Chermans! Read Sienkiewicz, love."

At anything untoward I went silent, listening as if my life depended on it, and for me it was an affront merely to hear her say "love." Then she turned grave and teary and told me about the businessman in detail.

I was twenty and I mention this not to mesmerize you into the goggle-eyed mindlessness pornographers like to incite, nor to warn away anyone who meets a Woiwode, but as a cautionary tale for my children. Hear! The Woiwodes and their interrelated clans, over the generations I've known them (now three, with a glance in opposite directions into a fourth at both ends) have been susceptible to sexual mishap, sexual misadventure, sexual excess, sexual sin – however you see it, no matter their age. So children, wherever you are when you read this or remember it, heed me.

And this: it wasn't until two years later that the conclusion to her visit came, in New York, when the wisest and most clairvoyant of modern storytellers, William Maxwell, said, "If you sit or stand still in one place long enough, even on a street corner in New York, your story will walk up to you."

My story is partly about the "Old Country" of every immigrant agrarian family, plus the otherworld of Europe, and how I was spared the seduction into its centuries-old maze when a Woiwode sailed to the New World in 1867. Then a century later I encounter a young woman from the Old Country who has been seduced and worse by the New and so seems set on another round of seduction – prey to our ancient names. Those layers are at the heart of the story I know.

Woiwodes are susceptible to such, I said, as others are susceptible, not *synonymous with*. They also tend to be thoughtful, if not intelligent, and slow to rouse to anger, though once angry they burn red hot, often at injustice. They have served as teachers, federal officers, finish carpenters and plasterers, farmers; in medicine, in the

church, the military, and nature conservancy. Younger generations are in banking, vet medicine, nursing, real estate, federal inspection; they oversee commercial building projects, are managers, accountants, in law enforcement, or guarding you against computer scams. Linked to them is the Thiel family of my Grandma Woiwode, known for its scholars and priests. Only one of all of them has stuck to writing.

As for the inheritance from my mother's line, the Johnstons, from the Norwegians on her mother's side, the Hyerdahl branch, is the adventurer Thor, of the *Kon Tiki* voyage and book of that title, and on the Halvorson—

Well! a great-aunt exclaimed, scandalized to read in a genealogy she received from a relative in Norway that a male ancestor "drowned in a vat of beer."

What was so scandalous to her was how this was written right on the genealogy for anybody to see!

From what I know about a tendency on that side, I doubt his death was accidental. He was drinking up the vat and tripped. And next the Scots-Irish-Welsh of the Johnston half who tended, like many from the edges of the UK, toward garrulousness and religious extremism. One great-uncle could barely walk by the age of forty from spending so much time on his knees in prayer – for most of the rest of his family, as it turns out. So from my mother's side that, and the related weakness of a diabetic strain; and from both branches an excellent or else a shaky sense of handling money, along with the compulsive way a Woiwode – most every one a teetotaler – will empty a glass of water in great quick gulps, as if a beleaguered ancestor died of thirst.

Again that.

Then this:

Voivode (Voi voud). Forms: _. 6 **voy-, voiuoda, voivoda, voyvode, voivode, -wode, woywode** [ad. Bulg. and Serb. *vojvoda*, Czech. *vojevoda*, Pol. *wojewoda*, Russ. *voevoda*, whence also Roum. *voevoda, -vod*, mod. L. *voivoda*, mod. Gr._____] = Vaivode

_. **1570** in Hakluyt *Voy.* (1599) I. 401 When we should have deliuered him with the rest of his fellowes vnto the Voiuodaes officers. *Ibid.,* Kneze Yoriue your Majesties Voiuoda at Plasco. **1599** *Ibid.* II.i.198 Voyuoda of Bogdania and Valachia.

_. **1614** Selden *Titles Honor* 249 That of Vaiuod or Uoiuod, vsd in other parts of the Eastern Europe, being, I think, a Slauonig or Windish word. **1686** W.Hedges *Diary* [Halk. Soc.] I. 232 I went to visit and present ye Voyvode and Musellim of Diarbekeer. **1833** R.Pinkerton *Russia* 111 Now but an insignificant-looking place, though formerly the residence of a Voivod. **1869** Tozer *Highl.Turkey* I.141 The protectorate ..passed into the hands of the Hospodars or Voyvodes of Wallachia and Moldavia. **1884** W.Carr *Montenegro* 22 By repeated efforts the voivode maintains with difficulty a position on the coast.

__**1847** S.Austin *Ranke's Hist. Ref.* III. 31 He encouraged Francis I. to keep alive the agitation in Germany,..and to support the Woiwode of Translyvania. **1847** Mrs. A. Kerr tr. *Ranke's Hist. Servia* xvi. 303 Amongst those executed before Belgrade were venerable Senators...and aged and renowned Woiwodes. **1868** *Daily Tel.* I Sept., To be a prince of its park, lord of its lake, ruler of its river, and woiwode of its woods.

attrib. **1888** E.Gerald *Land Beyond Forest* xxxiii. II. 84 Only such Tziganes are supposed to be eligible as are descended from a Woywod family.

Or so the OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY says, while next to it WEBSTER'S THIRD states:

vai vode\ˈvai,vod\ *or* ***voi vode*** \ˈvoi-\ n -s [*vaivode* fr. **NL & It** *vaivoda*, fr. obs. Hung *vajvoda*, fr. **Serb & Slovene**, *vojvoda*, fr. **OBulg** vojevoda, lit., chieftain, fr. *voinu* warrior, soldier (akin to **Lith** *vyti* to pursue, hunt) + *voditi* to lead; *voivode* fr. **Russ** *voevoda* fr. **OBulg**--more at **VIM**]:a military commander or governor of a town or province in various Slavic countries.

While back of all that I hear the voice of an officious recorder at Ellis Island saying to his table-side mate near the "In" door, "It would be the same, I suspect, as the way these people pronounce wegtable soup."

2

The beginnings of memory are eidetic, pictorial, images of the essence of a day. No language attached. Then a long mid-phase of learning. Then age, with new avenues the mind lays down. These accumulate fast. With the growing errands the mind must run the avenues that go the deepest, become the most important. Gloves and scarves disappear. Or the weather of the inner world draws me in so far it's hard to keep the outer in sight, keep a toehold, a grip on it.

As it has been this winter, merely keeping abreast. Snow to the eaves of buildings, which is bad enough, but the worst is the wind and the way it magnifies every aspect of the cold. It wears at my wife, pouring in streaming weight over the north of the house, the wall where our six-foot headboard stands, with a force I feel will bear us off in the night. Then strikes in wallops that jerk shrieks from nails as the bedsprings tremble under us in our suspended sleeplessness.

So no gloves. The castigation I condemn myself with pours through me in neon: *You should have known better*. "Yes," I say, thinking of the morning we drove early to the polling place, a bulky brick cube trimmed with rows of vertical windows that gave it the appearance of gaining an extra story in mock surprise – the county courthouse, set on a hill in town. We watched a county employee, a woman, use a snowblower to clear the walk to its double doors, a spangled fountain of snow arching from the candy-red machine across a blue spruce that reached to the second story – a patriotic vision of sorts (we were on our way to vote, after all; November 7, 1996) but one I should have taken as a warning: that much snow on the ground before December.

And now this winter stupor in the greenhouse of a car, in the new year of '97. Twenty below for a week so when the sun appears and cooks the snow to a dazzle you enter a daze similar to the one from a dream that has held you under too long, the dangerous state that undoes polar explorers.

When I wake, the teller with my check and deposit slip says, "Do you think we're going to get that terrible storm?"

I'm almost offended – so absorbed I didn't listen to the car radio, and now this affable woman I enjoy talking with asking about a storm, after what we've been through?

In a voice so tremulous and phlegm-rattly it feels I haven't used it all day, "No" comes out like a strangled moo – *Nooo*. "No," I say, normal. "No, I don't think so."

I'm wearing a light jacket and flimsy cap and realize her question may be her way of warning me, since natives (and of this village especially) can be that politely oblique. With her knowledge of the details of the financial state of everybody county-wide and her ability to face them every day, she's an artful expert at the mode. Her square shoulders shift in an interrogatory way, as if to ask if she's gone too far, then she pauses in her count of cash and studies me from eyes magnified by her glasses, head on.

My look lets her know nothing has changed between us.

Outside, exhaust from cars and pickups plumes both sides of the street, all the vehicles running, doors unlocked, not a person at the wheel of any. I run to the store and buy food, sensing a hurry there, as if others know something I don't, and on my way to the car streamers of snow start plastering every surface facing west, as my face is, and I think, *Twenty miles*! And her with no wood.

I decide to see the seasonal worker who helps supply our wood. I'll encourage him to deliver a load in the best way – drive to the abandoned farm where his house-trailer sits and hand him cash. We've cut every dead tree on our farm and moved on, with an absentee owner's permission, to a stand of cottonwoods two miles down our snow-clogged road.

What we call our farm or ranch, neighbors refer to as a garden plot – 160 acres. It is small in comparison to the spreads that extend for miles over the roll of our all but treeless landscape, with a sky that booms pure blue to the horizon on all sides, so that even a traveler like Peter Matthiessen, when he got in his genteel elegance from a car in our lane, turned in a slow circle, to take it all in.

He was working on what would be IN THE SPIRIT OF CRAZY HORSE – later pulled from bookstores by a lawsuit brought by the Governor of South Dakota – and I had driven him from the Bismarck airport a hundred miles south and west to our farm, below the Cannonball River Custer followed on his way to the Little Big Horn.

Matthiessen paused and stared at our garden with a pool of water at its far corner from the spring melt (after the only other winter with as much snow as this), and said in the mildly Oxonian accent he and George Plimpton picked up at the boarding school they attended together, "You've got shorebirds there." He pointed to the glare of water, the shallow garden pool. "I do believe that one is a godwit. I'll be. Do you have a pair of binocs?"

The gentle man who keeps us in wood, a three-hundred-pound biker with a full curling blond beard and a blond pony tail, lives north of the next town, New Leipzig – one of those Dakota settlements on the other side of the railroad tracks running parallel to the highway, so small that from your car you can see down three blocks of a main street to the fields at its far end.

But before I'm there a wind hits and streaks of snow revolve to the horizontal and double in volume, a white-out. I touch the brakes, blinded, our aging Lincoln seeping cold. I reach for my gloves and the bare spot, added to the storm's onslaught, confuses me so much I swing off too soon, onto the wrong road. But I keep going, a trait my wife translates as bullheadedness, but that registers in me as dislocation. I usually have my directions right and always imagine that if I drive farther, I'll reach the stability of the right place and the panic pressing me on will stop, an awful circle. My father did this, as he aged, and I hated it. Most men do. I can turn west in a mile, I figure. Land here is laid out in mile squares or "sections," and the boundaries of each, by law, should be roads but lately are so seldom traveled it seems stagecoaches left the last ruts.

Memory isn't a pilot but a backseat driver who wants control. Story is the pilot, and we follow its course through the present, hearing memory's nagging knowledge of the weathers and the roadblocks of the past. Memory's aim is to *be* there, leap the present, persuade us the past is identical to the future, prophetic, our one seat of reference – those blank spaces we slip from to find we've been suspended in the past.

That suspension is memory's power; memory *is* imagination. It holds a lifetime store of every angle and declination of experience and sensation and fact we know, besides its coloring of all of those. What people call a memoir is an attempt to tame its outrageous takeovers into paths we tiptoe down toward truth.

The temptation is to deny the demands of the past and switch on the autopilot of the rational. In men that rational preserve, the miniature speck of it, assumes a superiority that recoils from the depths that women intuitively inhabit, so men are often "lost," unable to set aside rationality for common sense: stop and ask that guy how to get there. A woman's plaint.

In the film *2001* you enter a primitive gruffness, man's zone, and are suddenly lifted into a sense, before the moonshot or shuttle, of the infinitude of space and travel through it. Then after the computer's takeover, that scene of a pilot aging down through time in a translucent room like a projection of his rationality, able only to rise from bed to check his face in a mirror for the effects of age – suspended in space inside a consciousness continuing forever, as it felt, so that I was turned inside out and seemed to be the fetus heading off in a diminishing dot, my span as brief as a breath on that mirror – though I didn't at first recognize this riptide of subliminal effect.

I saw it in Manhattan with my wife and a friend I once rented a house with in college; he was in the city (after studying at an Orthodox yeshiva in Brooklyn and dropping out) to finish an advanced degree in Math, and it was the crystalline architecture of his mind I partly viewed the film through that impressed it on me as it was, I think. Afterward we stopped in a bar for drinks and then went out to the car my father-in-law had given my wife when she left home, a Volkswagen Beetle. The street where it was parked was deserted, as if an extraterrestrial holocaust had occurred; the only other person was a young man walking with the bent-ahead haste of carrying out a grudge, and I gunned the car toward him and kept it on course until I hit the curb a few feet back, causing him to fling up his arms in the headlights in a parody of horror – as if the film's sense of the insignificance of life permitted this.

In those subterranean reaches women are attuned to – a molecular intuition they seem to pick up from the air – my wife was crying "No, No!" the second I hit the gas. And it isn't until now, over thirty years in rebound from the curb, that the right response occurs. *Forgive me.*

Now in this storm, snow sailing in from the west is forming finger drifts across the road, or so I see when I can see, and once I rumble over a few of these I realize I have to turn back. But no place. Earlier snows brim both ditches, bulked up by plows, all joining the falling snow in swirls, and then through the blue-gray blur I see a stab of light and to my right a mailbox goes by too quick for me to stop. I'm in a turn I must negotiate with every sense alert, a banked ascent, and in a stunning white-out I see it's a butte, a steep one, and I'm climbing it.

Easy to turn on a grade, once at its top, I think. Use the downhill slope. I hit a pillow drift with a wallop, then another, and the car, far from the top, slows and starts going sidewise, tires giving off the rubbery warble of a spin, and I hear the rhythms of a Roethke poem – of his driving alone down a long peninsula, the road lined with snow-covered growth, a dry snow ticking the windshield, the road going from blacktop to rubble and ending in a rut where the car stalls, churning in a snowdrift until its headlights go out. Which is where I am, at a dead stop, though the engine and headlights and heater work – so far, anyway.

Then it comes as before, the blankness of black velour, a midnight sky without a star. A point of light appears. It travels across the void, leaving a trail fine as frayed filament. It joins similar trails, millions of them, but the whole host do not lighten the dark an iota. The trails travel through ages, down through who knows how many millennia, until stars appear, the sun and moon, the earth in its aqua symmetry and froth of clouds, and then liquid splashes over a floor as everything rushes forward to a burning marvel I know is light.

Voices are raised, shouts. An icy grip surrounds my forehead and my mother screams.

Push! comes the shout. "Push! The hardest part is over!" My ears gain airy freedom and in the replaying of this I feel a tug of sympathy for my mother; she bore me and will bear me through time, though not long – nine years and three months, to be exact. But the flash takes too long to catch. The simple fact is I was born in Carrington, North Dakota, into the dark hour of 6:00 AM, on October 30, 1941.

My name is Larry, not Lawrence (for those who try to improve on her), an irritating diminutive common at the time, perhaps because of Olivier, a Lawrence called Larry by admirers. So I used L when I began to publish, but Larry was congenial to the mid-part of life, as she probably knew, though tough to fix on a fellow in his late fifties. So I often want to return to where I began as a writer, L.

An undeniable fact about the cast present at my birth is this: I'm the only one of them living, able to slip into the salty smell of blood on her naked heat. As all newborns do at birth, as ours did, my wife's hand across a stained and miniature back where ribs fine as wishbones expanded and fell with the panting breaths of all of our four.

The least trustworthy of the better attributes of any mind is memory.

3

As I sort the first images from my past that feel authentic I'm at an upstairs window of a house on my Grandma and Grandpa Johnston's farm, not quite four, because my grandparents move before I'm that age. Out the window I see our family car. It is squeezed between the house and a granary, as if wedged there, and perhaps I do the wedging, because my parents are inside, trying to leave. An internal picture of them in its front seat as the motor starts causes me to yell, "*No!* I shanged my mind!"

I'm supposed to stay with my grandparents for a spell of days, as my parents travel, but now I feel I can't. Somebody calls or runs to the car and my mother's younger sisters, Yvonne and Elaine, enact for their family audience "I *shanged* my mind!" "*He* shanged his mind, is that what he said!" "Yes, *shanged* his mind!"

Like all my mother's family, they are flawless mimics, and every time one or the other sees me, I hear "Have you *shanged* your mind?" – a question that plagues me when it rises in their voices as I work through yet another revision of a story I told my wife was finished. But then I found that *The New Yorker* had a phrase to handle this – when a piece was not only done and taken, but the fixing and editing was done, too; then it was "Done and done."

The only time Yvonne didn't mention my change of mind was the last time I saw her, in 1992, when she was gray-haired and drinking "gray panthers" – vodka with grapefruit juice – in her brother's apartment in St. Paul, there from L. A. with her

husband to visit. She was carrying the cancer she would die from in a year, though none of us knew it, not even her. But I sensed a reserve in her (and not only for neglecting to say "shange," out of charity, as I took it, because she seemed the one changed), and then I saw in her face, not in her eyes or mouth but the bones of her face, the face of my mother, dead for forty years.

Before I get out of the car to check where I am on the slope, as I would with gloves and warm clothes, I start backing toward what appears to be a place to turn. But when I revolve the wheel to enter it, the car slides. I touch the brakes, it slides worse, and I remember how, in the letup in the weather early in the week, first a thaw came and then a rain. The wind has scoured this area of the slope to ice, I see as I get out, then go into the tottering running in place that's so funny to others the second before you fall on ice. But I don't.

The nose of the car rakes northwest, its rear tires at the edge of the drifted ditch. From the trunk I get a grain scoop I put there for an emergency. But the snow is so hard I have to stomp on the shoulder of the shovel to get it to bite in. During the terrible cold, as winds shifted from one quarter to another, my son pointed out how the snow got worn to grains, like polished sandy quartz, and it has the weighty heft of sand – its corrugated waves a solid as sculpture, the sastrugi Byrd encountered in Antarctica.

Meanwhile freshly falling snow, clumpy and damp from the day's warmth, plasters the side of the car and clings in a film to my flimsy jacket, while the wind whistles the temperature down a degree a minute. My hands are numb, fingers like wood, the last of the blood in them, as it feels, about to squirt out my nails. I jam the scoop in the snow and jump in the car – still running.

You should have known better. The clunky, useless scoop, no gloves, staying on the wrong road, then starting up this hill. I should have brought the pickup; should have backed straight down, even if I couldn't stop, till I was on a flat; should have been more charitable when my wife called the other week to say she was backing out a drive and slid on ice into a ditch and, once she was home, I should have foregone my lecture on how to manage on ice, all before I went out to look – she'd hooked the steel post of a highway sign on the way down and scraped one whole side of the new finish we had a body shop apply a month before – and then I went back in and said, "We might as well drive the damn thing over a cliff."

"Dad!" our son said. "That's no way to talk!"

I'm not about to panic but I know now why people gamble their lives in storms like this – simply to walk out of the situation, probably in a mindless daze from car heat, as I am. Then they flounder in the featureless landscape and get lost. Farmers once tied ropes to their waists to go out for chores and then sometimes didn't make it back.

I get out and dig and my mind fills with Ruth, in this helpless tumble of our children I experience every hour – Newlyn, Joseph, Ruth, Laurel, that order. Ruth always busy at a task; Newlyn, too, but with her, the oldest, a sense of how her tasks were duties to hold the family together, when I wasn't – Ruth so geared up she's a power we can't identify, though she likes to help with what she likes. As when I was digging holes for a hitching post for Newlyn (nine years older than Joseph, eleven over Ruth), and Ruth, four, pulled piles of dirt back with her hands, helping, and when I was down three feet with the post-hole digger she asked me to put her in the hole, so I

lowered her until only her eyes and a crown of white-blond hair showed, and she giggled and whooped and had me call her mother to see.

I dig till my ears feel they're going up in flame, then hear a deep-throated sound like a tractor in the distance. An effect of the freeze? Snow is driving from the north now and might have caused a hallucination with its sudden shift that's subsumed the last light. I've lived in Manhattan, Brooklyn Heights, Chicago, St. Paul, a manor on the Hudson, in suburban and rural places from New York State to Michigan and Illinois, and now, in this corner of North Dakota, I stand on what could as well be the last hill at the end of the world. I can see nothing but white with white over it and more white pouring in.

My great-grandfather Charles was smuggled out of Upper Silesia in 1867 by his father, John, because he was at the legal age for military conscription in Germany, ten. John wrapped him in a feather bed and carried him over his shoulder onto a ship bound for America, and Charles said he was sat on and shoved around during the journey, but had to keep silent – a trait he passed on.

And, oh, how he wore away inner layers, bright and varied as a jawbreaker's, as I imagine, to the proximity of exposure, not knowing which "I" was I, when under one color was another of encasement, invention, projection, stillness.

Charles managed for his father on this side, filing a homestead claim in Dakota Territory, in 1881, before North and South Dakota were states. That came in 1889. The homestead was in the Red River Valley, three-hundred miles from our present farm, which is not a family place, as some think. My wife and I are children of the sixties, or anyway we were under thirty at its peak – armchair dreamers of an ecological Eden. We would find a place in the country and by our crops and animals and a system for generating electricity would become self-sufficient, returning organic balance to the land, for its sake and the sake of the life on it, especially wildlife, my wife's love.

I never thought I'd return. My wife is from Oregon and we visited the Pacific Northwest first; we spent a summer in Nyack and then tended west: Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, a summer in St. Paul. After two years in Chicago we took a tour of the west – Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, and found aspects of each state we liked but never the right place. Along the way we stopped to see the only relative I knew in North Dakota, near its western border, my mother's sister Elaine, and Ralph, her husband, and with him we attended a rodeo at Sentinel Butte. Back in Chicago, it was western North Dakota that in retrospect seemed to have an untainted sense of that Eldorado Americans have always pursued: the frontier.

We had joined a Presbyterian denomination and found it had one church in North Dakota, in its southwest corner, in Carson. With a compass I drew a circle with a radius of fifty miles from Carson, the focus to our hope, our faith, and we contacted a realtor in the area and told him what we wanted. Months later, when the realtor called with what seemed a possibility, I was too ill to travel. My wife went to see the place with her father.

Both her Peterson grandparents are from Norway and met in the U. S., so she is third-generation Norwegian on her father's side. The pastor of the church that was the point of my compass was a Peterson, a coincidence my father-in-law never got over, and perhaps it was that or the lilting talk of residents (sixty percent are Scandinavian) that was the clinching influence. According to my wife it came for her at the midpoint of their drive from Bismarck in a rental car, before she saw the farm, as she swung

around a curve on a hill above Flasher, where the Missouri breaks give way, and saw the countryside below, fields interleaved with pastures and misty buttes bunched in blue mounds in the sparkling distance, and her ancestry sprang to the surface.

She was at the wheel, her father beside her, and they saw what their ancestors – mariners and farmers above fjords where the sea exploded in cataracts of foam – saw when they crossed the ocean and came into this country – spread out from their feet like a sea with the fjords of buttes above.

My wife felt it through her body in a way that marked this as the place, she said. She sometimes still says, as we round the curve and look out on the land lying below to the horizon, "That's the west" or "It was right here." If I should happen to say, as I have, "Here's your west," she'll merely go "Mmm," letting me know in her gently sensible way I have no right to appropriate her vision.

Two things happen at once. The snow parts and I hear and glimpse what appears to be a tractor to the west, judging from the round bale gripped in a loader – now enveloped – and then a pair of lights trundle to a bright glow behind. They pause, as if trying to make me out through the streaking fuzz of pouring flakes, then swing off, past a mailbox they light up, the one I passed.

I get back in the car, flinging dripping snow, and feel hope: two vehicles, lights. Frostbite has my fingers feeling I've held them over a fire long enough to reach rare. I decide to head for where the lights went and as quick as that the storm lifts. I see the shape of a man inside the cab of what I thought was a tractor to the west but is a loader, busy on a run from a stack to a corral with a round bale in its bucket, trying to beat the storm.

Headlights reappear from close behind and it turns out to be a farmer in a pickup who lives off the road, his face the color of cowhide, so finely seamed it looks lined with leather tools. He went back for a towrope, he says, but why in hell am I on this road? Am I from out of state? No. Why, any fool knows this road is never plowed past his place once it gets bad. Where am I from? I tell him and he shakes his head as if it's the worst possible place.

He hooks a tow rope, of thickly braided yellow nylon, to the bumper hitch at the back of my car and to his pickup hitch and tells me to get in. I drop it in reverse and give it the gas, as he does, but sit like dead weight while his pickup slides to one edge of the road, then the other, back and forth, as if it has straight left and right down pat, and no more. I see him back up, giving slack to the rope so he can try a freeing jolt, and hop out and warn him how a friend broke a two rope trying that on our heavy Lincoln.

"Get in," he says.

I do, he applies his jolt, the rope sails off like a slinky snake with jet assist, and I touch my pocket, glad for the cash. But only a pin holding a hook at the end of the rope has pulled loose. He sits on a running board on the driver's side, in the lee of the wind, to repair the hook. Over his pickup box, across the road where the loader works, I see another vehicle, a bulk gas truck come barreling in our direction from buildings now visible in the thinning snow – all this last-minute activity a blizzard brings on – then suddenly cant to one side and grind to a halt. A man climbs down from its cab and looks around, as if in shame, then trots back toward the buildings.

Down on the running board, the man whose fingers I've worried about since he pulled off his gloves to grip the ice-crusted hook, says, "It sounds like Ray has his Payloader going. I'll go see."

He's been following the activity by its sound, as farmers familiar with an area do. He drives down to the canted bulk truck, pausing as if to assess the loss, then drives toward the buildings and is gone like that behind heaped snow. All farmyards are like this, a contractor has said; he uses a crane to clean out corrals and feedlots so swamped there's no other way. We have damaged our tractor snowblower on the hard-sculpted snow; you have to ram it to break it up to blow, then the blower piles it in drifts that get other drifts going. From inside the car I meditate on the way darkness tints the overabundance of white pure blue.

This outpouring of nature, its excess not to be copied, and the energy we expend on it; the time it takes, first, to admit its presence, in whatever form in yourself, and then sift it from a poem or book or, better, your life. In the seventies I put together a book of poems called MATCH HEADS, to denote their brief blaze, all trimmed to a few lines. My publisher bought it but didn't want to bring it out until after my next novel – which I presumed was nearly done. It took three more years, that excess. By then I had poems of a different sort and saw in them the beginning of a story of the relationship of eleven years with my wife. I added poems and found that many of the brief match heads also fit.

A new book came of that, named EVEN TIDE, for the way the two in a marriage are evenly tied, or not, and the time of day when healing happened in Jesus' life. My editor and I persuaded each other we didn't like the previous title, MATCH HEADS, also a pun, but another problem was manifest. EVEN TIDE ran to a hundred poems. I removed at least a dozen and used brief match heads as prefaces or conclusions to others and a rearrangement of the order of the poems in the story started to surface, and I remembered William Maxwell saying about a collection of tales, in his whispery voice, "When I was working on the final version, with all the arranging and rearranging it put me through, I reached a stage where I wanted to throw myself out a window."

I wasn't quite there but knew what he meant. I called my editor, Michael di Capua, who was working with a number of poets and he suggested I get in touch with James Wright. "So how do I put together a cover letter to a book he probably doesn't have time to read and maybe doesn't want to see?" So I said.

"Just call him. Jim loves your book." He meant the "next one," BEYOND THE BEDROOM WALL, which was listed so many seasons in the FS&G catalogue it became a source of in-house jokes, along with Harold Brodkey's "first novel," the advance on which had been out for so long without delivery that, as one wag put it, "the interest just on that would pay off the national debt."

I liked Wright's poetry and we had talked at New York soirees – once when he was nominated for an award he didn't receive, and afterward said to me in the booth of a bar in the form of advice, "When something like this happens, what you have to do is make the next one so damn good it blasts the bastards out of the bleachers!" Which is what he did, or anyway he received the prize the next time around, after he quit drinking, as we had heard.

"When I finished my first book I showed it to Wystan Auden," he said over the phone in a soft voice. "He was kind about the poems, I think, but what I remember most was him saying, 'Only 43. You need to cut them down to 43, James. You can't have more than 43 poems in a first book.' I don't know where he got the number, probably

from his own first book, but I think he was right and I think I got mine close to that. I'm a little afraid to look."

I'm afraid to look myself, but finally I get out of my chair and go to a box hidden behind a recliner I seldom use and dig through the books in it until I find a copy of EVEN TIDE. I open it, afraid the number will be in the 60s, and I'm somewhat relieved: forty-nine.

Still I feel the heat of shame climb my face.

A blur like headlights grows into spots at my back and swings past the mailbox; the pickup. I get out. A bulky yellow Payloader (what I mistook for a tractor) shows above the snow near the buildings and starts up the lane, then pauses and swivels sideways, as if training its robot eyes on the bulk truck, then swings again and rumbles past it, uphill to me. A driver climbs down a ladder from its cab in a hooded jacket, his face hidden, and hooks a chain to the Payloader scoop, then to my bumper.

"You're a ways from home. You're Woiwode, aren't you.

FREE TO DIE LAUGHING

James Broughton
From an interview with Martin Goodman

The American public does not know poets exist. That Americans have no knowledge of nor appetite for poetry is symptomatic of the impoverished prosiness of their lives.

On other shores it is a different matter. Being identified as a poet in France or Denmark or India one is greeted with gracious respect. When my landlady in a Neapolitan village learned I was a poet, she insisted I have the best room in her house, and forever addressed me as "Dottore di litteratura."

Today the U.S. is farther from being nourished by poetry than it was a hundred years ago, when books of poems were best-sellers. On her sewing table my grandmother had copies of Tennyson, Longfellow, *Omar Khayyam*, et al., in soft leather bindings with bookmarks for favorite passages.

In the world of poetry there are would-be poets, workshop poets, promising poets, lovesick poets, university poets, and a few real poets. There are poets with leaden feet, tin ears and tangled syntax. Rarest of the real poets are born poets. They are the oddballs, not the professors.

I have never taught poetry. I never wanted to dilute my private passion for the art by airing and arguing it in public. I remembered what Professor Albert Guérard at Stanford said years ago: "The best job for an author is to be a postman. It has nothing to do with writing, it gets him out in the air, he sees what is going on in his community, he can read everyone's postcards, and he comes back to his desk refreshed, not weary of words."

Yet everything that I have taught insisted on a poetic view of life. I taught the arts of ritual, myth-making and magic, individual soul-making, avant-garde cinema. I tried to stir the imagination and enthusiasms of students to take risks, to do what they were most afraid of doing, to widen their horizons of action.

As for feedback, what I learned of value from students over the years is embedded in my book, MAKING LIGHT OF IT, which purports to be about filmmaking but is really my aesthetic of poetry and the poetic life.

A born poet knows in his cradle that a poetic life is the only life worth living. He is born with divine sparks in his head. His favorite of all games is the play of words. He expects to be dismissed as a fool, a black sheep, or a threat to society. But he can't help writing memorable lines. Glorious oddballs: Hopkins, Rimbaud, Rumi, Lear, Lao-Tsu, to say nothing of Blake, Whitman and Jesus. None of these took a course in creative writing, but they can make shivers go down your spine.

The literary establishment fears originality, oddity and outrage.

> An excellent poet wrote a book
> And an excellent book it was.
> But nobody gave it a second look
> as nobody often does.

But as Noel Coward said, "We must try not to be bitter."

I have found my most support within literature's unestablished corners, among a few fellow poets and a few editors of obscure magazines. I owe special gratitude to Jonathan Williams, Andrei Codrescu, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Paul Mariah. Above all I always had the support of my angel, who is my ideal reader.

And acclaim? What would I do with it? Wear a rhinestone tiara? Acclaim is a distraction. Adversity is a stimulus. I prefer the response of one reader who truly listened to me and suffered goosebumps, heard bells ringing in his head, or took a deep breath and yelled, "Wow!"

Most poets, like most people, try hard to be like someone they admire or they are possessed with an image of what they ought to be. Trusting your individual uniqueness challenges you to lay yourself open. Wide open. Some artists shrink from self-awareness, fearing that it will destroy their unique gifts and even their desire to create. The truth of the matter is quite opposite. Consciousness is the glory of creation. And remember Gertrude Stein's comment, "It takes a lot of time to be a genius. You have to sit around so much doing nothing."

The quietest poetry can be an explosion of joy. True delicacy is not a fragile thing. The most delicate and yielding of our necessities, water, can be the most powerful destroyer, swallowing everything.

True delicacy is indestructible. Take Shelley, Dickinson, Firbank, Basho. I like things which appear fragile but are tough inside. In the long run the dandy can outmaneuver the brute, the bird is more resourceful than the rhino.

This reminds me of an encounter at the beginning of World War II. A burly fiction writer from Berkeley taunted me for delicacy and called me "The Venetian Glass Nephew." Before 1945 he went off his nut and had a lobotomy.

My major aim in writing is to set out flags and issue wake-up calls. Life is adventure, not predicament. Amazement awaits us at every corner. If you don't fill your days with love, you are wasting your life.

I have always been a passionate spokesman for love, even before I knew what it was. My earliest poems sing of the absolute necessity of allowing love to invade and pervade one's life. That can make the miracle happen in reality. Try it.

For me, prose walks, poetry dances. And to Shakespeare I owe my vision of the world as a theater, wherein all humans are acting out their parts. The theme of my film, *The Bed*, I phrased thus: "All the world's a bed, and men and women merely dreamers."

Dance, vaudeville, drama, movies – as a child I loved everything that went on in a theater. I loved the scenery, the music, the magicians, the slapstick clowns, and the whole play of illusion. I had a toy theater and a magic lantern, and when I was eight I built a stage for theatricals in the attic. At the age of twelve I wrote serious imitations of Eugene O'Neill, at the same period when I began writing a sonnet a day. So it is not surprising that my first book, years later, was a verse play, "The Playground."

My films are an extension of my poetry, using the white screen like the white page to be filled with images. I consider my films to be poems that are all as personal as my writing and as hand-made. Hence, like poetry, they have no commercial value.

Work in the theater sharpened my verse and my cinema. One learns especially the value of timing, and above all, the necessary ruthlessness to excise any word, sentence, or entire scene that does not advance the magic. Over my desk, a sign reads: "When in doubt, cut."

I often start writing in order to excite an expansive emotion. Feelings are springboards for creative swandives. If bitterness wants to get into the act, I offer it a cookie or a gumdrop. The most astonishing joy is to receive from the muses the gift of a whole lyric. Here is an example of a poem which gave itself completely to me, rhymes included:

God is my Beloved
God and I are lovers
He lifts me in tidal embraces
That turn the world on end

God is my Beloved
the ultimate in lovers
We ride through timeless spaces
a rapture without end

God is my Beloved
from first to last my lover
I surrender to him praises
and never ask the end

For me a poem has to sing out of itself and the lilt of it carries the magic. What Stravinsky said about music is also true for poetry: if it strays too far from its roots in rhythm and melody it loses its human connection. Rhythm and melody emanate from the body, the heartbeat, the voice of the soul. I concur with Nietzsche, "Light feet are the primary attribute of divinity."

I'm happy to report that my inner child is still ageless. He takes his cue from the impudent play of the universe. For him, poetry is the greatest form of play; playing

the way the gods play, and playing with the gods. Unless you are playing around with serious matters you are not a serious artist. Juggle the verities, dance with the mysteries. "Only when I glee / am I me."

I think I am happiest being a "laughing man of God." I enjoy the company of gods and daimons. They drive my green fuse forward. My ideal model would be someone like Hotei, the Japanese god of happiness who is fat, untidy and giggling. In the West where is any haha-ing god of happiness?

Poetry for me is as much a spiritual practice as sexual ecstasy is. Since I know that spiritual practice is an upbeat devotion, I find it more apropos to celebrate existence than to deplore it.

Everything that ever happened is still happening. Past, present and future keep happening in the eternity which is Here and Now.

What matters
matters
but it doesn't

Some of the time
everything
matters

Much of the time
nothing
matters

In the long run
both everything
and nothing

matter a lot

Most poets in their youth begin in adolescent sadness. I find it more rewarding to end in gladness. However there is lingering regret that limitations of daring and energy prevented the completion of the masterpieces one imagined for years. Advice: Be true to your madness throughout your life.

Everything is Song. Everything is Silence. Since it all turns out to be illusion, perfectly being what it is, having nothing to do with good or bad, you are free to die laughing.

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James Broughton 1913 – 1999

Martin Goodman

A summer party was held in 1994, welcoming me to Santa Fe and the United States. James Broughton had flown in with Joel Singer from their home in Port Townsend, Washington. Topped by one of his collection of embroidered poet's caps, eyes shining, moist lips fluttering for a kiss, James was able to whisk new acquaintances into a place of great intimacy and keep them there.

The material for *Free to Die Laughing* came from an interview I conducted with him in 1997. He agreed to the interview on a visit I made to his home that summer, but chose that it should be in writing. I spent a week in the south of France, reading his work and composing my questions, and mailed them off. When his answers came, I recognized them as a personal gift. James showed me how creativity could keep on springing from a source of joy … one of the names friends gave him was Big Joy … and that it was not necessary to keep looking for recognition from the literary establishment. Through many decades James wove creative dances around the literary establishment as though it were a maypole and he held all the ribbons.

In May 1999 I heard that James was dying. On May 17th, as he was passing away with the taste of champagne dropped onto his tongue, I spent the day using those interview answers to compose *Free To Die Laughing* from his own words. This was my way of staying close to the dear man. It was a treat to read the closing pages of this piece at his memorial celebration at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he taught for so many years. At the end of that afternoon we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and stood on the shore as a young man whirled naked around the beach, coated his body with James's ashes, then danced into the ocean, sending the rest of James's remains billowing above the water in handfuls that spread into silver clouds.

In November 1997 PACKING UP FOR PARADISE, SELECTED POEMS 1946-1996 was published by Black Sparrow Press. As a compendium drawn from 50 years of publishing poetry, it's a good place to start. James received a lifetime achievement award from the National Poetry Association, and another from the American Film Institute, for there are 23 films for you to search out and savor too. The philosophy behind this film-making, and a companion testament on creativity to the piece published here, can be found in his book MAKING LIGHT OF IT. His first gift to me was a copy of THE ANDROGYNE JOURNAL, which is a finely honed, very brave and personal book about breaking creative boundaries. To get to know him still better, read his autobiography COMING UNBUTTONED.

James was a tremendously good friend. I'll leave you with an aphorism of his:

> Crazy old men are essential to society.
> Otherwise young men have no suitable models.

NAMING THE HOMELESS

Portraits Before and After

Lucy Gray

Photo Lucy Gray

Rosemary McCord

Photo Lucy Gray

"I've been through ups and downs but always come back up. I'm a go-getter. I've got a big heart and am a happy-go-lucky person."

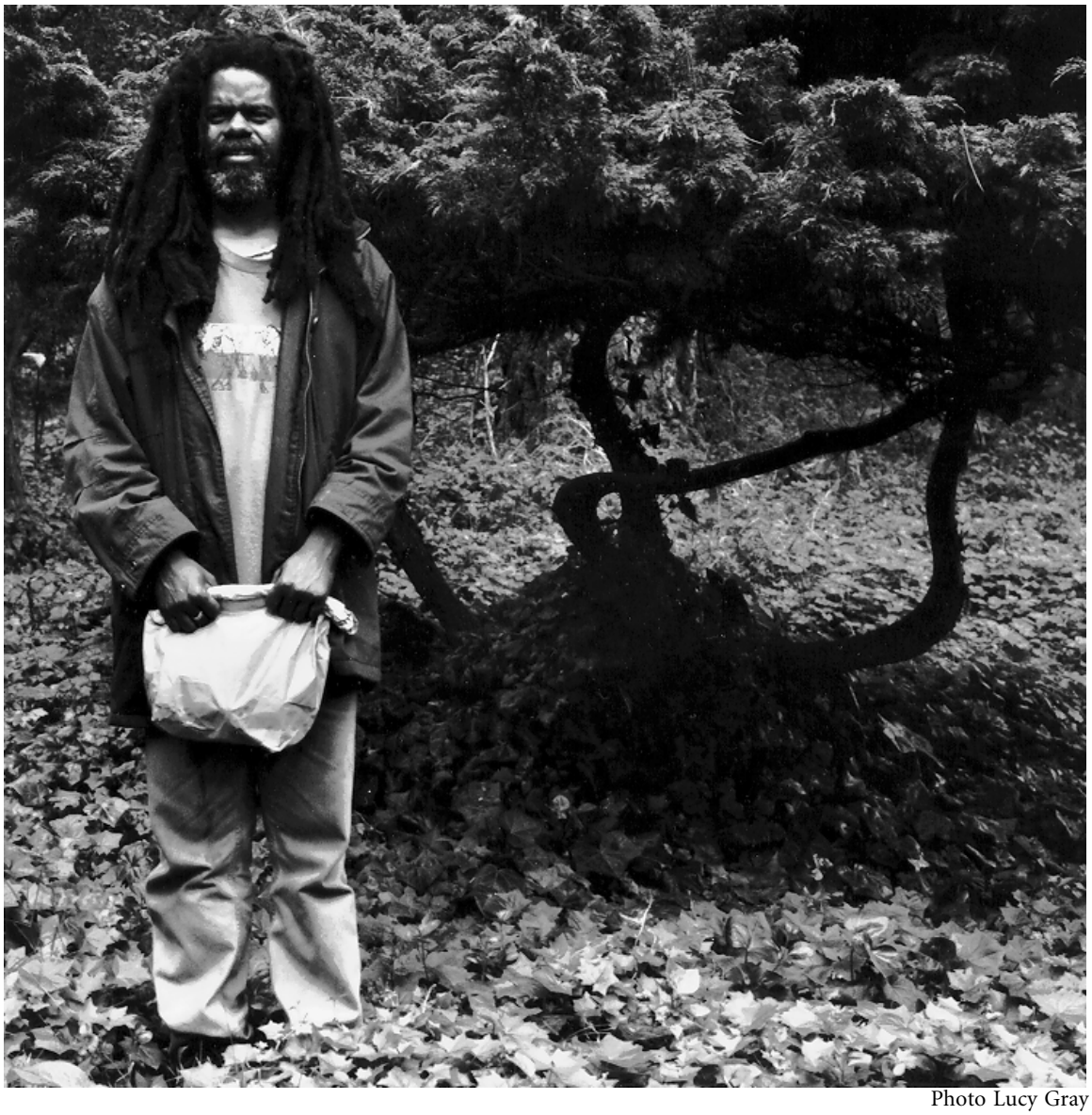

Photo Lucy Gray

Jonathan Beaver

Photo Lucy Gray

"I was an English major. My favorite book is Virginia Woolf's MRS. DALLOWAY. My most rewarding job was at Project Read teaching adults to read."

Photo Lucy Gray

James Leighton and Denise Nichols

Photo Lucy Gray

James: "Not every homeless person is a bad person. We're just down on our luck and shouldn't be treated any differently than the person that has a place to live."
Denise: "I'm very easy-going. I like to read, write poetry, surf the net, and just have fun. Being able to work with people is the most rewarding part of any job I've had because it's cool to see such an array of society out there."

Photo Lucy Gray

Susan Lowenthal and Bridgette Jones

Photo Lucy Gray

Photo Lucy Gray

Kirstin Bain

Photo Lucy Gray

"I left for college in August 1997 and dropped out in December. I moved to Amarillo, Texas, and held down a job and an apartment. I then moved to Denver, Colorado, where I became homeless.
I'm currently part of the San Francisco Running Crews – a technical theater crew. I'd like to have a career in sound editing/design and continue singing as I currently do."

Photo Lucy Gray

Robert Simmons

Photo Lucy Gray

"I blew it with my wife and daughters. But now I've had two years of recovery which have been the best and hardest of my life. I'm eternally grateful for the people who spent time to help me. Now I have my parents back, at least."

Photo Lucy Gray

Richard Stephens

Photo Lucy Gray

"I teach Junior Golf at Mission Bay Driving Range. I find it rewarding to pass on my experiences as a golfer. I was a member of the U. S. Army Honor Guard. I also was selected to march in President Kennedy's funeral, and performed in the St. Louis World's Fair. Honorable Discharge 1965. I am now fully recovered from a near-fatal car crash in 1997."

Statement

NAMING THE HOMELESS

Lucy Gray

Program notes, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco December 1998:

This is a project in which 28 homeless people had their pictures taken where they lived or liked to hang out and again after they had been made over to look like fashion models. There was no satire intended. Rather, the idea was to show these people at their peak. Further, I felt it would be so much easier for the rest of us to care about people, and harder to forget them, once we knew their names.

I still believe that, but I have now also to consider the view from the other side. Lawrence Green, the first model who called me after his case worker told him about the project, was upset by the idea that his name might be linked to homelessness indefinitely. "What happens after I get a job?" he wanted to know. "I'll write 'Happily Employed'," I promised. But that was a flip answer. These peoples' lives are fluid, while the pictures capture and keep a 60^{th} of a second or less. Still, these pictures compare and contrast the documented life to the invented one – the one that might be.

Some people whom I asked to contribute money or goods to this project worried about what would happen after the models had been made over and then had to go back to their real lives. These models are complex adults as rich as reality. Just because they are in need doesn't make them simple. They shoulder extraordinary responsibilities in order to protect their children from dangerous people or, like Mr. Toshi who travels an hour and a half by bus each way to get his son to school each day. Does that mean he can no longer imagine? Take a holiday? Separate work from play? Do we insist that the homeless must be genuinely helpless before we can assist them?

There are as many different kinds of homeless individuals as there are housed. I hope this exhibit reminds us that the homeless are not only the people we feel threatened by because they are sleeping in a doorway we wish to enter. Or because they are begging for money. Or that all homeless people become so out of stupidity or shiftlessness. Twenty-five of the 28 people in this exhibit showed up on time and worked well and hard.

I defy you to find the one who showed up six hours late and drunk. She's the one who holds herself like a professional model. But she hadn't washed her hair in three months and she arrived at Architects and Heroes too late for a cut. She got ugly with the make-up artist who had given her time and materials for free and might have expected some appreciation. But the homeless are people just like paying customers, they have sweet personalities and cruel ones. It's our vanity that wants people to be grateful for charity.

It was shocking, sometimes, to discover how easily some people had reached their predicament. Richard Stephens was once one of the guards who protected President Kennedy. Recently he had been living a happy, productive life in Portland, Oregon, until he got hit by a car one day and had to be hack-sawed out of his driver's seat. It took him years of hospitalization and therapy to become one of the amazing recovery stories. But he had nowhere to go after he got out of the hospital. He lives

with a friend now and needs to work again. He's got aspirations to teach golf for a living. For fun, on Sunday mornings, he teaches kids to play. I think he'd be good with kids.

His case worker, Danielle Lacampagne, at the Veterans' Administration Compensated Work Therapy Program, talks a lot about the miracle she finds in each of her 'survivors.' These miracles are made out of facing hard facts and surmounting them day by day. The social workers I met were unending in the trenches helping to make difficult decisions. Their organizations didn't want to be thanked in this exhibit. Many helped generously, but should the models be unhappy with the experience the advocacy organizations want that to be my fault, not theirs. I often had to say that before taking the first pictures of someone who had come to me because their case worker had told them about the project.

I had originally intended to select the models after having met them and decided that I could make them over. It didn't work that way in practice. There wasn't time. There wasn't a way to meet people. Instead, case workers at various advocacy organizations asked individuals if they'd like to participate, and if so, they called me up. With a few exceptions, I included whoever called me. I simply made an appointment on the spot and went to take their picture. It was impossible to get in touch with many of the models by phone. No none had their own transportation, with the exception of one couple who lived in their van. We should remember how much harder it is for a homeless person to participate in society than it is for us. We should give them double the credit when they do participate.

For me, the heart-rending person is Suny H. Roberts. She's the only model I met on the street. This was in July, when I needed a picture to put on the proposal for this project. She's the only one who sleeps on the streets and eats at soup kitchens while she waits for her boyfriend to get out of San Quentin, again. Suny has the most beautiful face, life shines out of her. I met her once at the Martin de Porres soup kitchen where she was having lunch. I guess she'd forgotten I was coming because she wasn't inside the door as promised. Instead, she was sitting at a picnic table hovering over her food with a hood over her head, but still I spotted her in the crowd without trouble. Her small slice of cheek looked like velvet in a row of lettuce.

It was that day she took a picture from her pocket revealing a very unattractive, very overweight Sheryl Roberts. That was Suny before the degenerative bone marrow disease that keeps her in constant pain yet somehow ravishing. Suny wants to leave San Francisco. She wants to go somewhere easier. I want to scoop Suny up and give her a place to rest her bones and keep from getting a chill. But I can't do that by myself. I'm just a photographer who can introduce her to you. This exhibit is one effort in a very large social structure.

I don't want to undervalue this exhibit. I'm proud of the community effort this represents. Grace Cathedral has been astonishing in their caring and skill. I think the pictures challenge our assumptions about appearance. Many of these people have a big gap in their resumes, but so do mothers who take off work when they have children. This project has been called controversial. I should hope so. Grace Cathedral says they are hosting the exhibit in the spirit of open discussion of important issues. I felt the same when I set out to make this project. Having met the models, I have more hopes for their future employment than I did beforehand, but for the rest of us and for potential employers, I hope these pictures stir you up. For good or ill, at last the homeless are then in the forefront of your thoughts. And maybe you've got a better way to help.

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NINE MONTHS LATER

Program Notes, City Hall, San Francisco August – September 1999:

Most people who see these photographs think the people in them are lovely. Sometimes the complaint is that the people don't change enough from street to make-over picture – to begin with, they look too good. Another point that has been voiced is that not all homeless people believe in make-up and pretty clothes. O. K. These 28 models are not all homeless people. They are among the homeless who want to be appreciated for their skills and what they have to offer the community. They want to be a part of it. The obstacles to making this happen are vast. These people are getting training but they need transportation, too. They need the confidence to be persistent and consistent. They need to be hired. Don't we all. If there is one ultimate goal in this exhibition, it is to remind us that these people are our neighbors. We need to remember their names. We need to know them.

It took a huge effort from a lot of people to make *Naming the Homeless* and while we were doing it we all said, if just one person is helped seriously this will be worth it. What we didn't foresee was the effect the experience was having on us. The production manager, Corey Nettles, left photography so she could go back to school to become a teacher. After *Naming* her work seemed unfulfilling. The project opened up the world of political journalism to me. I am now working on a project about death row.

About a month ago I sent out letters to all the participant models asking how they were doing and whether they'd like to say so on camera for Scott Stender, the man making a documentary about *Naming the Homeless*. The first call was from Tamieka Alford, who said that she had a satisfying job working with homeless prenatal parents and children. She is getting paid $6.50 an hour. Her son (who was 12 years old when I took Tamieka's first picture) is doing well. Patricia Davis was the next to call. She, too, loves her work as a counselor for people who are drug-dependent. She makes $8.00 an hour. She told me I could tell Tamieka to call her because her clinic was hiring. I believe Tamieka will stay on the track she started, but the notion of her and Patricia networking had never occurred to me. Neither had I seen how they both could have taken their worst experiences and turned them into the basis for employment. I am deeply admiring of the way they are working to support their children. There is a lot to be learned from these women.

I know the many people who gave money and time and clothes and food to make this project will be gratified to hear about any of the homeless models as they strive and develop. I for one am looking forward to the day Catherine Latta finishes her schooling and becomes a nurse. I want to know if Rosemary McCord got into the janitors' union. I can't find Larry Edmond. Is that because he finally went home to his family after 13 years away? I'm wondering if Richard Stephens applied to teach at the new public golf course at the Presidio. Everyone I know who was involved with this project is excited and curious when they spot one of the participants on the street. I only hope the models can appreciate how much they have expanded and enriched our lives. Thank you. Keep in touch.

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NAMING THE HOMELESS RESULTS

The best way to look at the success of the project is by looking at what has happened to some of the participants in the year since the pictures were taken.-L.G.

Kirstin Bain – She was living in Guerrero House. She is now supporting herself in an apartment and recently left a job as a manager at Tower Records to join the employee-owned cooperative at Rainbow Grocery.

Rosemary McCord – She was living in low-income housing and raising her son, Fabien. She has a five-year lease she hopes she can renew. But the city no longer pays her rent. She is now a janitor in a union, working toward seniority and a permanent job in an office building.

Catherine Latta – She was in Raphael House. She has since started the two-year program at Clara House and City College, where she is training to become a Licensed Vocational Nurse. She is a year through the program and very much looking forward to supporting herself and her son in their own apartment while she studies another two years to become a Registered Nurse.

Richard Stephens – He was moving from relative to relative as he tried recuperating from a near-fatal car crash which ended his career as a sky cab with his own shoe-shine business. His physical therapy was preoccupying. Now he has reconciled with his wife and they live in Cole Valley. As a boy Richard was a golfer who competed on the circuit in the mid-west. He now volunteers as a golf instructor to children in San Francisco and acts as a marshal on a course in Burlingame.

Patricia Davis – She was a heavy drug user, with two children she couldn't look after. She is now a clean, responsible single mother who loves her job as a counselor to drug-dependent individuals.

Tameika Alford – She is a third-generation welfare child. But after having her own baby, she found work as a councilor with prenatal homeless women. She is living in the Cecil Williams Glide Community House and looking forward to becoming a social worker.

Lenora Hughes – She was a drug-dependent young woman living from night to night in shelters that kicked her out during the day. Soon after I took her picture, she called to try and frighten me into giving her money. She has recently called again to tell me she's been through treatment for her drug addiction and she's doing well.

Response

ON LUCY GRAY'S PHOTOGRAPHS

Susan Garrett

If you had walked quietly into Grace Cathedral in San Francisco two winters ago, you would have faced an unusual sight. Exhibited on the church's interior pillars were photographs of homeless people, images that might have changed the content of your prayers that morning.

Photographer Lucy Gray's black-and-white portraits are beautiful in themselves. Take away their message and they stand alone as works of art. Contrast of light and shadow, soft clear tones, lines that let the eye lead itself effortlessly through substance and detail – all are there. But the message is Gray's intent. These are documentary works, photographs with a purpose. Each subject has been photographed twice, "before" and "after," first, as a homeless person or couple in their daily poverty, and second, as models: dressed in good clothes and posed as a commercial photographer might pose them for a magazine shot. It is essentially a gimmick, but an indirect one, designed to ask us to think differently about homeless people, to see them differently.

What does the photographer want us to see? Homeless people suddenly transformed into models, ideals, people "at their peak," as Gray writes in her accompanying text? Or people who could easily be our friends and neighbors? What first catches my interest in these photographs-with-a-purpose is the seeming ease, the relaxed comfort of the subjects in their new, dressed-up roles.

Here is Rosemary McCord. She stands in a doorway, her left hand gently supporting her in the frame. Behind her two small paintings hang on a wooden wall, hung for pleasure, for fun, placed off-center, for style, decoration, amusement. The expression on her face is one of mild curiosity, a wait-and-see look at something in the middle distance. For the matching "after" image, the photographer has persuaded her to put on a sleeveless sweater, long black satin gloves, a black feather necklace and a grand hat made of swirling white tulle piled on top of dark straw. Her hair has been cut and darkened, shaped in a chic French cut that ventures onto her cheek. It is the same face, the same strong-looking woman rising to this odd occasion by posturing as an actress might, mimicking slightly a pose that she thinks should go with the clothing. The detail that delights – what Roland Barthes would call the "punctum" – is the tattoo on her arm that is wonderfully out of place in the high-style costume. But what strikes me most about her – and about all of the subjects of these before-and-after photographs – is how naturally she assumes a new role in costume. She knows she is play-acting but the calm strength in her face tells us that she is herself. She could have been wearing that hat for years.

Look at the young couple sitting together on a mattress, looking out from the open door of their van. They are "down on their luck," as the text tells us, but except for some litter in the form of loose papers and a soda can, they appear content in their situation. Their little cat sits alertly by. A pair of sneakers looks clean, in good shape. After, when they are dressed in real clothes – she in a strapless black dress and he in a

good sweater and shiny leather jacket – their smiles are broader but they are the same people, capable of having fun, enjoying the moment.

Here also is Robert Simmons, who according to the text, "blew it" with his wife and daughter, but with two years of recovery he has gained back some of his life. In the first picture he is standing alone in front of a wooded path that appears to lead nowhere, his hands helplessly at his sides, looking at the camera with a bit of annoyance in his face. In the second picture he is sitting up on a comfortable-looking bed, dressed in pajamas and dressing gown, holding the Money & Business section of the *New York Times* and smiling, as if he were in agreeable conversation with someone in the room. It is the same Robert Simmons. What is surprising is the similarity, not the difference, between the subject's demeanor before and after. The same facial expression, almost. The same humanity; it does not change with new clothes, a new facade, or a new setting.

Now we see Richard Stephens, who survived a "near fatal car crash" in 1997. In the first picture he stands outside under a clothesline where a coat hangs by one small strong clothespin. This, by itself, is a beautifully composed picture. Indulging my own love of detail, I delight in the second clothespin on the line. This clothespin has nothing to hold and looks like a free but lonesome bird, filling no function. Richard Stephens' expression in the first picture is darkly serious, dignified, and it is the same in the second picture, where he is dressed in a good suit and seated in front of a full plate of food, holding up a glass of wine. A fine picture punctuated by the expression on Richard Stephens' face. We expect to see some joy and we do not. He does not celebrate his new situation because it is not real, it is a momentary play-act. He wonders if a joke is being played on him. Is he toasting the photographer? Or was he asked to hold up the glass and is going along with all of this, dutifully and without pleasure? We look at his eyes and see dignity, resignation, perhaps anger. I remain in front of him for a long time, and while searching and longing for a clue to his thoughts, I linger over the photographer's composition – the elegant, rhymed placement of a wine bottle and shakers of salt and pepper.

The human being is an entangled whole at all times in all situations, no matter what deprivation he or she must endure. Lucy Gray writes in her program notes: "These models are complex adults as rich as reality. Just because they are in need doesn't make them simple."

These photographs are subtle and completely engaging. Who are their subjects? We are alike, we and they. We are difficult creatures who share a common humanity. Lucy Gray's pictures show – not by a dramatic transformation of the subjects' appearance before and after but by the absence of transformation – that the homeless can, with attention from us, move into lives not unlike those of most of the churchgoers moving slowly along the aisles of Grace Cathedral.

Fiction

THE ROOMS OF MEMORY

Novel of a Dissolution

Christine Wolter
tr. from the German
by Isabel Cole

Book One
CRANZ

1

I saw this only once, one single time that rain-heavy summer I spent in the Berlin apartment, and though it was nothing out of the ordinary, and surely nothing supernatural, it seized me like an apparition. In the paling evening sky over the trees of the park, in the gray pink broken only by a withered acacia's rearing crown, birds wheeled. It was not a flock gathering for the autumn migration; the birds darted in all directions across the piece of sky, myriad solitary dark arcs. Are those swallows? I wondered, leaning my forehead against the pane, but even in the rose-gold glow it was too dark to make out the birds. Only their high wheeling flight was still visible and – perhaps because of the appalling silence all around – palpable.

It was a restless rising and sinking, black on vanishing bright, soundless. I watched it, I followed the teeming random motion, it drew me, I circled with it, leaning my face against the pane. That is me. I thought and did not think it; I thought next to nothing, only rose and fell, wheeling, mute, with a glassy sense of absence.

The last time: I did not really think this either, I saw it in the sky. I used to think it sometimes, at partings, on trips; it had been a dramatic, even melodramatic thought. Now everything was simply as it was.

The trees grew darker, the piece of sky was still bright, the black flitter rose and fell, on into the night. The oaks, acacias and lindens merged to a softly-swaying black mass. I turned away, back to the room which had once belonged to me, but the same twilight muteness awaited me there, only gentler, homelier, more familiar, even with the emptied bookcases.

Among the books I had set aside for myself before the used book dealer came was one I had read many years ago. It had always been like a friendly affirmation when I saw the black binding and the title in the red field, a reassuring pledge, a memory of her library from those distant shared years when the two of them, curious, not without irony, had dabbled in the currents of the life, death and nature philosophies. Now the book was packed away in a carton, the gold title on the red field out of sight: DEATH AS A FRIEND.

But really, I knew, this circling, some birds' black soaring, was not sad and not comfortless. For I did find comfort, especially on evenings like this, even if it was not enough to satisfy my thirst for it. Even this circling, now swallowed by the darkness as I turned away, was comfort. It really was, I said to myself, nothing could be better than

this soundlessness. This up and down soaring in unending unrest, this migration by unalterable decree. Not the image, not this vanished sky, so like the pale and mute sky of that other day, only I was sad.

"Memory is the only paradise from which we cannot be expelled." Who had said that? Someone had written it in a book of mine, a long time ago, perhaps K., with his weakness for quotations. It sounded good and it was – suddenly I laughed – nonsense. In the age of expulsions there was no paradise, however fictitious, from which you were not expelled. Paradises, if any still remained, were the actual ultimate goal of all expulsions, resettlements, devastations, they were there for people to be driven out of them. And: why call *memory* a paradise? Another lie. Back then the quotation had delighted me; K. had the gift of delivering quotations at just the right moment and making them a kind of present, which had only made me more in love with him.

My memories wheeled. Up and down, rising and falling, aimless, directionless. I followed them, aimless too, directionless, in search of something which might have been comfort and might have been pain; I rested my forehead against the pane again, but it was dark outside now. I saw the circling inside in my eyes when I looked back into the room, at the empty shelves.

In a distant summer, on the Baltic, we had sung the song of the migrating birds and drawn it over and over with colored pencils: *When summer's end is nigh/The little birds will fly...* the two of us sang it for the landlord and landlady, for the Ahrenshoop barber Saatmann and his pale wife with the trembling hand, who loved us, we stared at the trembling hand, the summer drew to an end, was it a paradise-summer? At least it recalled other lost summers in the blaze of white beaches, we sat in the big clean kitchen in the basement of the Saatmanns' house, watched lovingly by the pale woman, the migrating flocks passed over the wide salt marshes, we painted them on paper, with the beautiful lines of the electric wires over the flat green landscape which began just past our veranda. We knew that our summer's end was also nigh and we could not stay, that this beach and this sea did not belong to us as the beach and the sea had then, but at the same time the success of our singing and our painting delighted us; later, after the endless trek to the garden at the edge of town, the feeling of parchedness and suffocation came.

Now, in a rainy Berlin summer, I sat in a room which would grow barer and barer, a room I would leave for the last time. I thought this with a dull sadness, like someone hearing a long-awaited verdict; I had always known, sometimes thought it, sometimes rehearsed it inwardly, for years. For fifteen years: since I had moved out and yet remained, because she remained with all the rooms and her and my books, shelves, memories. For fifteen years I had asked myself – not often, though – what it would be like, this last moving-out, and stopped thinking about it before I could answer.

No tragedy, no expulsion, no exodus like the one now sweeping Europe, it was only the course of things, the course of time. It was a quiet, natural cessation, and into it the past crept, evenings in the deserted apartment, bringing expulsion, flight, war, from letters, diaries and photos; the past and not past: memory – a paradise?

On one of those evenings my friend Elke picked me up and we spent two hours in our old pub in Grünau, she with a pint and I with black beer, we talked about our husbands and our sons, about friends, books, and finally about her approaching

fiftieth birthday, and as we came out of the warm miasma of the pub into the drizzle and got into her new car (we still said: *westcar*), she said, as if to sum up our conversation: "At our age the crucial part is behind us. We've already experienced the most important things."

She started the motor, turned, and swung out smartly onto the wet street. I understood that this statement was not part of the litany of the fifty-year-olds. Elke was not one of the losers – if one disregarded her chronic loss of glasses and keys, which was more a sign of her phenomenal activity – but rather one of those capable few who were still willing to help. I stared into the rain as it whipped down with increasing force. No, the crucial part had not yet happened, it had yet to come, it would take place – I could be wrong, but the important thing was that I was expecting it.

As Elke steered around the puddles between the streetcar tracks, I thought of a remark I had encountered on the page of a letter on one of my solitary evenings, a casual remark which sounded casual and was a parting, the final one after so many others, "I can't drive in the dark anymore." On this same street, in the last year of his life, he had driven onto a construction site in his Wartburg Coupé and had gotten stuck on the tracks over a missing stretch of street, it must have been this stretch of Grünauer Strasse, in his eightieth year, twenty years ago. The street gleamed and dazzled. I didn't want to contradict Elke; for one thing she wouldn't tolerate it, despite our friendship, in her present state of westjob-overload. But I thought: I am still waiting for it, for the crucial part. And hadn't it been an omen that on the very evening of my fiftieth birthday my sister had sat up with me in the kitchen after all the others had gone to bed, and we had begun to talk about her?

Suddenly both of us had wept, we had embraced and reconciled ourselves with her, the eighty-year-old sleeping in the next room. She's old, after all, I said sobbing into the sobs of my sister. Only on this fiftieth birthday was that possible, not only because of my sister's first officially-sanctioned westtrip to visit me, above all because of my fifty years.

Elke hugged me when she dropped me off at the lonely house in the park. Now the crucial part was this: the mute evenings in the emptying apartment.

I stood at the window in the light of the still-bright piece of sky. I leafed through his last letters to her from that winter twenty years ago, when he was forbidden to drive in the dark after the accident on Grünauer Strasse, and at the end of which he died.

They weren't really letters, only brief messages which he enclosed with his remittances, sometimes only a greeting. In another portfolio I found children's drawings, one in which I recognized the salt marshes behind the veranda of the Saatmann house in Ahrenshoop; more drawings were pasted in an album, my name and the year 1946 stood on the first page, in his handwriting. Later she had put our children's drawings alongside ours. Everything was saved. So that I would see it now one more time? I found drawings and watercolors of hers as well. The childhoods mingled, she must have been the same age as we, as our children, six or seven; her pictures were charming and very funny; she had never showed them to us.

That last summer too I slept in the little room in the middle of the apartment, where the windows faced the back of the garden with the rotten arbor, the mugwort shooting up in the rain, the rampant maple saplings. The room fit only a bed and closet, a tiny table and a small bookshelf, now emptied like the others; the big two-piece

closet custom-made in the sixties by the Schumann company (purveyor to the apparatchiks), birch on the outside and reddish tropical wood on the inside, was empty, in a few days my nephew would come to pick it up.

Once, not long before, I had lain there staring at the closet, this once so precious piece of furniture, which had held all my bedclothes, table-linen and underwear; I was not really looking at the closet, but at a Picasso print which had ended up on one of the doors, showing part of a piano, a grand piano. Suddenly I thought of all the pianos we had had in this apartment, the closets which had stood in this room, the beds, and I decided to take stock of everything, all this furniture, this stuff, this junk, these bought, rescued, inherited clothes – dust and life clung to them, and they in turn would cling to us or we to them, until one day we left this rotten ark which she now navigated alone. It would be a stocktaking of all the shuffling about we had done in these five rooms in the course of forty years; on top of that the occupation of the apartment by Aunt Suse's furniture, the inheritance which had descended upon us with its musty smell and could not be let go to waste; and all the moving out, separations, divorces; and all the burst pipes, cesspool stoppages, burglaries; nor could I forget the garden, the big trees which merged into the tree-nursery in the back and the gentle slope of the park in the front, how the vegetable garden was fenced off and built up with the shacks of the house management, how garages of tar-board and corrugated iron sprouted on all sides like mushrooms, looking shabby before they were finished, and her roses, her phlox, the long-vanished blue clouds of the larkspur and the tall evening primroses which last surrounded the house.

The small room faced the front door; you could see in from the vestibule when the doors were open, and someone was always saying: Shut the door! The bed consisted of a wooden frame with four short legs, a box spring and a mattress; over it lay a handwoven blanket with a geometric irregular pattern in brown and light shades, which they had brought with them from East Prussia. This was his bedroom. She slept in the larger room next door, where the rectangular dining table stood with four chairs, on an improvised couch whose back was made of pillows of gray-pink sackcloth with sawdust filling; over it lay the second East Prussian blanket. But I can't remember whether he really slept in the small room. One scene lingered: he came home, *drunk*, I knew; she had hidden with me, in the third, back room, then the children's room. He shouldn't go, he couldn't go: I had to tell him that, if I said it, she repeated, he wouldn't be able to. But in this scene he only kept calling for her, staggering and enraged.

She moved into the small room. His charcoal drawing was left hanging over the bed, the portrait of a child with pale curls. He took very few of his drawings and paintings with him.

Usually guests stayed in the small room. Nori from Halle, the painter Birnbaum from Dresden, the grandmother from Radebeul. Once a man rang the doorbell – she was not at home – familiar and cheerful and already standing in the living room. He came from Halle, he said, an old friend.

We sneaked into the guest room, where the stranger had already unceremoniously hung his coat inside the door; something hairy, which we thought was a wig, peeked out of the coat pocket. She came home from Grohmann's Picasso lecture in West Berlin, laughed, and ushered him out; Nori's friend took the fur gloves

from his coat pocket and bowed. The room was often in use, they liked to come, made the crossing, smoked herring, chocolate, coffee, movies.

And one came because of her. He seemed tall and imperiously handsome to me, his dark eyes in the sharp face were bright, piercing. Come to me for a little, he said, but she did not go over to the guest room; she laughed (that last year she told me this for the first time). Defensively.

I, the daughter, went naked through the apartment, from the bath into the children's room, as I always did – to be seen by him. He loved straight legs like mine. His sculptor's gaze did me good: I walked in it, walked from the bath through mother's-bed-living-and-dining room into the children's room.

After 1961 we rarely had guests. I came home late from the movies, I let myself be kissed in front of the house, unlocked the door quietly. Light burned in the small room, she always left her door open a crack.

I moved into the small room so that K., who had compiled a collection of quotes for me from antiquity to the classical period, and whom I loved, could have my former small front room, far away from her. She had taken the old children's room. Now I was in the middle, and bore the brunt of her war against us.

He found room for a chest of drawers. I changed the baby on top of the chest of drawers; the wicker cradle stood next to my bed; I listened in astonishment to the nightly breathing, the energetic sucking. I unlock the door of the apartment, drop my valise, reach the room in two strides, fling the door open: the child is sitting in his little bed, with puffy cheeks, a face which no longer believes in my return. He looks at me, strange and sad. Once more I promise him never to go away again.

The child's bed (plastic, pressboard, foam rubber mattress) no longer fit in the little room. With cars and trains, with crates, hammers and nails, the child migrated into the far-away room where K. had lived.

My visitor crossed Europe. I could only wait for him, read his officially-opened letters. The visitor brought an ashwood frame on the roof of his car; he came in the winter, over the Alps, through snow and rain, and built a bed for the two of us in the small room.

It was supposed to stay my room when I moved away, with him and with the boy. Bed, closet, books stayed behind. But gradually she repossessed it, her clothes hung in the closet. When I cleaned the room to rent it out, a final wrong-headed, well-meant and underhanded campaign to keep her from being so lonely in all those rooms, there was another fight. We ran screaming through the apartment. The room was left as she wanted it; she slept there when she was alone because she was less afraid in the small room in the middle of the apartment.

When I came to visit, I was a guest in my old room. She made my bed the last time too, in the spring holidays, despite her swollen legs, despite the weakness. In the evening when she came to my bed, still wide-awake from our conversations and agitated by all the stirred-up memories, she asked me whether I wanted to take my father's drawing, the portrait of the child with pale curls which still hung over the head of the bed.

No, I said, no.

"You looked like an angel."

A wind from the Alps, the sky bright, the Isar spring-blue. They stayed the night at her sister's in Bogenhausen, a pause on their trip to the Allgäu, a beautiful day.

The painter goes sketching. Buy some pretzels, says the sister. She holds the child's hand on the beautiful broad street. Jubilant sun. The child takes little steps, the little curls bob, white little curls, a white-blonde corkscrew mop, glistening in the light. Holding the child's hand, little words, little steps, and suddenly she sees men coming toward her, a tight-girded group, epaulettes, glass eyes, stone eyes, quickquickquick come the steps – slamming, leather and steel, now the leather and steel faces are close, now in front of her, straps belts guns, the child hops, the little hand in her hand, no side street, he's bending down already, as he always does, nose-dive, bombing squadron, swoops down upon his prey, a blonde German child, is anyone watching? She clutches the little hand, he leans forward, leathern and jangling, the throaty shoutvoice chuckles and rolls, such a darling, rasps forth from a too-narrow overstrained overwrought throat, a darling, the white-blonde curls hop in the breath of the dead mask, the iron lock slips, he laughs, grins, straightens up, the moment seized, they march away, they clatter, clomp, click their heels, the boots trample the pavement, the child says a little word, the woman wakes up, her knees buckle, her icy hands slip, she clings tight to the little hand, it leads her back, Ludwigstrasse, we're just passing through, the headquarters back there, not to the baker, get back as fast as possible, the trembling spreads, rises up the arms to the neck, over the chest, the nape, it leaves behind a coldness, an itching shiver on the skin. What's wrong, asks her sister, but she runs past, the words can't come out yet, she stumbles into the room, we saw him, she says and throws herself onto the couch, face down. Up close, he was standing right in front of us, he wanted to put his hands on, he wanted to touch the child, she shudders, she is freezing and drenched in sweat, blistering spots appear on her arms. She pulls the blanket over her head. I saw him, up close, he stood in front of me, with that bloody earthy voice, the dead man's eyes, draw the curtains, turn out the light.

The child stays in the room with her, holds its stuffed animal in its arms, dances a mute dance in front of the couch, then in a quiet voice it starts to sing, a good-night song in the bright afternoon. *Mama is sick*, it sings, and dances up to the painter as he comes in with his sketchpad, Mama is sick – Mama is sick, it dances and sings its singsong and rocks the stuffed animal to sleep.

2

White: Tears on frosty skin, crunching white, you slid and ran, wool socks over your shoes, trudged uphill to the hollow, the hull of blankets on the skis, into the roughwoolly browncheckered warmth, threadbare timeworn and still warming, you were sheltered by fence and house and trees, birds fluttered around the birdhouse on its high leg. To be was: to inscribe your own steps in the white – alongside the bird tracks, the ski tracks, white in white. The voices bright, ice flower songs on the windows.

White and light.

Why? Don't remember. Remember why?

What is memory, what is remembered story?

The snow painted in 1943 was gray and heavy by contrast, lying like plump pillows on paths and bushes, around the entrance to the cellar, hanging cottony in the trees which hemmed in the gaze and guided it into the garden, in whose midst Elfriede chopped wood in her red jacket. A white with the look of thaw, painted lightly but precisely, in almost naive manner, so it seemed to me as I studied the picture in the hall of the Berlin apartment with sudden curiosity, as if I might detect something. What could it tell me, except that it was a touch academic but still painterly, with that carefree or careless naivete in the rendering of the snow? What did the date say, this *1943*? The impenetrable gray behind the backdrop of winter-bare trees which surrounded the garden, what could it say about the painter, about me?

The other, the summerwhite, was higher, horizonwide. It flew with the gulls, frothed, surged over the beach, over the breakwaters, into the minute endlessness. My being, not yet an I, was naked, in white brightness. It ran, hopped, knelt in the sand, it built: room upon room of kelp and pieces of bark, it built houses, enclosures with small shadows in the blinding light. Wavetongues licked shells out of the sand, and stones. Two children ran along the beach, gathered in the white sand white, smooth, oval stones. Two children, naked in their sunskins, sought forms which meant to them what they knew but we no longer know. They counted before they could count. I more than you. You as much as I.

Stones, white egg-forms. White the beach, the sand, felt by feet, white the foam, the day was bright and long, it never ended. The small voices mingled with the roar. Suddenly it was evening. But the roar remained, inside and outside, day and night. Christian went home to his grandparents behind the garden fence. The white-haired grandparents were called Seliger, blissful. Tomorrow was distant and blissfully certain: a new, bright endlessness.

"When you finally got hair..." she laughed. She had often told me the story. Their friends made fun of the newborn's round, naked skull: Like her father! Like the fifty-year-old, practically bald father! When your hair finally grew, it was blonde, a silvery fluff. Angelhair. White. Foam. That's how your father sketched you. The foam of the sea, down there, below the house – a path led out of the garden down the bluffs – bushes, nettles, steps – don't remember how – to endless games. Remember only this.

White: Bitter on the tongue. Juice, furred with a layer of white, heavenfar, Christmassy, harsh, a taste you never found again in life, a bitterness, bloomy, a sharp skin of dreamed aromas, studded with yellow-red drops. The dry white was the essence, it was the exquisite, never-again-tasted. First single orange, war ration for children, in the bitter-sweet white: the edge, the border between inside and outside, Christmas present.

No, not a special ration, she said. The fruit woman gave it to me on the sly because I had given her a massage. On the sly, already wrapped in a bag.

Voices. Someone said: those are children, talking and singing. Someone said: the voices come on wires, through the air. Wires swung outside in the wind, from the street to the house, birds landed flapping. You knew: those were birds. They sang in a language which you did not understand, because the words flew up from the wires stretched from the street to the house.

You sang. Your song sprang from a book which lay in front of you...

You sang of black berries, white lambs. On your lips you had the taste of the berries which lay in the chip basket on the page of the book in front of you, black and bright, you tasted the heat of the sun and the sweetness of the songwords in the soft speech. No one spoke it but she with invisible friends, letter speech, dream speech, *vita lam, har du nogon öll*, white white lamb, white soft wool, for Mother and Father, *mor och far*.

We sat across from each other in her former living-, dining- and bedroom, now commanded by Aunt Suse's Biedermeier sofa, she in her chair, I on the sofa. One question was enough. She was filled with memories, her life was waiting for my questions, it lived and unfolded, her long life, as soon as she spoke the first words. She took me with her, dragged me into the current, into the maelstrom which snatched and jumbled and swept up everything: her memories, and mine, and others' memories which came to mind, until her thin face flushed. She forgot her aching legs, we wandered through the garden of those days, we were home, in our true eternal home, among all the good and loved ones who returned to us from the void. Then the birches stood by the fence again, the currant bushes, the blue-glimmering larkspur swayed, the evening primroses strove upward in front of the veranda, guests came; she went through the garden and scattered sand, white sand which the guests carried up from the beach. They had many guests – even in the dark years – who came to swim, and drank tea on the terrace below the veranda; all of them had to bring a bucket of sand up the steep seaside path, gradually loosening the heavy loamy soil in the garden.

I remembered the white sand, and the white snow...

The snow is damp, the gray shadows show how heavy and wet it is, and the sky is gray as well. Around the snowy garden and the woodcutter, trees stand woven against the impenetrable gray of the sky.

The woodcutter is the house-maid Elfriede. Big, strong. She swings the axe high above the chopping block. Yellow billets lie in the snow. Elfriede is wearing a red jacket, a cheerful spot in the center of the picture, the only one, bright as fresh blood.

On one side of the picture the ground rises under the snow: the cellar, built when the summer house became a home. In the end it was an illusory shelter, when the English bombers on their way back from Königsberg dropped their remaining bombs over the sea and made the bluffs quake and with them the wooden house, the cellar, the garden, the trees, the rabbit-hutches, the hen-house. But I don't remember that, neither the trembling of the earth nor her trembling as she stooped with us two children in the cellar. The picture is still, white-gray, ringed by birches and willows, in the middle the raised arm, the falling billet, the bright red fleck. I never really looked at it, never examined it closely and searchingly, I never saw it the way you see a picture. It was always there, for forty years it hung in the hall of the Berlin apartment when I came from school, from the university, from work, and later, when I came to visit, in the slowly decaying house which she never wanted to move away from. He had left it her when he left her.

Her picture was surely a different one than mine: a piece of her garden, one day in her East Prussian winter, but more than that the picture was *him*: the painter in front of the silent scene. She watched him sketch, disappear with the drawings into the studio, which was nothing but the converted garage (the car had long since been requisitioned for the war), and load the palette with colors. She loved the picture, she liked it better than their friend Partikel's work; he painted one Flora after the other – in times like these! – lying, standing Flora-women with flowers or fruits in their arms and a rounded line to the shoulders to make the figure solid and plastic and a touch Germanic. She loved the snow picture, which was signed: "H.H. 1943".

In my pictures, which are not painted, only a drifting, a glittering, the snow was white, so burning white that the tears came, even in memory, and you cried out for Mother, the mothers.

On the flight home from spending the spring holidays with her, I found a brief article in the Berlin morning papers: "At Tegel Airport yesterday Aeroflot inaugurated the first regular route from Germany to Königsberg (Kaliningrad), flight-time one hour. According to the director of the airline office, potential customers are mostly Germans wishing to revisit their East Prussian *heimat*."

I flew home in the opposite direction, to Milan; the Alps came into view below us. I was not flying to East Prussia – but once, years before, on a flight to Leningrad, I had suddenly seen a black silhouette in the white-silver Baltic below me, a land formation with two narrow tongues projecting into the sea, and thought their no longer existing names: Samland, Fresh Spit, Curonian Spit. Names from the past. In June, 1993, I was coming from my mother, from her – and my – Berlin apartment which was still a home to me. Every evening, sitting across from each other, she on her chair, I on Aunt Suse's sofa, we had spoken of Königsberg, of Cranz, Nidden, Rauschen, Pillau, the places from Nevermore.

Did I want to see Königsberg again? Could Aeroflot take me there, an hour's flight? Could I find my place by the sea again in the endless beating of the waves, the shore, the house, the garden, the beach, where a child built rooms with pieces of bark and scraps of kelp and sprigs of a small plant with pointy leaves which clung to the sand, rooms which are its true home?

I don't want to go to Königsberg (Kaliningrad), I thought. There's nothing I want to see again. The annihilated city, the empty place on the bluffs where a wooden house once stood, a painter's studio, a garden, a cellar. The house burned. I want to

leave it standing in memory. I have nothing to visit, nothing to recognize, no paths to retrace. Only within us should these places appear if they still can. If we still know how to call them.

Inside was brightness and darkness. The big room bright where they sat in their wicker chairs, holding the newspaper in front of them with outstretched arms and making the words rustle. But you fetched the berry-basket and the flowers, the butterflies and the meadow dwarves, all you had to do was turn to them, they lay in the brown bookcase in the corner:

Bä, bä, vita lam
har du nagon ull
Ja, ja, lilla barn
jag har sacken full...

The white lamb's promise delighted you, for you were the child in the meadow, the child who set out into the sky-blue world, mors lille Olle, that was you. You didn't know why the white lamb promised Father a Sunday coat and Mother a holiday dress, you waited for the most beautiful line, the announcement which filled you with longing and tenderness and which you wanted to hear again and again; you saw them clearly, the tiny white socks for the little little brother, they hung over the song on a clothesline

och tva par strumpor
at lille lille bror.

The big room enveloped you with ocher hues, green was the airy veranda, yellow the tiled stove stood in solitary splendor in the middle with its encircling bench.

Further inside the house was dark. Once you fled, but they stood in front of you, you crouched at the height of their arms, you edged into the furthest corner, but you knew that in a moment they would grab you and tear the bandages from your legs, they would hurt you again; they coaxed you, you did not believe them and yet you had to inch forward, toward their hands. Who left the bucket of boiling water standing around for the child to stumble into?

It wore booties with soles of smooth kid which I found again in that long summer when I was emptying out the drawers; they lay small and gray at the bottom. I did not realize what they were until I had thrown them away.

Black was the night outside, black was the flat man with the big hat who slunk around the house. They left a light on in the corridor to keep away the coal thieves. Then the little flowers on the curtains around the bed came to life, they opened their mouths wide, flashed claws, goggling eyes. The ugly faces danced, they whirled white on red, they gave you no peace, and then, all at once, they vanished. They lurked in the folds – and there: the game was afoot again, but now the other way around, now it was red faces which peered out of the white, small and wicked with their round eyes and short tails, and carried on the twitching dance.

Later the red and white curtains hung in our nurseries, in Halle, in Berlin. The pattern had dwindled, nothing more could be seen of the wicked tormenting games, but at the sight of this fabric I sensed a residual antipathy, a memory of the tireless monsters which had now melted away into the cheerful pattern.

They stood behind the house, face to face, separated by chicken wire, the rabbit cloudy, its nose pink, a trembling and muttering and soft hair combed daily. The child answered the mutter.

I can read now, said the child, it held a piece of newspaper in front of its face and moved its lips. The paper rustled, the child mumbled, now it could do what the two of them demonstrated, he and she, when they sat in the room in their wicker chairs, the newspaper in their outspread arms.

The child waited for the dandelion leaf to grow shorter under the pink triangle. It stood behind the house, where the cellar and the wood-yard in the thawing snow were painted forever, it laid its hands against the little doors, the silvery chicken wire behind which the other face pink-white looked straight ahead.

"All that combing!" she said.

She had told me the story of the angora rabbit so many times, the hutch which the painting architect built, the hair she combed from the rabbit day after day, which she gathered and had spun, the white angora sweater she knitted for the child, of old Augstein who came to butcher the rabbit, and how the child would not touch meat, she had told all these things so often, to the child and me, that the memory of the white-pink face has almost faded away.

Who was old Augstein?

He used to be a cotter.

And he did butchering too?

He did everything, she said impatiently; we both knew old Augstein well, I only knew him from her stories. You didn't touch a thing. For a long time you wouldn't eat meat. Then, one day you had forgotten it, your rabbit.

We sat together in the evenings, facing each other; I had to take the Biedermeier sofa which was so hard to get up from. Every day I read microfilms in the library. I read the year 1944 in the *Völkischer Beobachter,* the perpetual reports of strategic withdrawals on the front page and the profusion of minutiae, miscellany and fatuousness inside, announcements of rations, animal fats for cooking oil, cheap tips, mushrooms as a source of protein, edification, abundance of children in all ranks of the *Volk*, waiter executed for collaboration with the enemy, that too in miscellany. Rabbit pelts essential to the war effort! Private use of private production prohibited After stripping, the pelt must be stretched and dried slowly in the shade Anyone can build a pelt-stretcher following the instructions in the pamphlet "Every Pelt Counts" published by the Reich Section for Rabbit Breeding Three weeks after stripping the pelts may be handed in at the nearest collection point.

With her in the evening, on the sofa. Did you hand in the rabbit pelt?

She laughed, scornfully.

She had told me what they had to hand over: the car, later the skis. Then they lay around in big piles somewhere.

They had hidden the books.

Old Augstein took the pelt with him, and that was that.

They stood on the high bluffs, the storm tore at the trees, a squalling whistle filled the air, mingled with the rolling of the surf; behind them, stretched out flat under the wind, lay the garden, the house, once their summerhouse and now their home.

They had abandoned the attic apartment on the castle pond, they had abandoned the famous city on the Pregel with its castle, its warehouse district, its modern buildings. It was a city which had seemed open even as the horizon narrowed over the center of the land.

Where the architect H.H. embraced the New Objectivity: "The most sober, the most mathematical, in a certain sense the most inartistic solution will be the most truthful, the most expedient, the most satisfactory, and a new canon will gradually emerge from an aggregation of such solutions." Where he could build great things: the exhibition hall, the school, the hotel. Where a young physiotherapist found work. Back then: when life was on the upswing.

A year later they drove away from the city on the sea, not to go bathing, not to garden or to paint. It was better not to be at home. The young woman and the successful architect went on a strange honeymoon. They were on the move, a night here, a night there; the scare would soon be over, said the intellectual circles. They had laughed at the Blood and Soil style, never would they submit to them, not in art, not in life, never lick blood and kiss the ground before their kind, everyone had said that. But already it was time to hide, blood was already flowing, in cellars people were already being beaten to the bloody ground. Already someone was no longer speaking to someone. They slept at friends', they left the city, the great, famous city which hailed the savior man at his triumphant entrance. They were left with the little wooden house, they installed an oven and double windows, built the cellar.

They stood on the bluff behind the garden. The storm churned the clouds, the water. At the edge of the wood a tree tilted, fell slowly, slid part of the way down the slope, the roots stared up, the crown struck the beach.

A man passed them, a man who loved the sea. They knew him, he was a good swimmer, they saw him pile his clothes on the dry strip of the foam-washed beach. He ran into the surf, toward the waves, arms like wings, through the breaking autumn fury. The sea was white, white with frenzy. They had warned him, had told him that the sea would drag him out. He knew the sea, he said. The woman had clutched at his jacket for a moment, a short pleading gesture. The swimmer, laughing: In the fall it's at its best.

He had crossed the sand, passed the rim of foam.

He swam. They watched him, watched him go. Watched him turn, fling up his arms – toward them. They stood, bent against the storm, not a soul, no boat anywhere, no one. They stood, and out there the swimmer swam, torn away, out into the gray. The storm screamed.

He was found two days later.

They talked about it over and over. Over and over they retold it to each other. They counted the words of their conversation, the minutes. They repeated their words, his laugh. The woman repeated her gesture. How can you hold on to someone who storms out confident and unwitting? *I know the sea*. Seconds, minutes. How he turned, far out, barely visible, certainly no longer audible in the roaring of the air and the water. The flung-up arms. Not a soul far and wide. The rumble and thunder of the breaking waves, the white lightness of the welling streak of foam.

We had to stand by and watch... she had said, back then; she repeated it, sitting across from me.

The wide landscape of the beaches. Sandland where we built rooms. Walls of bark and black kelp, rooms where we lived in spirit. Carpets of white sand, gardens of white sand, green lyme-grass grew there, and the creeping twigs of the sandwort. The sun hung over our dwellings, these houses were much smaller than we, we were giants, we lived at the edge of endlessness. The days were long, we were double and naked, we found egg-stones, they sprang white from the white sand, bared themselves under our feet, I'll give you mine, and you keep mine, we'll lay them under our pillows, we'll feel them, smooth, eternal.

The grown-ups sat in the garden, the neighbors, the old Seligers, white-haired, at the tea-table with the colorful cups, the sun flickered warm in the trees, the beds overflowed with flowers, in the shadows stood the baby-carriage with the new, tiny child, covered with a veil. Wonderful summer, summer full of wounds. Their friend Partikel had lost his son, eighteen-year-old Adrian. What a July. The last. Irises, the last; evening primroses, mallow, the last; we will not stay for the asters. They sat in the sun, they drank tea, it's time to pack, we can't believe it.

Christian, we're going home.

The game did not end, the game did not divide into I and you, it mingled us, we went on playing, the great roar waited for us till morning, there was only the path through the garden, the bushes, the nettles, then down the bluffs... and once again we were in eternity.

Christian was gone.

He left with his grandmother, the bright opposite, my other, equal in play. He had left a present, a brightly-painted tin, decorated all over with palaces, palms, garlands, *Made in Bombay*, said the label, which I deciphered much later and did not understand.

3

In that rainy summer the evening primroses had shot up tall and exuberant; I saw them as I stood at the window and looked out into the green-rampant garden, and at the same time I heard myself cry out. "I hate this apartment!" I was so angry that I nearly screamed it. We were not sitting in the big room with the book cases, but in her room, where she had seated me on the Biedermeier sofa so that I would stay put and not keep running into the kitchen and interrupting her storytelling. Once again I had described to her all the disadvantages of the apartment in the run-down house, all the aggravation, the trouble, and now, in these new times, the costs as well, the rent, the thousands she burned for fuel without getting the five rooms warm, the seeping rain-water, the damp walls, the rotting-away shutters and all the difficulties with the new house management, which had remained its old self... All the things she knew perfectly well herself. I had gotten angry and almost believed myself: "I hate this apartment!" I announced in a shrill voice, the one I always got when I wanted to discuss something with her and knew from the start that she would never give in.

I kept finding new, highly plausible reasons why she should finally move into a small, comfortable apartment, where she wouldn't have to go down the cellar stairs anymore to start the fuming central heating oven, where she wouldn't have to carry the ashes upstairs, gather kindling and chop wood. Yes, yes, she said, and as my voice reached the climax of shrillness and I explained to her that she wouldn't be able to stand the horrendous loneliness any longer and the nightly fear, the voices, that she got no pleasure out of her garden anymore, and that it was much too big for her all by herself, she said quietly, "You may be right."

She said it so gently, so wearily, that all my zeal was extinguished, my concern and my good advice fell silent. On every one of my visits we had talked this subject through to the point of exhaustion, she had told me again and again that she could not move now, that she had to hold out. I've moved too many times, now I have to stay. From the hymnal verses, which came to her effortlessly, she had quoted the line, "abide, my soul," with the ironic sing-song which she liked to use for hymns, "*abide, my soul...*"

For a moment I thought my self-righteous talk had convinced her, but that thought was done with before it was finished. Her surprising gentleness expressed something she did not find necessary to explain to me. A kind of pity, toleration of my blindness. She had given up disputing with me; she was tired of my good intentions, my good egotistic intentions, she no longer resented them as bitterly as in the past, but she did not want to defend herself before them anymore. You may be right, she said, got up from her chair across from me at the narrow table with a certain effort, and sat in her armchair in front of the switched-off television, as if to distance herself from me, to withdraw from my arguments, which, when we had fought earlier, she had called *stupid and super-smart*.

As I leaned against the window, looking out into the green-rampant garden and listening to our voices, the evening primroses caught my eye. They towered in front of the window and around the entire vacant house, they encircled it like a hedge, they even sprouted from the cracks between the crumbling bricks of the flat base which went around the entire building. The lower star-shaped basal leaves formed a dense silver-green fringe out of which the stems rose, set with buds, several blossoms blazing

out bright yellow even in the rain. The wet summer had spurred their growth, the plants forced their way out of the barren sand with thick leaves and unusually strong, tall stalks, like candles in this mute garden which was a garden no longer. I saw her as I stood at the window, letting the last daylight shine on the photos as I put them away in a box.

I saw the dimming yellow glow of the flowers. I remembered arriving last winter in the dark and taking alarm at a row of withered forms swaying in the fog; they were the withered remains of the evening primroses, as I saw the next day, and I was not allowed to touch them. I secretly pulled up a few of them and threw them into the bushes, to free at least the entrance from these smog-blackened plant cadavers, these ghostly sentinels. She regarded my stupid orderliness with scorn; she thought of the seed of the abiding plants, of the future blossoms, their grateful opening day after day, this modest, vigorous growth, this honey-yellow above the silver-green, as she had always loved it, as it rose before her out of her memories, so alive that it became one with the yellow of the present.

In the drawers where she had kept the painter's watercolors, I found a portfolio containing his large watercolor of evening primroses, from Cranz, which I had only forgotten, along with it several sketches which always showed the same group, the bright blooming stalk rising triumphant in the middle.

As I was putting away photos in the evening light, at the window of the big room with her last evening primroses blooming outside, all at once I saw the climbing syringia on the pergola she had spoken of; in the yellowed black and white I saw the blue of the blooming larkspur and the overwhelming luster of the evening primroses in her long-deluged garden.

A CONVERSATION WITH ODILE HELLIER

Proprietor of the Village Voice Bookshop

Paris

Katherine McNamara

"If the bookseller has disappeared, and is only a salesperson, it means that there is no vision. It means that there is no knowledge. It means that, if you sell Gertrude Stein, you put Gertrude Stein at the same level as [John] Grisham: it makes no difference, a book is a product. Thus we have seen the leveling of the meaning of books."

For three years I have been asking notable publishers and editors about the book business, its history, and the remarkable alteration we have seen in its structure. Generously, these persons have told me how they entered the trade; spoken about writers they've published and declined to publish; described the (changing) class structure of their domain; talked straight about money, commerce, and corporate capitalism; described their way of practicing responsible publishing. Without exception, they are serious readers, usually of more than one language. They recognize that times have changed. They speak with wary-friendly observation of the generations coming up. They speak from the old values and traditions of book-publishing.

But, once books are published, where do they go? To the bookshop? More likely, to the chain store: Barnes and Noble, Borders, Chapters; and to Amazon, the internet octopus.

Where are the small independent bookshops, where a thoughtful reader may browse at his leisure; where an insistent reader expects to find the new titles by her favorite authors? Where can any reader go, now, to inquire of a bookseller who knows his stock, indeed, who knows books at all? These booksellers and shops exist. Serious readers all know one or two of them. They prefer to buy their books there. They resist driving to a chain store, or ordering from Amazon, which tracks their purchases – even their movements – electronically and presumes (by computer) to know their taste. A conversation with an independent bookseller would, I thought, offer another insight into the chaotic business of books and why we all still need and want them.

Excerpts of these conversations about books and publishing will continue to appear regularly in Archipelago, *and may serve as an opening into an institutional memory contrasting itself with the current corporate structure, reflecting on glories of its own, revealing what remains constant amid the flux. Despite their surround of gentility, these people are strong-minded characters engaged with their historical circumstances. Out of that engagement have appeared, and continue to be sold, a number of books that we can say, rightly, belong to literature.*

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See also:
A Conversation with Marion Boyars, *Archipelago*, Vol. 1 No. 3
A Conversation with Cornelia and Michael Bessie, Vol. 1 No. 4 *and* Vol. 2, No. 1

Odile Hellier, of the Village Voice Bookshop

In 1982, Odile Hellier opened the Village Voice to a city suddenly awake to the vitality and diversity of Anglo-American literature. Today, the Village Voice is ranked by *The Bookseller*, the British trade journal, as the best independent literary bookstore in Europe. In the intervening eighteen years, the world has changed; where better to reflect on it than amid Odile Hellier's well-stocked bookshelves?

The proprietor and her bookshop can be found on a small street, the rue Princesse, off the rue du Four, in the glittering shopping district that the old literary neighborhood of St.-Germain has become. Still, she survives. Her shop is filled. On display tables are the new hard-cover titles from all the leading publishers, handsomely stacked, intelligently arranged. On the shelves, where her thoughtful hand has placed them, venerable paperbacks seem to talk to each other. They invite the browser into their conversation. Odile Helllier herself, slim, serious (until her face breaks into a warm smile), is always running. She greets you, leads you to the table of new books, puts into your hand a volume she thinks you'll want to see, then darts off to pick up the phone, speak with a book representative, answer a question, confer with a colleague. She races up and down the stairs; she shifts cartons (which are always arriving); she checks the computer; she replies to a fax. Her colleagues run in her wake.

In the early 1980s, Odile Hellier had returned to Paris after a decade spent in the States and, before that, graduate studies in the Soviet Union. Unwilling to work in the corporate world, vividly aware of the openness of American society, she realized that Paris needed the books and authors she knew were important. (She is considered by many writers and academics the best-read person in France of contemporary American and English literature.)

Odile and I are friends. I stay with her when I am in Paris. I spend hours in the Village Voice. I arrived there four and a half years ago, after my own life had changed, with an introduction from Sarah Gaddis, an American writer who had lived for some years in France. At once I was welcomed. Immediately began our long conversation, Odile's and mine, about books, and society, and life. When, the next year, I was organizing *Archipelago*, she only encouraged me, though she dislikes much about the internet. She agreed, despite her terrifically busy schedule, to become a contributing editor.

Recently, we talked over the course of an evening in January. It was an interesting moment. We had entered a new century; already, life was changing around us, in ways we wanted to chart. AOL had announced to an electrified media that it was going to buy Time Warner. The following week, the World Economic Forum would be convened in Davos, where the electronically-based "new economy" was to be the topic of conversation among world leaders of politics and business. (In the *International Herald Tribune* I would read that Yassir Arafat wanted first to meet Jeff Bezos!) Vodaphone, the British manufacturer of telephone hardware, was about to acquire Mannesman, the enormous German communications corporation, promising Europe an advance into e- commerce. Three months later, Stephen King would surprise his publisher by offering a new novella only as an e-book. The 44-page story was

downloaded from the web in an immense number of copies, surprising his publisher even more. Thus was the direction of publishing changed; again. So everyone would say.

Meanwhile, the semi-annual *soldes*, the great sales, had just begun in Paris and London, and hordes of shoppers had brought traffic in St.-Germain to a halt. We sat in a quiet room surrounded by books. A bottle of wine was on the table. I asked Odile about the future of bookselling as she saw it.

Why she became a bookseller

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Would you tell about how you started the Village Voice Bookshop, and when? What was the circumstance that led you to become a bookseller?

ODILE HELLIER: It was only eighteen years ago, but it feels like yesterday. At the same time, it feels like half a century ago, because things have changed so much in the last twenty years. I started the Village Voice on returning to Paris after ten years in the States, which I called at the time an open society, with its variety, its diversity of cultures. Some of them I was just discovering: African-American politics, culture, and literature. Ralph Ellison, Baldwin, Richard Wright: these writers were an incredible discovery for me. Native Americans, who were beginning to make themselves heard; and – complement of the '70s – the feminist movement, which was then flourishing. All those fundamental books by women who were writing about their lives, the lives of our mothers' and grandmothers' generations, about their history, their oppression. But more important, these women were giving us the tools to think, live differently. They envisioned what could be the life of free, responsible women. How exciting it was!

There was a lot of humor, as well. It was a wonderful decade, in that respect. And so I came back to France, in '80, '81. I had been a translator in the States, in technical matters: oil things, political things, from English into French. Coming back to France, I found a job at an international corporation. But I was not yet forty, and I knew that such a sterile life was not for me.

I took many walks around Paris. In the course of one of these, visiting bookshops which carried English books, the idea came upon me. The shelves and the piles on the tables looked dull to me, and dusty. Where were all those books which had opened, stimulated, my mind? Where were all those books which revealed the vitality of a country which had been able to put a stop to the Vietnam War, a country where women were making deep inroads into all fields, political, social, professional, and so on; a country where the African-Americans – the Afro-Americans as we called them at the time – were revolutionizing the country? These were ebullient times. And so, the idea literally crashed upon me: "This is it! Why not open a bookshop?"

And also, I wanted to have a café. In Washington, D. C., there was a certain café-bookstore, and I found the combination very attractive.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Oh, yes: Kramerbooks – I remember it well.

ODILE HELLIER: And so I said, "Maybe a small café-bookshop would be nice." Unconsciously, what I was probably trying to do was to build a cultural bridge between those ten years in the States that formed me and my new life in France, a country that, by now, I hardly knew.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You had also spent time in the Soviet Union, hadn't you?

ODILE HELLIER: Right after college I had gone to the Soviet Union to complete my graduate studies. I had come back to France to teach Russian, but I could not wait

to get away. That was a decade during which I had traveled all over, on almost no money.

And also, deep, deep in my childhood is buried a story which involves books.

In September 1940, my father, an officer in the French Army, was in Strasbourg at the time of the invasion of the east of France by the German Army. He was made a prisoner. But before being taken away, he had been able to send a message to my mother: "Take the last train to Nancy." My mother left during the night. The house, the neighbors reported to my mother years later, was immediately taken over by some members of the German Army. But they were not too pleased by what they found in my father's library. They found the works of Karl Marx and a large portrait of Lyautey, who was a famous officer in the French Army and a figure my father certainly admired.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But that is almost a contradictory combination, Lyautey and Marx, isn't it?. General Lyauty was the head of the African administration of 'overseas France.'* He was – can one say it? – almost an enlightened colonialist. He also believed, in some way, not in self-determination – am I correct about this? – but in the voice of the local people; and yet, he turned to a policy of suppression.

ODILE HELLIER: He was a colonial administrator of liberal tendencies. At any rate, this is the story I heard in my childhood. Anyhow, Marx and Lyautey triggered the wrath of the new 'owners,' and they took all the books of my father's library out on the street and set them on fire. I was not born then, but this is a story which, together with all the atrocities of the war – my grandmother savagely killed by the Gestapo, and my father, who fought in the Resistance, killed as a member of the Resistance, by a mine – has stayed with me. Hence, maybe this attachment to books. I have those memories of myself dragging everywhere I went suitcases filled with books, from Moscow, England, Yugoslavia, England, the States.

With some distance, one could almost call it a manic behavior. Deep in myself, I do believe that it was my thirst for knowledge, and it is the need I still feel today, of partaking of the experience of the authors and their vision of the world. It may sound pretentious, but this is the truth, the way I feel.

Given what I have said, it is not difficult to understand why the idea of a bookshop was so appealing to me. Of course, there is a big gap between a seductive idea and the reality, especially since business is not something I had ever thought of doing. The idea of opening a shop never, ever crossed my mind. But somehow, a bookshop was not an ordinary shop. Books made the whole difference.

And, instead of being discouraged by people around me who said, "Are you crazy? What are you going to do?", everyone said, "This is perfect for you." I had incredible support from my family and from two friends. I started on a shoestring. And yet, it became a success. It was the first bookstore with a café in Paris. It looked very modern, high-tech at the time. My brother designed it. Today, it is difficult to imagine that this crowded space was high-tech, but it was, at one point!

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* Louis-Hubert Lyautey 1854–1934, colonial administrator and marshal of France. Cf. André Maurois, MARSHALL LYAUTEY. Tr. Hamish Miles. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1931. Alan Scham, LYAUTEY IN MOROCCO: Protectorate administration, 1912-1925. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970. Lyautey (Marshal Louis-Hubert-Gonzalve): LETTRES DU TONKIN ET DU MADAGASCAR (1894-1899). Two volumes. Paris. William A. Hoisington, Jr., LYAUTEY AND THE FRENCH CONQUEST OF MOROCCO. New York: Macmillan /St.Martin's Press, (1995)

KATHERINE McNAMARA: The thing to say about your space is that it's filled, and filled, and filled, and filled. It's an astonishing range of books that you carry.

ODILE HELLIER: So, this is the way I started.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You had the café for several years?

ODILE HELLIER: For three years. But very quickly I could see that this was not something I enjoyed. People were coming for the coffee, for the vegetable dishes, the cappuccino, for my brownies, my carrot cake *(laughter)*, but it was too much work. I was working at night, and crying at night, in the kitchen. I could see how I was being pushed by the accountant to develop that side of the business. There was no end to it. It was much, much too much work. And, above all, it was not why I had opened a bookshop.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: In this *arrondissement* are great cafés: the Flore, where publishers go; Deux Magots; Lipp. There were great, old bookstores around the Place St.-Germain. La Hune, where I used to look at beautiful art books I couldn't afford. Le Divan. But now, La Hune has moved around the corner, Le Divan has moved – to the sixteenth! – and the old Le Drugstore, where I used to hang out, rather self-consciously, is now an Emporio Armani.

ODILE HELLIER: The *Sixième Arrondissement* was once a world of publishers' offices and bookshops. Now it has been taken over, almost entirely, by smart cafés and expensive boutiques. And they all look alike.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: They do look alike: people, clothes, interiors. St.-Germain feels like South Kensington or Madison Avenue. It's for shopping.

The Village Voice

KATHERINE McNAMARA: From the beginning your bookshop was called the Village Voice. You made an agreement with the newspaper in New York.

ODILE HELLIER: What happened was this: I called them up, and they checked into their bylaws to see if opening a bookshop in Europe was a problem. I called them back, and a woman, one of the lawyers, said: "We don't see any reason why you could not, as long as it is not a magazine."

The *Village Voice* people, right from the beginning, were very supportive. They came to Paris and brought me all kinds of little things from the paper, like the aprons. For a while, many people from *The Village Voice* would come to Paris to check on the Village Voice to see if everything was well and right. And from day one to this day, for the past eighteen or nineteen years, I have carried *The Village Voice* every single week.

Also, do not forget that this neighborhood is called *le village* St.-Germain, and so, there was already the image of the village.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And also, St.-Germain is, or was, at least, the center of publishing.

ODILE HELLIER: Yes, and so the name 'Village Voice' made sense for more than one reason. But it all sounds better in English than in French.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What were the first books you bought to sell in the store?

ODILE HELLIER: I remember that one of my first bestsellers was THE WHITE HOTEL, by D. M. Thomas. Another one which was really, really important to me at the time was [John Kennedy Toole's] A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Who were your customers?

ODILE HELLIER: Something happened which I wasn't expecting, in '81, when Mitterand came to power. With Mitterrand came a certain image of France. With Jack Lang, his Minister of Culture, came a certain idea, an image, of popular culture. On the one hand, because of the installation of a socialist government, the franc collapsed and the dollar went up. On the other hand, the novelty of the young and dynamic minister of culture attracted many young Americans to Paris. It was the last time they would be able to find inexpensive *chambres de bonne*, good food on a small budget, and small jobs on the sly. Good reasons for American youth to flock to Paris and imagine they were the new Hemingway or Henry Miller!

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Or were Jean Seberg selling the *Herald-Tribune* in the streets.

ODILE HELLIER: Well, all these elements combined created an incredible vitality in Paris. Suddenly you had a flourishing of literary magazines. You had, at one point, six English-speaking literary magazines, and all of them were giving readings at the Village Voice: launching No. 1, launching No. 2 – every week, there was a launching at the Village Voice.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: It must have been thrilling, a '*bouillon de culture*.'

ODILE HELLIER: It wasn't that I was making a tremendous amount of money; no; but it was a place where things were happening. For instance, you see that huge painting I have in the staircase: that is the work of a famous Argentine painter in exile, Ricardo Mosner. He made the painting during a bilingual reading. The bookshop was packed; and yet, he had one wall, on which he was painting. This was given to the Village Voice – I just paid for materials – as long as it would not be moved out of the bookshop. It's been there now seventeen years, sixteen years, and it's still as vital. I cannot put it anywhere else, and I don't know an apartment with walls big enough to hold this, so it has to stay there!

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I don't think there is a wall anywhere outside the Louvre big enough to hold that painting.

ODILE HELLIER: So, just to give you an idea. For instance, Ray Carver came several times. At the first reading he gave, in the room were Edmund White and Peter Taylor. Another time, he read with Richard Ford. It was an incredible *creuset*, a bowl where things get mixed; a crux.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Did the French come also?

ODILE HELLIER: The French came also: poets, translators, university professors, students and so on.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: The '80s, then, at least the first half of the '80s, were a boom time.

ODILE HELLIER: American literature was at the pinnacle, and the Village Voice was where it was all staged.

Who were the writers?

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Who were the writers, then, whom you thought were important, and who were important, literarily.

ODILE HELLIER: Pynchon was extremely important. [Thomas] Pynchon was really at the center of all discussions.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Did he come to your store?

ODILE HELLIER: No. Never.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You're sure?

ODILE HELLIER: No. *(laughter)* People would have recognized him.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You think so?

ODILE HELLIER: [William] Gaddis was extremely important. We had the opportunity to have him twice.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: He read?

ODILE HELLIER: Yes. To be more precise, he talked. It was a landmark event. The first time Mr. Gaddis 'read' at the Village Voice, he was introduced by one of the leading Americanists in France, Marc Chenetier. Marc Chenetier is a university professor who has written extensively on experimental American literature. Mr. Gaddis was on his way back from a trip to the Soviet Union, and he talked. He talked about everything touching literature – publishing, books versus 'products' (already!), commercial writing versus literature. His dry humor would send the audience into fits of laughter. The bookshop was filled with people, it was a memorable evening.

The second time he came, it was for the launching of the French edition of CARPENTER'S GOTHIC. It was an official event, co-organized with Ivan Nabokov *[director of foreign literature, Librarie Plon*], his publisher in France. What happened was that Ivan Nabokov organized a private reading of several chapters, by two famous French actors. One of them was Dominique Sanda, who was so beautiful. An interesting evening; but I certainly would have preferred a talk by Mr. Gaddis. He came by the Village Voice a few other times, once with a huge bouquet of flowers. I was touched by this. He also attended the launching of his daughter's novel [*Sarah Gaddis, SWALLOW HARD*], which we celebrated at the Village Voice.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I should mention that it was Sarah Gaddis who introduced me to you. I came to Paris after my husband [*Lee Goerner, former editor and publisher of Atheneum*] died. He had been her publisher.

ODILE HELLIER: She had lived in Paris while writing the book. And, as she read, it was obvious that he was a pleased and happy father.

Another person who was extremely important at the time was Ray Carver, whom I mentioned earlier. He gave two readings which could have converted the illiterate tough into a lover of literature. Richard Ford read, many times: his contribution, he would say, to "support the Village Voice." We had Russell Banks. [Don] DeLillo came later on; DeLillo came in 1992.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: That would have been for…

ODILE HELLIER: For MAO II. He read from MAO II; it was for the French edition.

Early in the '80s, just before he died, Julian Beck of the Living Theater, came. Michael Ondaatje read several times. The first night he read here, he had just published this little gem of a book, RUNNING IN THE FAMILY; but he was hardly known. Through the grapevine the word went around, and people crowded in to hear him read. They immediately showed an immense enthusiasm for him.

Stephen Spender came. Mary McCarthy came to the reading by Stephen Spender, but did not read at the Village Voice because I was too shy to invite her to read. I remember that very well! Diane Johnson read. Many poets; the Language Poets; Michael Palmer, who is well known as a Language Poet. Someone who read, many times, was Robert Coover. Paul Auster came often to the Village Voice but never read, because each time he postponed it, until it was too late, because he was too famous. *(laughter)*

So, that gives you a little hint of what was happening. It was like a roller coaster. I am grateful to all of them, because there is no doubt in my mind that it was with their support that the Village Voice became what it is, a place with a certain aura. I am aware

of the marks that all those writers have left on the place. I am deeply aware that all those books in the shelves and the tables represent layers of thought, art, civilization. At times when I am depressed by all the paperwork, the bills, the cartons which get lost, the orders which do not arrive – all the complications that make up our days – I pause and look around and say to myself: "Take the longer view. All these books: they are what count." And I can assure you that when I say 'all these books,' I do not mean 'products,' but magical objects which contain layers of civilization. What a treasure this is. Especially when in the relatively short life of the Village Voice so many writers who had read, not only once but even several times, have died, most of them young and at the height of their creativity. Ray Carver. Michael Dorris. Matt Cohen. Alan Jolis. Kathy Acker.

The next decade

KATHERINE McNAMARA: This, then, takes us through the '80s. When did that ebullience began to lessen?

ODILE HELLIER: I would say in '89-'90. There was the fall of the Berlin Wall. Suddenly, the central attraction was in the East, and Prague became *the* place. France was in the process of integrating itself into the European Economic Union. Life here wasn't as inexpensive any more. Unemployment went up. American corporations opened branches and offices as never before. Disneyland sprang up and Paris was no longer the same. The crowd of young future potential Hemingways disappeared. *(laughter)* They all went to Prague. And they were replaced by the business suits.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: When I first lived here, in the mid-'70s, it was a different city than now; and when I came back for the first time after twenty years, I hardly recognized it. I had lived behind the Église St.-Germain-des-Prés. My old neighborhood was the village of St.-Germain, and at that time it was dark, it was sweetly grubby. *(laughter)* Not any more. Even your little street is different, shinier, than four and a half years ago, when I first came to the bookshop.

ODILE HELLIER: We started to see a different kind of clientele. Today, I would say that my clientele is the intellectual middle-class.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Is that a large clientele? Is it shrinking? Is it changing in age?

ODILE HELLIER: It's difficult to assess. We still have Americans, tourists, of course, but I feel that we get more people who are used to dealing with books: professors, writers. I would say that French people – again, professors, students, researchers, journalists, professionals – make up sixty percent of our business.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And, certainly, every writer who comes to Paris comes to you.

ODILE HELLIER: They come, yes.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Whether they buy books is another question.

ODILE HELLIER: Often they do.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Nikki Gemmell *[who had given a reading the day before*] was buying books this morning that, she told me, she couldn't get in England.

ODILE HELLIER: She bought a nice pile of books. Richard Ford buys books each time; so does Michael Ondaatje. And what I appreciate most is that they pretend they are buying books they had meant to buy, but could not find elsewhere. An elegant gesture on their part

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But it does feel that way. You have so many books there that I would have expected to find at Books & Co., in New York; but that bookstore is closed. If I see them in the *New York Review of Books* or the *London Review of Books*, I can ask my local bookseller to get them, but she wouldn't necessarily carry them in her shop. If I were closer to your bookshop, I would pay your rent with the books I would buy.

ODILE HELLIER: You know, this past year, more than any year before, a number of customers, mostly Americans, have come to us asking, "Who buys the books? How do you make your selection?" It is a compliment which warms my heart. I don't do anything special. I just do what other booksellers and buyers do: that is, read and make notes. For instance, this is Monday night. I will read the *New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times Book Review*, my *Publisher's Weekly*, the *London Review*, the *T[imes L[iterary] S[supplement]*. Basically, each week I have five magazines, plus my [book company] representatives, plus the customers. The customers will always tell us, "You don't have this book, but I think you should have it, this would be interesting for you," and immediately we react. I know that the customers who appreciate our selection are the ones who share the same interests as we do.

I also get from customers acrimonious remarks: How is it that we do not have a better selection of comics, science fiction, et cetera? One cannot, given the space we have, and the means, make everyone happy. One of my criteria is that I and my colleagues should love the books we sell. New books arrive every day, and every day we feel an incredible appetite for all the new releases we display on the tables.

Writers of the last decade

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Turning back to America and England during the '90s, I wonder what writers – how can I put it? – what writers do you read with renewed pleasure; do you find your customers wanting to read? Who are writers whom you think have added something to literature?

ODILE HELLIER: Don DeLillo comes to mind. Russell Banks comes to mind. Gaddis, definitely. Ondaatje, who is not American but Canadian: Ondaatje is read all the time. Now, Hemingway is selling again. [Saul] Bellow, [Philip] Roth: it's incredible, how they sell. Roth – the last three novels he wrote are a marvel. I would say that people like D. H. Lawrence are in a phase where they are not much read; Malcolm Lowry, not much read.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I always thought that UNDER THE VOLCANO was one of the four or five American books of the century; but it went out of print!

ODILE HELLIER: I know that it's going to be back in print. But to me it's inconceivable that, simultaneously, it is out of print in both England and the United States. [*It is being republished in April 2000 by HarperPerennial.]*

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What English writers do you pay attention to? And what writers who are not English but who write in British English.

ODILE HELLIER: [Salman] Rushdie is one of the top authors. We sell many books by Hanif Kureishi: he is very, very popular in France.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What younger writers, would you say are notable; or, if not younger writers, those whose star rose in the '90s?

ODILE HELLIER: I would phrase it differently. I could, for instance, speak about books which were important to me in the past years. They are very eclectic. I would say

that FUGITIVE PIECES, by Anne Michaels, was very close to me. THE UNTOUCHABLE, by John Banville, struck me deeply.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Indeed. It's an astonishing book, isn't it? The bravery of that writer assuming the voice of a character so unlike himself, even a sort of enemy.

ODILE HELLIER: TOO LOUD A SOLITUDE, by [Bohumil] Hrabal, is a book that is necessary for me. It's a metaphorical book, about a kind of Kafka-esque character who works in a factory where books are being burned.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Oh, that's an extraordinary book. His spirit, grave and ironic. The irony of the compassionate man who knows the world is a vale of tears.

ODILE HELLIER: Another one which is a very strong book, is by the Australian writer David Malouf book, AN IMAGINARY LIFE. THE HOURS, by Michael Cunningham, was dear to me.

Another book, in a totally different spirit, is by Mordechai Richler: BARNEY'S VERSION; a very good book. Of course, to me, this year the important writer would be [J. M.] Coetzee.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: DISGRACE.

ODILE HELLIER: DISGRACE: And all of Coetzee. He ranks very high.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I read DISGRACE a few months ago. It doesn't go away. As I recede from it, it grows – not so much solid: it's too *bony* to be 'solid' – it grows and becomes indestructible in memory.

ODILE HELLIER: It means that it is part of your life. And this is what I mean by books that change your life: they become part of your mental make-up…

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Your mental landscape. Your nourishment.

ODILE HELLIER: For the past fifteen years I have been saying that I would like to add more space. Now, I feel that my strong point is selecting, as much as I can, and having fewer titles: but titles I believe in. Over the years we have, I would say, created a sort of 'Village Voice list' of books we love and which we try to keep in stock. Some of these, besides those we've mentioned: Cyril Connolly's THE UNQUIET GRAVE, David Malouf's AN IMAGINARY LIVE, Coetzee's WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS, Ondaatje's RUNNING IN THE FAMILY, and, of course, Hrabal's TOO LOUD A SOLITUDE.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Perhaps you haven't fewer titles than before – I don't know – but they are strong. On every shelf – on every shelf! – I can find five books I would like to have and read.

ODILE HELLIER: It's the same with me. But where is the time to read as much as we would like? I easily spend twelve hours a day in the bookshop, and there is all the professional press to read. The work is endless. I manage to read an average of two books a week, and my colleagues the same. But by the time we have read and fallen in love with a book, the fashion has already died away. THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW, by Washington Irving, is an example. There was a movie based on it ["The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," *directed by Tim Burton*]. The book sold very well – for two weeks. The movie is over, the book is dead.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But do you ever find that your customers seek unheralded or nearly-forgotten writers? Writers re-discovered without advertising?

ODILE HELLIER: There are book addicts. There are not many, but they still exist. I can find them books; they do not have to leave with empty hands. But it is a question of drawing on classics, of drawing on older books. For instance, recently we have been selling a lot of Malaparte.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Malaparte? How unexpected. I know the name of this author, but …

ODILE HELLIER: Yes, Malaparte. CAPUT and THE SKIN: we reorder them every week.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I don't know his work. Do you have any idea why this is happening?

ODILE HELLIER: Well, he's a rediscovered writer, a writer who was forgotten, a little bit. He is a writer of the First World War. He describes the war in Italy. He is raw, violent, very strong.

The rules of commerce

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Let us talk now about the structure of your profession and how it is changing. You are the proprietor of the best independent bookstore in Europe selling English and American books, according to *The Bookseller*, the British trade journal. We are in a new century; there is reason for optimism; and yet, you've told me over the last year or so that you aren't entirely optimistic about the future of bookselling. Would you speak of that?

ODILE HELLIER: This is a question which covers many different aspects of bookselling. I will start with the obvious: that many independent bookstores have disappeared in the States, are disappearing a little bit everywhere in the world at an alarming rate.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Even in France?

ODILE HELLIER: In France, booksellers are still relatively protected. But for how long? Under the *Loi Lang*, a law that was passed in 1981, in the first year of Mitterand's government – it was named for Jack Lang, his minister of culture – books could not be discounted more than five percent. This allowed every bookseller – chains such as Fnac and independents, alike – to have theoretically equal chances. I stress the word 'theoretically,' for the situation is much more complex.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: How so? You import books, you don't sell French titles.

ODILE HELLIER: For booksellers like me, those who import books, the law is full of arcane twists and loopholes. In theory, once I have put a price on my books, I cannot discount it as I wish. For example, a few years ago, I was selling English textbooks to a French university, with a ten percent discount offered to the students, just on the day I was there. A local bookseller, although he did not sell English books, as I did, used the *Loi Lang* to start a lawsuit against me. He tried, without success, to take that business from me! Yet, at the same time, given the competition in the field, importers of English books practice all kinds of discounts. Because of this, a university professor came one day to announce loudly to me that I would never get his business, since he was getting a twenty-five percent discount from one of my competitors.

Now, since it is the importer who sets his own prices, we have to define what it is we chop ten percent, twenty-five percent, off of. There was a time, not so long ago, when the exchange rates practiced by some importers were so outrageously high that they could very well afford to give a twenty-five percent discount. I tried to explain to this professor that it is the *importer* who fixes the price, and that this importer, my competitor, may have used a different rate of exchange – multiplying, for example, every dollar of the cover price by ten, instead of seven or eight, francs to cover transportation and VAT. You see, he was discounting from a higher selling price, to begin with. But the only thing our loud teacher could grasp was whether the discount he received would be five, twenty, or twenty-five percent. So, as you can see, for

importers the *Loi Lang* is far more complex. But as far as French booksellers are concerned, this *loi du prix fixe* has been very positive.

Now, to come back to the question of optimism, or pessimism: two recent events have badly shaken the foundations of the French system. The first is the death in England a few years ago of the Net Book Agreement,* a real Trojan Horse on the European landscape of bookselling. With its end, the fixed price disappeared, opening the gates to the installation of giant American discount stores, with all the consequences that we know. And the second is the spread of electronic commerce.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Ah, we are in new territory.

ODILE HELLIER: Now, don't get me wrong: business is business, capitalism is capitalism. If you are going to be in business, you know that you will be confronted by competition, and you accept the risks.

However, until the emergence of what is called the 'new economy,' which includes e-commerce, the rules of commerce were the same for everyone, except – oops, what comes to mind is the Mafia, which was involved in big business and never bothered to abide by the rules. But at least we can say that, officially, on the surface at least, they were not part of mainstream business.

Basically, it used to be that, if you bought goods and resold them, you had to make a profit and pay taxes, which are of three kinds: a local tax which is the equivalent of the European VAT, the value-added tax; a tax on profit; and taxes on labor, for social security. In France, the great majority of people still wish to benefit – each individually – from the various tax-funded public institutions, such as for those for education and public health, or, for retirement, their pensions. But now, the novelty of e-commerce is that this new form of doing business gets around the necessity of paying those taxes, while traditional commerce continues to pay them. As we say, *Deux poids deux mésures*.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You're speaking of Amazon now.

ODILE HELLIER: I'm speaking of any kind of business. All books bought on the internet are exonerated from the VAT, which represents for the buyer some sort of discount. In a bookshop, he would have to pay that VAT as part of the price of the book, and each month, by the nineteenth, the French bookseller must pay *le Fisc*, the Internal Revenue, five and a half percent of all his previous month's turnover. Given the ruthless competition which is going on because of the huge discounts granted on the internet, we often do not include in our selling price the five and a half percent VAT, but still we have to pay it. In other words, we can say that the VAT reduces our margin and is yet another drain on our cash flow – a tax the e-commerce ventures do not have to bother about.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And, your tax burden is quite a large percentage of your gross income.

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* "The net book agreement prevented English booksellers from discounting the price of new books; it collapsed in September 1995, when several large publishers and a major book retailer withdrew from the agreement; other publishers soon followed. In 1997, suit was brought by the government's Office of Fair Trading to abolish the agreement, as it was now ineffective. A defense of the agreement was mounted by a number of publishing and literary figures, including John Calder. In the meantime, Waterstone's and Dillon's, the two largest booksellers, have launched web sites; a British-based on-line bookstore now exists, as well as Amazon, the US-based on-line book service. The British sites will also offer books published in the US, before they appear in England. In 1996, 101,504 new titles (including 9,209 new works of fiction) were reported to have been published in Britain, compared to 95,064 in 1995." – see "A Conversation with Marion Boyars, *Archipelago* Vol. 1, No. 3.

ODILE HELLIER: It is. Plus the fact that, in France, we have to pay those huge taxes on labor, which explains the high unemployment rate here. It is between ten and eleven percent of the population. Of course, there is tax on profit, but it is not as huge as tax on labor. And the third element is, as I've said, the VAT.

But this VAT business is only the tip of the iceberg. E-commerce, and also the superstores, practice discounting on a scale unheard of before. What business practices do those discounts reveal? We are speaking, of course, of discounts on new books, new releases, which can vary from fifteen to fifty percent! Either, publishers grant those giant ventures huge discounts, or, those ventures do not make a profit. If publishers do in effect grant huge discounts to those ventures, then their practices are unfair toward independent booksellers, and they are, in the end, responsible for the chaos which has turned the bookselling business upside down.

If it is not the case, then it means that the ventures are selling at a loss. And if they sell at a loss, they are not going to pay taxes.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Because you pay taxes on your profit. And, depending on how your form of incorporation is structured, you must make a profit, at least where I live, to be considered a legal corporation.

ODILE HELLIER: As I said earlier, one of the tenets of commerce is that you make a profit. How is it then that, year after year, e-ventures show losses – and the greater the losses, the stronger they are on the stock market? All this, of course, is new: the 'new economy,' the economists call it, and it is detrimental to independent and traditional businesses.

For us booksellers, what it comes down to is that the rules of commerce have radically changed over the past few years. In the past, the rules set the framework within which we all could practice a profession we had embraced out of our love for books and knowledge. Today, traditional business continues to be taxed, while e-commerce escapes all of it. You can now be a capitalist and possess no capital, make zero profit, and still continue in business and be universally admired! The market has become a jungle where bullying is the code of behavior, leaving hardly any place to books – I am speaking of real books, not 'products' – and even less to book-lovers.

Poor publishing; poor bookselling

ODILE HELLIER: I would also say that two other elements come to my mind. One is that publishing of good books is becoming very poor, I feel.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: How do you mean, poor?

ODILE HELLIER: Poor in the sense that the range, the diversity, the quality of books are shrinking. You know that, if a book is working well, suddenly you are going to see seven books on the same subject, from seven different publishers. They are commissioned books. They are not books created by inspiration, springing from the soul of an author. I see a huge deterioration in the quality of the content of books. I would not say in the quality of the form, because so many people attend writing seminars and schools that, in fact, people write very well these days. But inspiration: where is it? Where are the books to get passionate about? They are rare. They are few and rare.

But they are there, you know, they are there. But in comparison with the huge heaps of books being published—. When I go through all these catalogs with representatives, of course I may find a pearl. But how many such pearls are there? This

is my work, the work which I feel is extremely important for me to do: to get the pearls out of the heaps.

This is where I feel that my optimism comes into play. The heaps are going to be everywhere. The thousands of titles are going to be there, on the internet, in the big bookstores, and so on. But: the selection has a *raison d'être*, a reason for being, and only a bookseller can do it. Not a salesman: not a salesgirl: a bookseller. And it is true that the business is becoming like any other business. You have products and you have salespersons….

KATHERINE McNAMARA: …instead of a bookseller.

ODILE HELLIER: Instead of a bookseller. And that is my second point. That is, a bookseller is someone who has learned a little bit about books, who has read a lot, but also, who has a certain mind, a certain taste. You have as many selections as you have booksellers, and this is what makes it interesting. In the past, you would go to a certain bookseller, or a certain bookshop, because you would know what kind of selection you would find there. It is the variety of selection through the prism, through the mind, through the knowledge of that bookseller which is interesting. And this is disappearing.

It's no fun anymore to look at book catalogs

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I've heard other booksellers – independent booksellers – say that it's no fun anymore to look at book catalogs.

ODILE HELLIER: It's not simply 'no fun,' it's often embarrassing. Representatives make the effort of coming to visit us. They come from afar, from the U. S., the U. K., Germany, the Netherlands, and, obviously, they come to sell us books. We open the catalogues, and with dread we turn page after page of drivel. Recently, in an article in *Le Monde*, André Schiffren [*formerly the publisher of Pantheon; now of The New Press, a non-profit house*], observed that, reading through the seasonal catalogues of the three major U. S. publishing corporations – Random House, which is really Bertelsmann, Simon & Schuster, and HarperCollins – out of five hundred titles, there was not one French translation, not one serious book of history, not one serious scientific investigation, and no philosophy or theology. All these are subjects which used to be the core of publishing. And I can only agree with him. There are still very good books, of course, but although they may be published, they are not visible even to a bookseller. They get lost in the slush of books which repeat *ad infinitum* the themes of a handful of bestsellers. How utterly boring!

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You buy a great number of books from smaller trade and independent publishers.

ODILE HELLIER: The problem with small-press books is that they do not always get reviewed in the media, and therefore the public is not aware of them. Now, it used to be that the role of the bookseller was to bring the books to the reader. It still is. But the power of the media is such that the public tends to trust the review they have read in *The New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, or in one of the weeklies, and not so much the personal taste or recommendation of the bookseller. Now, that being said, I have wonderful stories to tell about readers who thank us profusely for bringing into their lives a book or a writer. This is how it should be.

Quality v. entertainment, and return on investment

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Do you think the number, of good, or interesting, or necessary books is smaller than it used to be? Or does it just seem smaller in comparison to this flood of sort of mass-sensibility or entertainment books?

ODILE HELLIER: It is difficult to say. Good books continue to be published; otherwise, we would not have the selection we have. However, they are lost in the clutter of hundreds of titles which I will compare with the kind of food which fills you up but does not nourish your body. I will even go further and say: which slowly but surely poisons your system. Likewise with books: hundreds and hundreds of them read very much like magazines at best, tabloids at worst. What counts is not the expansion of the mind, but 'entertainment,' the sacred word.

And as everyone tells us, this is what people want: entertainment. What we are not told is that it is easier to sell a few titles, made into bestsellers, from which the publisher gets a high return on investment, than to publish a wide variety of books, whose return on investment will average a mere four or five percent, the regular rate in the trade.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: When I've spoken about this with publishers in this series of conversations, they have all said to me quite definitely that book publishing is by its nature a business in which you cannot expect a high rate of return on investment; and, if you need such a return, you had better not own a publishing company.

ODILE HELLIER: The fifteen, sixteen percent return on investment set as a standard by the book industry is totally unreal. In the process, it is killing the trade as we've known it. According to André Schiffren, in the article I mentioned, the German publisher Klaus Wagenbach divines the fifteen percent level of return on investment as the *todeszon*, the death-zone, where no publishing of value can survive. This same publisher was quoting Hans Magnus Enzenberger as saying that over the past forty years he has not found in the Bertelsmann catalogs a single title that would last.

This economic pressure of raising at all costs the level of profitability has affected everyone involved. For the independent publisher who is either pushed out of business, or is bought up and cannot, within his 'own' house, exercise his intelligence, his discrimination, his taste, and has to publish according to criteria which have nothing to do with excellence, but which have to fit the economic plan of the corporation. For the editor who becomes a simple cog in the machine. For the writer who will not be considered unless his book will sell well enough to reach the magical mark of fifteen percent profitability. To sell in huge quantities, a book has to be scandalous, one way or another: horror, sex, violence, personal horrifying stories. And – or – the writer has to have a saleable face or body, something in his look which will appeal to the viewer's thirst for glamour; or, the opposite, something outrageous, weird, shocking, ugly.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Yes, so often it does seem that way. But let me point out the unexpected successes of several books in the last few years. Dava Soble's nice little LONGITUDE, which is non-fiction. The novels SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS, by David Guterson, and COLD MOUNTAIN, by Charles Frazier. Ondaatje's THE ENGLISH PATIENT. It was booksellers who sold these books, we're told. Their success took their publishers, or at least, the marketers, by surprise. On the other hand, I know of a novel by a well-known, respected writer – and it can't be the only one this has happened to – which was practically killed by a bad review in *The New York Times*, because Barnes & Noble

immediately cut back their orders and returned the books they had in stock. The writer, who was shocked, said to me, "What is the life of a book – two weeks?"

ODILE HELLIER: It seems that the first two weeks are vital for a book. In the past, I used to order new releases in relatively small quantities. I preferred to re-order rather than have huge stocks sitting in the bookshop. But several times, when I re-ordered a book immediately, I would get in reply an O/S, Out of Stock, or R/U, Reprint Under Consideration. How could this be possible? There must be a mistake. Finally, I understood what was happening. I was told the story by an insider in the trade. The print-run is based on the figure given by the pre-orders. Once the book is published, the copies are dispatched to the selling points, and the lion's share goes to the chains and wholesalers.

Just this week, I sent an express order for a certain title which got lost in transit. I was told two weeks *exactly* after the publication of the book, and one week after the book made the cover of *The New York Times Book Review*, that the publisher did not have a single copy left, and there was no reprint in view. I could only get it from a wholesaler. – Yet, after a certain length of time, many, many copies – the returns – will flood back into the publisher's warehouse. But in the meantime, bookshops like mine cannot obtain the book from the publishers they work with.

Yet the credit departments are never slow to claim your payments. One moment past the last day of the month, and their computers send you threats. When we ask them to apply the same efficiency to shipping books on time, they reply dryly, "Not our responsibility."

Another thing that is worrisome is that many authors are not published anymore, many voices are unheard, because they do not conform to the criteria I listed. Many are the believers in the miracles of the world wide web who reply: The answer is on the internet! Very well. An internet magazine like this one is a feast. But how, across the internet, is one going to sort out what is good, and what is mediocre? One can imagine hours and hours being spent surfing over the waves looking for the right text. What I do know is that quite a few failed writers have succeed in being published on the internet, and now pretend to be published writers!

That reminds me of a wonderful quote about Auden, which fits perfectly here in our discussion. I found it in Shirley Hazzard's memoir about Graham Green on Capri. [*She goes to find the book.]* Here it is:

Shirley Hazzard writes: "Creative writing, which, alone among the arts, seems delusively accessible to every articulate person, has immemorially attracted that confusion of esteem and envy, centered on the independence in which it is conceived and composed: a mystery of originality that never loses fascination for the onlooker, in W. H. Auden's view.

"This fascination is not due to the nature of art itself, but to the way in which an artist works; he, and in our age almost nobody else, is his own master. The idea of being one's own master appeals to most human beings, and this is apt to lead to the fantastic hope that the capacity for artistic creation is universal, something nearly all human beings, by virtue not of some special talent, but of their humanity, could do if they tried."

Could we not say this is a perfect definition of one reason why the internet is such a success? The illusion that, if you are writing something on a screen, you might be read by millions of potential readers and become visible? One of the roles of the editor, and of the bookseller, likewise, was to sift through the pebbles and give the gem

to the reader. Now, anything goes, and everything is equal: equally good, equally bad. It does not matter, since all tastes are equal. The internet – the great equalizer!

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Ah. Well. In principle, I don't disagree with you. I've heard would-be writers speak this way. They are hungry for – what? That connection? They want to appear in print, on paper, and are denied that chance. A friend of mine who is a publisher called the matter of being published a "lottery."

But I know, equally, that the internet was invented to allow for fast, direct communication among scholars, especially scientists, who needed to see each other's work without having to wait for publication, because discovery came so fast. I know, also, that much interesting, specialized work is available at particular places on the web. I speak of the noncommercial sector of the web. And I know, very well, that serious publishing is serious publishing, no matter the medium used. For myself, I was so dismayed by the state of book publishing, and by its brutal treatment of so many serious writers, that I wanted to act. When an editor suggested to me that I put my incipient journal, in which I meant to publish 'shadow' literature, the kind of writing that was being turned down in New York, on the world wide web, I thought: There are serious readers everywhere in the world. If I can put literature on the internet, they will find it. That has been true, I would say.

But, I admit, I spend as little time on the web as possible. I tend to go only to sites recommended by people whose taste I like. I see it as a means of distribution, and it serves me well. But I know that – because it is amorphous – it allows anybody to post anything they want, and claim 'millions of readers.' Whether this is true or not remains to be seen.

ODILE HELLIER: I would say that, with the spreading of the chains, and the fast development of e-commerce, a page has definitely been turned in the book trade, and it will never be the same. Yet, the last word has not been said.

[*In early March, about six weeks after this conversation, Stephen King's novella* RIDING THE BULLET *was published as an e-book exclusively on the web. More than 500,000 copies were reported to have been downloaded. It was reported, as well, that the sales of e-books by other writers and publishers rose accordingly.]*

The bookseller, the publishing industry, and the book as product

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You spoke earlier of what you thought a bookseller was: a person whose taste, intelligence, immersion in certain kinds of books makes her shop, his shop, its own place. How has the role – or, perhaps better, the *treatment* – of the bookseller changed, especially in the '90s?

ODILE HELLIER: It changed the moment the book became a product, no different from any kind of other products. It was then that publishing *business* became the publishing *industry*.

And now we go back to the negative point of Amazon: a book at Amazon is just a product. Amazon was not created for the sake of books. It was created because the book was a product saleable and marketable on the internet. There was a market survey done, and the book came first on the list as the ideal product to be sold on the web. So, it's not sold because it's a book.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But because it's a portable product. The book was already a 'product' before Amazon came along, however.

ODILE HELLIER: Yes, it was. But it was certainly not as much a product as now.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: When did that happen, do you think?

ODILE HELLIER: I would say, in the past five years. Book publishing is an industry, like Hollywood. The bookseller has become the salesperson.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Ah. And that, also, in the last five years?

ODILE HELLIER: In the last three years. The bookseller is not perceived as someone special. We have requests all the time from people who want to work as salespersons. I get c.v.s from people who have never read a book!

KATHERINE McNAMARA: So many of us have gone into these chain stores where the salespeople have never read books, they don't know books.

ODILE HELLIER: Yes, but this is part of the industry. I speak about Amazon, but the chains have absolutely helped this process to accelerate. If the bookseller has disappeared, and is only a salesperson, it means that there is no vision. It means that there is no knowledge. It means that, if you sell Gertrude Stein, you put Gertrude Stein at the same level as [John] Grisham: it makes no difference, a book is a product. Thus we have seen the leveling of the meaning of books. There is no difference between *this* and *that*. Of course, if you want to make money, you are not going to carry Gertrude Stein, you are going to carry Grisham, because then, what counts are the figures. The product dictates the figures, and the figures are Number One, now. It's an industry, you are a salesperson, and you have a product. So, you have not only the content of the book to take into account, if you are in the business, but you have the figures, also, to take into account.

So, figures are primary. A representative comes to us. First, before starting to discuss and be shown books, we are shown the figures over the past few years. A book is presented to us *based on the money which is going to be involved in the promotion of the book*.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Yes, I see them announced that way in *Publisher's Weekly*, also.

ODILE HELLIER: So much money is going to be put into the promotion of the book *because* the advance was so much. You have to recoup the money. So, you are not going to promote a book when you have paid nothing to the young girl who wrote it. You have to recoup the money when you have paid $17 million to, to—

KATHERINE McNAMARA: —to Grisham or Tom Wolfe or Stephen King—

ODILE HELLIER: Exactly.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I noticed you had some paperbacks by Stephen King. I didn't notice if you had any John Grisham.

ODILE HELLIER: Oh yes, I do, of course.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Do you have the new book? How does it sell in comparison to others?

ODILE HELLIER: Of course. Usually I take a few copies of Grisham in hardcover, because I know that I will sell a few copies.

But let us go back to figures. Either the bookseller disappears altogether, because he is not recognized, because he is like any other salesperson; *or*, with dinosaurs like me, you still believe in how a book can change a life. And for me, I know that my life would have been different, and much sadder, a life of greater solitude, if I had not had books to talk to me, change with me, to nourish me. And I know other people like me, because so many readers have sent me letters, or have called me, and said, "I thank you so much for the book you gave me to read. You cannot imagine how important it was."

I think, also, of what William Gass said. He said, All the books you see are the thoughts of people who have lived. They contain the experience of people who have lived. They contain their thinking, their beliefs. And when you have shelves of books,

like in the bookstore, like in the library, like in the house where there are books, they are not just books, but layers of civilization. Thought is there. Life is there. How is it possible to imagine a book as just a piece of entertainment to spend eight hours with on a plane? That way of thinking can exist, but it cannot be the only way.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: This week, AOL announced that it is going to buy Time Warner. Their intended conglomeration has caused huge reverberation on both sides of the Atlantic. I want to read to you something rather terrifying in today's *Herald Tribune*. This is from an editorial column by Jeremy Rifkin.

ODILE HELLIER: Jeremy Rifkin wrote AGE OF ACCESS, the book I mentioned to you several days ago.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: The headline is "The New Capitalism Is About Turning Culture into Commerce." Here is what he says:

> A great transformation is occurring in the nature of capitalism. After hundreds of years of converting physical resources into goods, the primary means of generating wealth now involves transforming cultural resources into paid-for personal experiences and entertainments.
>
> The announcement of the merger between America On-line and Time Warner *[in fact, America On-Line bought Time-Warner, which is another story altogether – KM]* underscores the shift to a new form of hypercapitalism based on commidifying human time.
>
> AOL-Time Warner, Disney, Viacom and Sony Corp. are not just media companies. They are global arbiters of access to a vast array of cultural experiences, including global travel and tourism, theme cities and parks, destination entertainment centers, wellness, fashion and cuisine, professional sports and games, music, film, television, book publishing and magazines.
>
> The capitalist journey is ending with the commodification of human culture itself.
>
> ….
>
> By controlling the pipelines that people use to communicate with one another, as well as shaping much of the cultural content that is filmed, broadcast on television or sent over the internet, companies like AOL-Time Warner are able to affect the experiences of people everywhere. There is no precedent in history for this kind of overarching control of human communication.
>
> Social critics are beginning to ask what will happen to the rich cultural diversity that makes up the ecology of human existence. When a handful of information, entertainment and telecommunications companies control much of the cultural content that makes up our daily lives…. (*IHT*, January 17, 2000)

ODILE HELLIER: Yes. I am aware of that. I am aware of it every single day, and that is why I want to fight. I want to be there, to survive there: not just for my own sake, but because I believe in a life of books. Small places like mine, like the Village Voice, can be a pocket – not of the past, but of the future. If we, because of a certain knowledge, experience, vision – and I would say 'vision' is the essential word – can survive, I feel there might be a resurgence of the humane person we envision. I know that there is still a certain kind of person who is going to need the book, not to be entertained by it, but to live with it. I believe there will still be those readers who thank us for having found them the book which made a difference in their lives at that

moment. It seems to me that this vision can co-exist with that other, in which all cultural life is processed.

What I have said may sound elitist, in a way, but not because of social background or money. If I sound this way, it is because of reflection. If I have become 'elitist,' I have a certain right, because I work to get there. I work to have the right to think as I think, and not to think in the processed way controlled by the entertainment companies which Jeremy Rifkin writes about.

This is what THE RESURGENCE OF THE REAL, by Charlene Spretnak, deals with. The Rifkin book, also, is strong. Richard Sennett's THE CORROSION OF CHARACTER, about the effect of the new kind of work on us, is very good. Many people are trying to think differently. Of course, it's not because they are trying to think differently that they are going to change the course of history. The course of history is AOL and Time Warner, it's Amazon, it's definitely the internet. But the human mind may also rebel against this. The human mind is, in the end, what is stronger.

The next two or three years are going to be difficult. But, I feel, people will become tired of consumerism. It seems to me that they are going to look for something different. And that's why small 'pockets' like mine don't have to be huge, but they have to exist, and to continue to exist. The future of the literary, convivial, neighborhood bookshops may still be rosy. As the owner of such a bookshop, I can only hope for the best.

Odile Hellier <yhellier@worldnet.net>
Village Voice Bookshop
http://www.paris-anglo.com/clients/vvoice/html/info.html
6, rue Princesse
(Métro: Mabillon/St.-Germain-des-Prés)
75006 Paris
Tel: 01 46 33 36 47 Fax: 01 46 33 27 48

Authors and (selected) books of the time, mentioned in the conversation:

Kathy Acker, BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL; DISORDERLY CONDUCT; DON QUIXOTE: Which was a Dream; EMPIRE OF THE SENSES; IN MEMORIAM TO IDENTITY

Paul Auster, THE NEW YORK TRILOGY; HUNGER; INVENTION OF SOLITUDE

James Baldwin, GIOVANNI'S ROOM; THE FIRE NEXT TIME; NOTES OF A NATIVE SON

Russell Banks, CLOUDSPLITTER; CONTINENTAL DRIFT; THE SWEET HEREAFTER

John Banville, THE UNTOUCHABLE; ATHENA; GHOSTS

Saul Bellow, HENDERSON THE RAIN KING; HUMBOLDT'S GIFT; THE DEAN'S DECEMBER

J.M. Coetzee, DISGRACE; WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS; FOE

Raymond Carver, WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE; CATHEDRAL; ELEPHANT

Marc Chenetier (tr.), RICHARD BRAUTIGAN; BEYOND SUSPICION: NEW AMERICAN FICTION SINCE 1960

Matt Cohen, COLORS OF WAR; ELIZABETH AND AFTER; FLOWERS OF DARKNESS; FREUD: the Paris Notebooks; THE BOOKSELLER

Robert Coover, PRICKSONGS AND DESCANTS; A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES; BRIAR ROSE

Michael Cunningham, THE HOURS; A HOME AT THE END OF THE WORLD;FLESH AND BLOOD

Don DeLillo, WHITE NOISE; UNDERWORLD; LIBRA; RUNNING DOG; MAO II

Micahel Dorris, CLOUD CHAMBER, A YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER,

Ralph Ellison, INVISIBLE MAN; JUNETEENTH (ed. by John Callaghan)

William Faulkner, WILD PALMS; SANCTUARY; ABSOLOM, ABSOLOM!

Charles Frazier, COLD MOUNTAIN
Sarah Gaddis, SWALLOW HARD
William Gaddis, CARPENTER'S GOTHIC; THE RECOGNITIONS; J.R.
William Gass, OMENSETTER'S LUCK; WILLIE MASTER'S LONESOME WIFE
Nikki Gemmel, ALICE SPRINGS (published in England as CLEAVE); SHIVER
John Grisham, THE BRETHREN; THE PELICAN BRIEF; THE FIRM
Ernest Hemingway, THE SUN ALSO RISES; A FAREWELL TO ARMS; FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
David Guterson, SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS
Shirley Hazzard, GREENE ON CAPRI: A MEMOIR; TRANSIT OF VENUS
Bohumil Hrabel, TOO LOUD A SOLITUDE; DANCING LESSONS FOR THE ADVANCED IN AGE; TOTAL FEARS
Alan Jolis, SPEAK SUNLIGHT: a Memoir; LOVE AND TERROR; MERCEDES AND THE HOUSE OF RAINBOWS
Diane Johnson, LE MARIAGE; LE DIVORCE; THE SHADOW KNOWS; DASHIELL HAMMETT: A LIFE
Hanif Kureishi, THE BUDDA OF SUBURBIA, INTIMACY, MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDERETTE, and Others; LONDON KILLS ME; SLEEP WITH ME
D.H. Lawrence, SONS AND LOVERS; WOMEN IN LOVE; THE RAINBOW; LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER
Malcolm Lowry, UNDER THE VOLCANO; ULTRAMARINE
Mary McCarthy, THE GROUP; BIRDS OF AMERICA
Curzio Malaparte, CAPUT; THE SKIN; THE VOLGA RISES IN EUROPE
David Malouf, AN IMAGINARY LIFE: A NOVEL; CHILD'S PLAY; REMEMBERING BABYLON
Anne Michaels, FUGITIVE PIECES; WEIGHT OF ORANGES & MINER'S POND
Michael Ondaatje, THE CINNAMON PEELER: SELECTED POEMS; IN THE SKIN OF A LION; RUNNING IN THE FAMILY; THE ENGLISH PATIENT
Michael Palmer, MIRACLE CURE; NATURAL CAUSES; CRITICAL JUDGEMENT
Thomas Pynchon, V.; GRAVITY'S RAINBOW; THE CRYING OF LOT 49; VINELAND
Philip Roth, PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT; ZUCKERMAN BOUND; PATRIMONY
Salman Rushdie, MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN; THE SATANIC VERSES; THE GROUND BENEATH HER FEET; HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES
Mordechai Richler, BARNEY'S VERSION: A NOVEL; THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ
Jeremy Rifkin, AGE OF ACCESS; HOW THE SHIFT FROM OWNERSHIP TO ACCESS IS TRANSFORMING CAPITALISM
Richard Sennett, THE CORROSION OF CHARACTER: THE PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES OF WORK IN THE NEW CAPITALISM
Dava Soble, LONGITUDE
Stephen Spender, COLLECTED POEMS; THE BACKWARD SON
Charlene Spretnak, THE RESURGENCE OF THE REAL: BODY, NATURE, AND PLACE IN A HYPERMODERN WORLD
Gertrude Stein, THREE LIVES; THE MAKING OF AMERICANS; THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ALICE B. TOKLAS
Peter Taylor, THE OLD FOREST AND OTHER STORIES; A SUMMONS TO MEMPHIS
D.M. Thomas, THE WHITE HOTEL; ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN: A CENTURY IN HIS LIFE; EATING PAVLOVA
John Kennedy Toole, A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES; THE NEON BIBLE
Edmund White, THE BURNING LIBRARY (ESSAYS); CARACOLE; THE BEAUTIFUL ROOM IS EMPTY
Richard Wright, NATIVE SON; THE LONG DREAM; EIGHT MEN

&&&&

Memo to William Shawn

April 5, 1948

Mr. Shawn:

Forrestal in Washington told me a couple of odd things: I told him I was astonished at a sentence in a recent story ([Daniel] Lang) that the principal activity of the atomic commission is the manufacture of weapons; that I'd thought it would develop the atom for peace use. He says that the weapon use is all there is to it at present – that the peacetime use is visionary and very far off.

He also said that when Roosevelt and the rest of them were debating whether to drop the bomb on Hiroshima or not (which was flatly unnecessary militarily) one of the powerful groups in favor of dropping the bomb were [*sic*] the scientists, and exactly the same scientists who, after the bomb was dropped, started wringing their hands. They had made the bomb and they wanted it to be dropped. Also, Forrestal says, there would have been one hell of a congressional investigation if the bomb hadn't been dropped, to find out what happened to the two million dollars.

H.W. Ross

LETTERS FROM THE EDITOR, *The New Yorker's* Harold Ross
ed. Thomas Kunkel
Modern Library, 2000

&&&&

ON THE MARIONETTE THEATER

I

The Czechs and Slovaks have a folk tradition of the marionette theater, and puppets on strings are sold in all the tourist locations. In Prague I bought a marionette that is also a sort of doll, and a sort of double, or a shadow. It, she, is a sturdy little girl about two feet high, carved of wood, with muddy feet (made of darker wood finely joined), and a sooty red dress, and a smear of grime on her rosy cheek; but she is not rosy. She is determined. She has dark hair cut in a bob with cowlicked bangs, unblinking green eyes, a pretty little unsmiling mouth. She doesn't care for other peoples' opinions. She is dreamy, but not fooled. She has a mind of her own and accepts no nonsense! I entered a state-owned tourist shop offering hand-made objects, saw her sitting on a high shelf (she saw me at the same time, though she gave no sign of it), and knew she would come with me. The young girl clerks couldn't find the name of the artist, although an insignia was carved on her back, which was left deliberately unfinished. This creature, this fairy-tale girl, emerges from the wood. An iron ring was set into her head, as the oldest marionettes were operated by using a rod or stick attached to the ring, rather than by strings. I felt as if I could read her mind, which was alert and lively with observations and little stories and conversations with herself. I felt she was going to set off on a quest, initiated by a bird's message.

…

Kleist wrote a beautiful essay on the Marionette Theatre. "One evening in the winter of 1801, I met an old friend in a public park," it begins. "He had recently been appointed principal dancer at the local theatre and was enjoying immense popularity with the audiences. I told him I had been surprised to see him more than once at the marionette theatre which had been put up in the market-place to entertain the public with dramatic burlesques interspersed with song and dance. He assured me that the gestures of these puppets gave him much satisfaction and told me bluntly that any dancer who wished to perfect his art could learn a lot from them."

The perfect balance of dancers bewilders me; it is so elusive. The little muddy-foot girl: can she dance, creature of the barnyard? She will plod, unswerving, I thought to myself; even if Kleist's old friend proposed not. He observed, rather, that the puppet's limbs aren't positioned by the operator, but follow gracefully from their mechanical movement.

"Each movement, he told me, has its centre of gravity; it is enough to control this within the puppet. The limbs, which are only pendulums, then follow mechanically of their own accord, without further help. He added that this movement is very simple. When the centre of gravity is moved in a straight line, the limbs describe curves. Often, shaken in a purely haphazard way, the puppet falls into a kind of rhythm which resembles dance….

"I asked him if he thought the operator who controls these puppets should himself be a dancer or at least have some idea of beauty in the dance. He replied that if a job is technically easy it doesn't follow that it can be done entirely without sensitivity. The line the centre of gravity has to follow is indeed very simple, and in most cases, he believed, straight. When it is curved, the law of its curvature seems to be at the least of the first and at the most of the second order. Even in the latter case the line is only elliptical, a form of movement natural to the human body because of the joints, so this hardly demands any great skill from the operator. But, seen from another point of view, this line could be something very mysterious. It is nothing other than *the path taken by the soul of the dancer*. He doubted if this should be found unless the operator can transpose himself into the centre of the gravity of the marionette. In other words, the operator *dances*.

"I said the operator's part in the business had been represented to me as something which can be done entirely without feeling – rather like turning the handle of a barrel-organ.

"'Not at all,' he said. 'In fact, there's a subtle relationship between the movements of his fingers and the movements of the puppets attached to them, something like the relationship between numbers and their logarithms or between asymptote and hyperbola.' Yet he did believe this last trace of human volition could be removed from the marionettes and their dance transferred entirely to the realm of mechanical forces, even produced, as I had suggested, by turning a handle."

Oh, my heart sank at these words, despite their beauty and suggestion of mystery. What if the dancer – the operator – *had no soul*? What if he were without feeling? What if the relationship between his fingers and the puppets' strings really were logarithmic? What then was it that I had so loved in their movement?

Kleist's essay progresses simply, to a sublime, aristocratic conclusion; but, downhearted, I could not follow. The image of the calculating puppet-operator insisted on its metaphorical power. The little mud-foot girl was no dancer, she was a wily-yet-innocent peasant, and she would not be fooled. ("He asked me if I hadn't in

fact found some of the dance movements of the puppets [and particularly of the smaller ones] very graceful. This I couldn't deny. A group of four peasants dancing the rondo in quick time couldn't have been painted more delicately by Teniers.") I noticed that, if not handled correctly, that is, with grace, she simply would not move. Her face was set in resistance.

II

Suppose I am being operated as a marionette. Suppose I click into the Amazon-maze, looking for a book title. (I don't intend to buy; I want to check a publication date and find out what other books the author has written.) Because in an earlier, experimental mode I bought several books from Amazon, when it presented itself as a 'virtual' bookseller, not a bazaar, it now pretends to greet me. It 'knows' my name. (I so dislike being greeted familiarly by something with which I am unacquainted.) It presumes to suggest other books (and also music!) which it 'thinks' I would like. (It is wrong.) It wants to 'set cookies.' I refuse them. I've learned that to 'accept' a 'cookie' means my computer is being identified; that my mouse-movement makes tracks across the site, watched by Amazon's cat-computer. What is it learning? What does it want to know? It wants to know how to sell me something. "Yet he did believe this last trace of human volition could be removed from the marionettes and their dance transferred entirely to the realm of mechanical forces, even produced, as I had suggested, by turning a handle."

III

In the Devil's Dictionary I am compiling, the American national verb is "to sell." It has displaced "to persuade," as in: "President Clinton tried *to sell* his bill to Congress." "To offer" is done away with: "The writer *sold* her book to the conglomerate publisher." As a verb, it seems to have reorganized our older notions about commerce, and its variation, "to market," has subverted human dignity, to wit: "He has learned how *to market* himself to possible employers." I've also recorded a new noun: "dot com" as, *var.,* analog. to *to sell* in the new economy.

An illustration comes to mind. A few months ago, Bart Schneider, the good editor of what was a decent quarterly called *The Hungry Mind Review*, wrote this in an editorial:

> I took the final issue of the *Hungry Mind Review* to the printer on Friday. As many of you know, Hungry Mind recently sold its name to an on-line cyberuniversity called hungryminds.com. A requirement of the sale is that the magazine, along with the bookstore and press, banish the words "hungry" and "mind" from our realm and come up with a new name by April 1, 2000. This is not an April Fool's joke.
>
> Thus far the whole business has been amusing. Those of us charged with inventing the new name have visited several public relations firms that specialize in "identity." Their process, we're told, works a lot more quickly than psychoanalysis.
>
> Initially, there was fear that some bookstore customers would feel betrayed at the loss of the fabled name, but the Twin Cities community has adopted the naming of the bookstore and its satellites as a favorite project. In-

> store suggestion boxes fill up quickly. Media Web sites offer opportunities for renaming the Hungry Mind. Classes of elementary school kids are racking their brains for the right name. My father, a man who likes a puzzle, calls periodically from his retirement community near Sonoma, California. He offers not only his suggestions, but those of his buddies, a bunch of well-read seniors, never short of ideas. "How about the Intellectual Rabbit?" he says.
>
> Now, after editing all fifty-two issues of the *Hungry Mind Review*, I feel some trepidation about the magazine changing its name. Whereas the bookstore remains at the same address on Grand Avenue, and the press has a sales group representing its titles, a magazine, without the financial resources of *Talk* or *Doubletake*, goes out into the world a bit like an orphan. And now, an orphan with a new name. If you have any ideas, please send them our way.

The orphan's new name is *Ruminator Review* (and R. Bookstore, and R. Press). The logotype has a cow on it. Rightly. The owner of Ruminator, who is not the editor of the review but someone else, has a lot to chew on, considering what he has sold. He has sold what was once called his good name.

I read *The Hungry Mind Review.* The Hungry Mind was independent and determined to review and publish books appealing to its mid-western (and wider) readership. It enjoyed the protection of a good liberal arts college. That customers and friends had adopted the retitling project as if undismayed by the "loss of the fabled name" puzzled me. Had no one spoken of the loss of integrity? Surely (I hoped); privately (no doubt); while in public all kinds of folk pitched in to help.

On reflection, I wondered if their response might not have had to do with recent history. After 1989, when the Soviet empire gave way before what is now an unrestricted hyper- or turbo-charged capitalism, working people – I meant the salaried American middle class – suffered a series of profound shocks. In those years (have we forgotten?) *hundreds of thousands of employees* were separated from their jobs, no matter how long their service, because of corporate calculations like stock ratings and price/earnings ratios. Under a rain of blows, American employees absorbed perhaps the first lesson of the new century: not that everyone, but that *anyone,* is expendable.

That lesson settled deep into their bones, it seemed to me, and because of it they had decided that they must be inventive to survive. And, I supposed, they were much like those loyal customers who might have seen the Hungry Mind – bookstore, press, review – as their own and rallied around it.

Some time later, I received an e-mail from Bart Schneider saying he had read a piece I had written about Lee Goerner, who died a few years ago, and who had been the last book editor and publisher of Atheneum, a literary imprint shut down in 1994 by its new conglomerate owner. Bart Schneider recalled having met Lee several times. He said Lee had turned down his first novel, "with the grace of making it seem his shortcoming not mine," and wished he had been able to send him his next one, which was published last year. He mentioned editing a quarterly magazine about books, and said he had started an e-mail column and that he was going to write about Lee in the next one, which he would send me. He closed by thanking me for my "fine piece and for [my] devotion to literature."

The message touched me, for I had followed the Hungry Mind's travail, and I was glad to hear from anyone who knew Lee Goerner. But I was still troubled by the business of the change of name. I wrote back:

Thanks for your note, with apologies for this slow reply. Of course I know the *Hungry Mind Review*, very well, though may I say I find the new title less than inviting? The association with cows' stomachs is awfully close, even for this urban reader; but of course I wish you all continued luck and grace.

May I ask, privately and off the record, what you think about the title having been sold to an on-line 'university'? More and more, I myself worry about the erosion of barriers between commerce (turbo-capitalism, actually) and everything else in life, not the least, literature. Amazon is sponsoring (with PEN) a short-story contest, and Cynthia Ozick, saying that Amazon didn't have a presence in her life, thought it just fine as a way of welcoming new writers. I wonder.

About ten years ago, when Gayfrid Steinberg (wife of a NY financier of some sort) was underwriting the annual PEN dinner, one of the board members, Ken Auletta [who now covers business for *The New Yorker*, not wholly uncritically], criticized PEN and Ms. Steinberg for the relationship, saying she was treating PEN as a 'pet,' and disapproving of their association with the rich. Naturally, she was miffed and at once withdrew her support, leaving PEN hopping about on one leg looking for more dough. Since then, everyone has shut up and fawned gratefully over whatever dollars come their way, from whatever source. No thought, any more, of contamination by association!

No doubt you've examined this issue down to the ground; but doesn't it affect all of us, very closely?

Bart Schneider wrote a nice piece about Lee Goerner and *Archipelago*, in which he drew attention to an incident. A year or so before Atheneum was closed, Lee and Thomas Pynchon had lunched together and were saying goodbye, when Pynchon shook him lightly by the lapels and half-growled, "Only publish good books!" Lee was silent. When, later, I defended Pynchon, Lee exclaimed, perhaps in despair, "That's easy for him to say."

That wasn't easy for Pynchon to say. He had earned the right to say it. But nor was it easy for Lee Goerner to publish good books. When Atheneum, which he took into the black, did not make enough return on investment to suit its new owners, they shut down the imprint and fired its editor-publisher.

I wonder what we we mean when we say that we support literature. That we read books and journals; that we buy them in independent bookstores? Perhaps, that what we read informs our mind and discourse? Don't we expect the highest work of the imagination from writers? The *Hungry Mind Review* lost its appealing name to an economic necessity, it seems. Yes, but can a literary publication survive without the patronage of wealth, even as an entertainment rag like *Talk* arrives with immense backing? Is the dissemination of thoughtful, serious writing, in any form, to be left to what is called fancifully "the market"? These are old, old questions. The economics of responsible publishing have not changed; the margin is always low. What price literature?

In his piece, Bart Schneider wrote our URL as www.archipelago.com. It's an understandable mistake, made often enough, but *Archipelago* isn't a dot com; we've nothing to sell.

IV

We know, don't we, that we can't recover lost innocence? (That we would not?) I look at the muddy-foot girl and my heart softens and cheers for her, and also is wary of her. She is stronger than I am. Her gaze is unnerving. She is practical and doesn't suffer fools at all.

"My reply was that, no matter how cleverly he might present his paradoxes, he would never make me believe a mechanical puppet can be more graceful than a living human body. He countered this by saying that, where grace is concerned, it is impossible for man to come anywhere near a puppet. Only a god can equal inanimate matter in this respect. This is the point where the two ends of the circular world meet.

"I was absolutely astonished. I didn't know what to say to such extraordinary assertions…. I told him I was aware how consciousness can disturb natural grace. A young acquaintance of mine had as it were lost his innocence before my very eyes, and all because of a chance remark. He had never found his way back to that paradise of innocence, in spite of all conceivable efforts. 'But what inferences,' I added, 'can you draw from that?'"

My conceit, the marionette theater, is limited. We humans are fallible and I've erred on the side of bad taste, I feel, speaking of Kleist and Amazon and *to sell* in the same discourse. I could buy "On the Marionette Theatre" from Amazon's catalog on-line; but I won't. When, earlier, I ordered books there, someone at the warehouse had carefully wrapped them, as they do in a real bookstore, but then had included advertising which had nothing to do with reading. The company (not the person who wrapped books) treated me as a likely prospect for buying things from the mazy tangle that the site Amazon.com has become. I would rather buy a copy in an independent bookstore. I would rather borrow it from a library. Yet, I've been told that Amazon, selling books, does some good for small publishers and similar casualties of the chains and conglomerates. If it does little for me except as a reference service, that is because I am not a consumer but a reader of books, and I recognize persiflage when I hear it. – No, I am curious about the unfinished child: what has the bird whispered in her ear? Her eyes have widened. She knows so little, and is very curious. The world rolls away, far, far beyond the fence around her small field. The gate opens.

"'Now, my excellent friend,' said my companion, 'you are in possession of all you need to know to follow my argument. We see that in the organic world, as thought grows dimmer and weaker, grace emerges more brilliantly and decisively. But just as a section drawn through two lines suddenly reappears on the other side after passing through infinity, or as the image of a concave mirror turns up again right in front of us after dwindling into the distance, so grace itself returns when knowledge has as it were gone through an infinity. Grace appears most purely in that human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness. That is, in the puppet or in the god.'

"'Does that mean,' I said in some bewilderment, 'we must eat again of the tree of knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?'

"'Of course,' he said, 'but that's the final chapter in the history of the world.'"

See also:
Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theatre," tr. Idris Parry. Syrens (Penguin) 1994
A Conversation with Odile Hellier, this issue
Reminiscence: Lee Goerner, *Archipelago* Vol. 3, No. 3
The Ruminator Review http://www.ruminator.com

The Double, Vol. 3, No. 4
Folly, Love, St. Augustine, Vol. 3, No. 3
On Memory, Vol. 3, No. 2
Passion, Vol. 3, No. 1
A Flea, Vol. 2, No. 4
On Love, Vol. 2, No. 3
Fantastic Design, with Nooses, Vol. 2, No. 1
Kundera's Music Teacher, Vol. 1, No. 4

Recommended Reading

I think glamour is an invented word – it didn't exist when I was young.
Perhaps it was a combination of *gloire* and *amour* – and meant to describe
a woman who was thought or felt herself to be loved. Glamour exists
where all is present but not all is given.
Quentin Crisp

Friends of Archipelago *suggest books worth reading:*

Diane Johnson (LE MARIAGE, due in April, and LE DIVORCE, both from Dutton; PERSIAN NIGHTS, Knopf; DASHIELL HAMMETT: A BIOGRAPHY, Knopf):

"My first choice would be Jean Dutourd's THE HORRORS OF LOVE, which is translated into English and was published in the sixties. It is an incredible tour de force – a dialogue running to more than 600 pages, between two men who are walking through Paris, talking about the fate of a politician friend of theirs who was brought down by an erotic entanglement. Urbaine, wise, humane, funny, even suspenseful – this is a worthy successor, as someone said, to Proust. Dutourd is the greatest living French novelist, and the only witty one since Proust; and before that? Voltaire? Laclos? People say of his THE BEST BUTTER that it is the greatest World War Two novel to come out of France." **Jean Dutourd,** THE HORRORS OF LOVE **(tr. Robin Chancellor, Doubleday,** 1967) THE BEST BUTTER**, An Extravagant Novel (tr. Robin Chancellor, Simon & Schuster,** 1955) AU BONNE BEURRE**: Scènes de la Vie Sous l'Occupation (Gallimard,** 1986)

"Do you know Lois Gould's LA PRESIDENTA, about Isabel Peron? Strangely wonderful. There it is on my shelf. I'll have to re-read it." **Lois Gould,** LA PRESIDENTA **(Farrar Straus & Giroux,** 1981, 1989)

"THE HORRORS OF LOVE is an abiding favorite. Otherwise I am fickle and yield to fits of passion, at the moment for Sybille Bedford. Her memoirs – JIGSAW – or their fictionalized version – A LEGACY – are riveting pictures of Eurotrash society between the wars – how many people can write about that? Or perhaps 'Eurotrash' is harsh – seedy itinerant formerly rich people." **Sybille Bedford,** JIGSAW**: An Unsentimental Education: A Biographical Novel (Knopf,** 1989)**;** A LEGACY **(Simon & Schuster,** 1957**; Ballantine,** 1966)

Fae Myenne Ng (BONE, Hyperion)

"In this glorious, posthumous work, Hannah Green takes us to the ancient village of Conques, into the world of the sacred and the simple everyday. As she and her husband Jack are embraced by the villagers, we too feel intimately welcomed. We meet the wonderful ninety-one-and-a-half year (!) old Madame Benoit, the artist Kalia, the devoted Père André, and hear stories of hardship, joy and faith, even of the mischievous streak of their beloved saint.

"It is one day; it is Eternity. Hannah's rapture, her discovery of Sainte Foy, fills LITTLE SAINT with mysterious, magnificent light." **Hannah Green,** LITTLE SAINT **(Random House, July** 2000) Also, her "nearly-perfect" novel, THE DEAD OF THE HOUSE **(Turtle Point Books)**

Interesting Sites and Resources

Annotation

As *Archipelago* begins its fourth year of publication, we pause to remind ourselves of where we come from. In "Little String Game," our contributing editor K. Callaway traced the meaning of the word through history.

"I've looked up 'archipelago' in the OED and my Eleventh Edition (1910-11) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*," she wrote, "and found it is pronounced arkipelago, and that the Italian word it came to us from, *arci-pelago*, is pronounced archie. Thus, at least two pronunciations are in use. To my surprise, though, I see the word doesn't mean 'islands' but *the sea in which they are found in number*. The etymology is much disputed. The OED says it comes from the Italian *arcipelago*, from *arci* (chief, principle) and *pelago* (deep, abyss, gulf, pool). The medieval Latin is *pelagus*, the Greek *pelagos*, sea. In most languages the word had at first the prefix of the native form: OSp. *arcipielago* ; OPg. *arcepelago*; M.E. *archpelago*, *arch-sea*. All except Italian now begin *archi;* according to the OED…."

"Little String Game," *Archipelago* Vol. 1, No. 2.

Independent Presses

Back in Print <http://www.backinprint.com>. A brilliant idea: through the agency of the Authors Guild, books gone out of print are made available to readers by way of print-on-demand, with book orders filled on-line, by toll-free phone, or through Shakespeare & Co., New York City. In this set-up, authors establish the price; titles available are varied and often surprising.

Catbird Press <www.catbirdpress.com> publishes, among other notable books, a number by Czech writers in translation, including THE POEMS OF JAROSLAV SEIFERT; a garland of these poems appeared in Archipelago Vol. 2, No. 3. DAYLIGHT IN NIGHTCLUB INFERNO offers Czech fiction from the "post-Kundera generation," including work by Daniela Fischerová. Her "A Letter to President Eisenhower," appears in Vol. 3, No. 1, from FINGERS POINTING SOMEWHERE ELSE, just published. New, also, is CITY, SISTER, SILVER, by Jáchym Topol, considered the best Czech novel of the last decade, by a writer worth watching. We heard him read, were fascinated, and will read this long, complex book. See the web site of the Czech Embassy, Washington, http://www.czech.cz/washington for their cultural calendar in the capital city.

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), and the performance artist Carolee Schneeman. A beautiful story by Ortese, "The Great Street," appeared in our inaugural issue, and the writer's testament, "Where Time Is Another," appeared in Vol. 2, No. 4.

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 only celebrity writers 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.

Station Hill Press <www.stationhill.org> is a non-profit publisher run by the poet George Quasha. They publish writers of serious and surrealist bent, as well as very fine poetry and fiction. Among their writers are Maurice Blanchot and Spencer Holst (whose "The Zebra Storyteller" appeared in Vol. 3, No. 1). María Negroni, whose work appeared in Vol. 1, No. 1 and Vol. 2, No. 4, is the author of a beautiful work in poetry and prose, ISLANDIA, which they will publish this year, using print-on-demand; a noteworthy work of literature brought out by an interesting development in publishing technology.

Salmon Poetry <http://www.salmonpoetry.com> lives in County Clare, Ireland. The editor, Jessie Lendennie, is pleased to publish not only her countrymen, including, she tells us, the largest list of women poets of any Irish publisher, but also Alaskan poets, among whom are several old friends of ours. She wrote to say she liked our "The Repetition of Their Days," Vol. 2, No.3.

Sun & Moon Press <www.sunmoon.com> is a fine, serious, literary press with a long backlist. They publish classics as well as contemporary fiction and poetry; writers and poets such as Arkadii Dragomoschenko (astonishing Russian poet), Paul Celan, Harry Matthews, Djuna Barnes, Paul Auster, Russell Banks. They will publish Maria Negroni's LA JAULA BAJO EL TRAPO/CAGE UNDER COVER, tr. Anne Twitty, in a Spanish-English edition; a selection appeared in Archipelago Vol. 2, No. 4.

Turtle Point Press <http://www.turtlepoint.com>. This intelligent press, led by Jonathon Rabinowitz, Helen Marx, and Jeanette Watson, is reviving several books by the marvelous Iris Origo, including her LEOPARDI: A STUDY IN SOLITUDE. Another necessary book published here is Hannah Green's profound THE DEAD OF THE HOUSE. Jeanette Watson's Books & Co. News is posted, as well. (An excerpt from Lynne Tillman's BOOKSTORE, about Watson and Books & Co., once one of the cultural resources of Manhattan, appears in Vol. 3, No. 3.)

Twisted Spoon Press http://www.terminal.cz/~twispoon, publishing in Prague, offers works in translation by Central European writers, in handsomely-made paperbound books. Among their authors: the great Czech writer Bohumil Harabal (his TOTAL FEARS, as it is called in English, being a selection of periodic writing, is a great book), Tomasz Salamoun, fine Slovenian poet, Peter Nadas, Hungarian novelist, and other writers we will want to know about. The Prague Links are particularly useful if you are going there or are interested in the city.

Fine Arts

iola <http://www.artnetweb.com/iola/home.html>. This perfectly eccentric site is like the dinner party of artists, thinkers, above all, talkers you want regularly to be invited to. Its host-redactor is Robbin Murphy, who is worth looking up. Of particular delight: The Little Window.

Kamera – <http://www.kamera.co.uk> came to us via the *Richmond Review* and is its pictorial mirror-image. Lively, hip, devoted to the cinematic arts, with features and reviews of movies and exhibits currently on in Britain.

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. 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.

Work in Regress <http://members.aol.com/perkons23> This vertiginous site is by Peteris Cedrins, author of "The Penetralium," an excerpt of which appears in *Archipelago* Vol. 3, No. 3. Here also are two images of dark, thrilling paintings by Inguna Liepa; descent into the psyche.

Journals and Reviews

The Barcelona Review <http://www.barcelonareview.com>, Jill Adams, Editor. A fine, multi-lingual (English, Castilian, Catalan) offering published in Catalonia by a multi-national group. Intelligent editing; interesting reading of younger writers from Europe and America.

Big Bridge <www.bigbridge.org> is edited by Michael Rothenberg, editor of OVERTIME, selected poems of Philip Whalen (Penguin, 1999), and Wanda Phipps, who bring an open-armed, '60s generosity to this "webzine." "We think walls are good for keeping out the cold and rain," they write: "They're useless in the creation and propagation of art." Big Bridge Press publishes chapbooks and handsome botannica.

Blue Ear <http://www.blueear.com/index1.html>. "Global Writing Worth Reading" is their motto; well done. The publishers of this international web journal, from Washington, D. C., publish thoughtful journalism, sponsor articulate forums, link to articles and publications (such as *Central European Review* and the *New York Review of Books*) that we read regularly. They are forthright about their views; they are (properly) doubtful about hyper/turbocapitalism and are smart to trust their readers' intelligence. Their Links page is terrific. We found *Archipelago* there, recently, and in good company, when they linked to 'Hecuba,' Fragments of Witness, The Trojan Women. Vol. 3, No. 4.

The Cortland Review <http://www.cortlandreview.com>. Established in 1997, this publication offers such poets as Charles Simic, Robert Pinsky, Henry Taylor, Mark Doty, Robert Creeley, Mark Jarman, Lloyd Schwartz, Neal Bowers, R.T. Smith, John Kinsella. All poetry and most fiction appear in Real Audio format. They publish in February, May, August, and November, with Monthly features.

George Meyers Jr.'s LitKit <http://www.georgejr.com> bills itself as a "non-commercial zine and archive" and "a larkabout for readers with brains, and for writers with lightbulbs blazing in their heads." That's close enough; it's an experience.

The Hungarian Quarterly <http://www.hu.net/hungq>, the respected literary journal, offers an essay by Sándor Kányádi in No. 152, Winter 1998 (linked from the cover page) An essay about Kányádi and poems by him, translated by Adam Makkai and Bruce Berlind, appear in No. 138, Summer 1995. Kányádi's great poem "All Soul's Day in Vienna" appeared in *Archipelago* Vol. 3, No. 4; his charming, heartbreaking "Song of the Road" is in this issue.

Illuminations <http:www.cofc.edu/~lewis/illums.html>. The web site advertises this printed literary journal appearing normally in July/August of the year. We look forward to it. Its editor, Simon Lewis, writes, "You might just call us an international magazine of contemporary writing devoted to publishing new and up-and-coming writers alongside already established ones; very open to writing from around the world and in translation; mainly poetry but carrying some short prose pieces and some art work. This summer's issue will include an interview with Tim O'Brien and poems by Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American writers, also a couple of poems by Sándor Kányádi translated by Paul Sohar, as well as some of Sohar's own work.. The 2001 issue should showcase Cuban writers."

Jacket <http://www.jacket.zip.com.au> was founded and is edited by John Tranter, a Australian poet whose work is published often in the *TLS*. "For more than thirty years he has been at the forefront of the new poetry, questioning and extending its procedures." In this quarterly literary journal he publishes the work of other writers generously. A new collection of his that should be read, LATE NIGHT RADIO, is published by Polygon & Edinburgh University Press. It can be ordered there (tel. 0131 650 8436), or through Columbia University Press <http://www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup>.

London Review of Books <http://www.lrb.co.uk>. One of the few reviews we read cover to cover; published on paper every two weeks and worth subscribing to. The on-line edition offers a generous selection of the current and past editions.

Mangrove http://www.uq.edu.au/~enjmckem/mangrove/ is published at the University of Queensland, Australia, and is a lively site, offering well-chosen work by young writers, some of whom will bear watching.

Poetry Daily http://poems.com. A daily necessity.

The Richmond Review <www.demon.co.uk/review> received approving notice (along with *Archipelago*) in the *TLS*. Its staff is drawn from about twenty-five young persons-about-London-publishing. The

founding editor, Steven Kelly, is the author of THE WAR ARTIST, a chilling moral thriller about a man called Charles Monk, an artist who "only during wartime feels truly alive." It was published in the U.K. by Simon & Schuster.

Render <http://www.hhrf.org/korunk/render/render07.htm>. Anthology of Korunk, Journal of Culture, History, and Theory, offers a poem by Sándor Kányádi.

Renditions < http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions> is a magazine of translation from the University of Hong Kong, Centre for Translation <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/rct>, edited by Eva Hung, whose poems appeared in *Archipelago* Vol 3, No. 2.

Zimmerzine <http://www.nhi.clara.net/zimzine.htm>, edited by Martin Grampound, is an 'e-zine' with a flashy cover opening onto serious literature, including two poems by Sándor Kányádi, translated by Paul Sohar, at <http://www.nhi.clara.net/z59.htm>. Kányádi's great poem "All Soul's Day in Vienna" also translated by Sohar, appears in *Archipelago* Vol 3, No. 4.

Good Deed

The Hunger Site, United Nations http://www.thehungersite.com. A friend e-mails: "Quite clever of the U.N. to do this. Go to the Hunger Site on the U.N. webpage. All you do is click a button and somewhere in the world a hungry person gets a meal at no cost to you. The food is paid for by corporate sponsors. All you do is go to the site and click. You're allowed one click per day." It's true, and worth doing.

Et Alia

The Puppetry Homepage http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/index.html, is good news for devotees of the art, artifice, and folk-traditions of the marionette theater