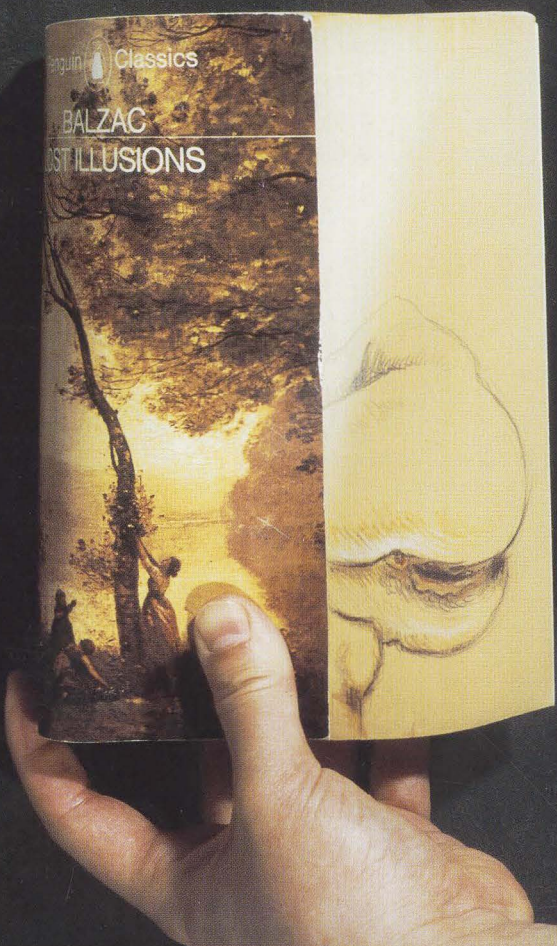


# THE CAPILANO REVIEW



The idea of the city providing me with water  
makes me wanna puke. Whatever  
happened to digging your own?

— Michael Turner

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Editor's Apology & 100 Ryan Knighton  
Gratitudes: An Erroratum

FRONT COVER

*Balzac*

4" x 6"

Marina Roy

BACK COVER

*Keats*

4" x 6"

## Clint Burnham / SIX STORIES

### WHITENECKS

Little Tommy Douglas's friend knew Alan Blakeney's son. He was at the window of his house when a lady from the complex came up and asked him if your mother's using the laundry. He said he didn't know and she asked if she was home and he said he didn't know. The woman went away.

Tommy went up to the main street to see his friends who had to go to the school. They were recessing and he went and sat on the curb by a coffee emporium. Some of the boys came by.

Tommy told them of his dream, of whitencks attacking at noon. Some of the boys elbowed each other noisily. What's whitencks hey? Hey doncha know. Pushing each other with weak knowledge. The quiet ones who knew from watching the tv sat quietly.

None of them quite caught what was going on. The whitencks did indeed arrive at noon, in new pick-ups and old jeeps. They were mostly the town bully losers, contract killers who never quite made it, like those Africans you read about who'd join up with the missionaries and sell out their brothers and sisters.

## NOT FAIR

(from *Smoke Show*)

Hey how're you doin'? Okay eh?

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah okay, hunh. Kernal. Yeah so okay. Hey, you want to open the window? Open the window okay?

The white girl sitting up in front of him turned around, folding her legs under her. She pushed a couple of times on the window. Jeff got up and she opened the window. He sat back down again and continued abusing the guy next to him. That guy wore flip-up sunglasses, and carried two plastic bags. He wore garden gloves. A cream windbreaker and looked like Jad Fair from the band Half Japanese.

So you want to get off now. Jeff talked to him. Get off, and, you know, go for it.

Uhhh, no.

Yeah okay so maybe we'll. This is your stop eh? This your stop? So what're you doing? Going to the fireworks? So you know. Hey no one mind the rush from the window?

The guy shifted a bit on the seat, pushed his glasses up, the flip-up shades stuck to the light sheen on his forehead.

Yeah so what if I had a gun eh? You got a knife, no, you wouldn't carry a knife, don't have the guts. You wouldn't carry a knife, would you? Hey Howard.

The guy called Howard looked straight ahead, said no.

Yeah, knew that. So where you going? Going downtown? Going to *Waterworld*? Gonna see it eh? Some movie eh? You seen it? Going to *Waterworld*, fireworks? Yeah so you going to the fireworks? Not much going on there. Something. Not much. So how's it going? Mind if I, think I should fuck ya? Hunh, you mind? Want me to shoot you? Hunh? Want that to happen? The bullet's bigger when it comes out eh? You know? Whole back of your head goes. So what're you going to, *Waterworld*? You want to sit here.

A little while later, a native woman moved back in front of Jeff. He got up, and she sat down. Yeah good so like I still wanta talk to my buddy eh. So how's it going eh buddy? Yeah, want to keep an eye on him. Don't want him getting away.

The woman looked at Jeff, she frowned and quickly smiled.

So where you going, where you going? Going home.

The girl who'd opened the window looked up at him. Nope.

Going to a movie? Yeah? What movie? *Waterworld*.

Umm, I don't know. Whatever. Some movie.

Yeah so, what movie. Don't you know. Don't you want to?

I don't really feel like having a conversation right now.

A guy across the aisle dropped some peanut shells into his pocket and stood up.



Hey so what's up.

Not much.

Going to a movie?

Yeah. He smelled of gasoline, or lighter fluid.

Guys going together?

Yeah, you know.

Yeah so what're you up to?

Oh you know, movie.

Yeah so what're you seein'?

I don't know, *Glass Key*. *Glass* something.

Yeah so what is it?

I don't know, some gangster movie.

White.

Yeah.

White gangster. Not a black one.

Yeah.

Yeah so like, right on. You know, not *New Jack City*, hunh? *Boyz N the Hood*.

No, this is an old one. Black and white.

Yeah, same drug, different —

Same shit, different pile.

The woman at the back got up and Jeff sat down again. Hey let's talk some more, eh buddy. Get some talking, hey Jew-boy. Hey you better not report me to *The Buzzer*. So where you going? West End? Going to the West End? Hunh? You like to go there.

No. The guy's jacket was zippered to his sternum.

Jeff kept putting his hand in his jacket pocket, poking with his finger. It was zipped up half-way: Body-Glove.

Hey you interested in our conversation? Pretty interesting eh? Well why don't you mind your own fucking business.

## SOMETIMES IN THE SUMMER BUT NOT USUALLY

Sometimes Wolf'd imagine how he'd sound if he was being taped and under surveillance. He read part of a book of tapes of the mobster John Gotti to get the tone right.

He would do quick conversations aloud.

· So I says to him, I go, how coulda ya forget the coke?

Although he was exaggerating. Most of the tapes were of people talking about how they were being taped. They worried about it, and talked about the informants. He used to use the pay phones. Assuming his own house was tapped. Then, they started tapping the pay phones in the early 90s.

By the late 90s, someone in BCTel decided that certain areas didn't deserve to have pay phones at all. They ran a cost-benefit analysis and while they were making money from all the pay phones altogether, they weren't from ones that were vandalized. Soon it wouldn't be from ones in rich neighbourhoods near high schools, since the kids had cell phones, but for now they differentiated between where they should have pay phones, where they shouldn't, and where there was a grey area. For the grey area they put in pay phones you could only call 911 from after 9 p.m. This crimestoppersish initiative only succeeded in making people use cell phones and further inconveniencing non-cell owners, or NCO's. Then AT&T got into the market and spread more pay phones again.

## SELF HELP = SELF DENIAL

Felicity filed her report cards at the government office, walked out to where immigrant-looking families — Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Ethiopian, Cambodian, Polish, American, Somalian, Filipino — sat in idling minivans and compacts waiting for their breadwinners to emerge from the government building. She unlocked her bike from one of the three almost-full racks.

Rules for dating:

1. Drink before you get to the party/bar/event/whatever.
2. Wait for guys to start talking to you, then talk back. Or start yourself.
3. Only have sex with them if you end up back at your place, or back at his place. If you end up somewhere else — say, it's muggy, and you're half drunk or totally drunk and it's a park and the grass feels cool, well, okay, but only if there isn't some creepy guy watching from the other side of the statue with a horse on it, unless the guy watching from behind a bush or from the other side of a statue with a horse on it doesn't bother you. Too much.

She wrote this down in a notebook, with a blotchy pen, in her terrible handwriting. That even she couldn't read. So she kept thinking sentences were over. Even if they weren't.

Two months later, looking through it, she couldn't tell what it was and could not remember the circumstances. In ten years of going on unemployment insurance they had changed the name, and now she got a job before her benefits ran out, for the first time.



## MY COCK IS A WOMAN

The woman begins speaking: It started when I put this sweater on backwards. I could see the Armani tag when I looked down to see if I'd spilled any cigar ash. And it looked like deflated tits down there.

He asks, What do you mean?

What's so hard to . . . ?

So hard to what? What, this isn't funny. I can't believe this, I'm talking to my cock? What, I'm one of those guys —

She, his cock, looked at him scornfully, if you can look at him with one eye scornfully.

He said, This is like a Jewish dog.

Yeah, she said, it's like a Jewish dog. She stopped and frowned. What do you mean a Jewish dog?

Why would I think my cock would be male? It's like a noun, right? It can be like male or female. Like is it a Jewish dog if it's born to a Jewish family or if it's owned by Jews.

What, so you're my cockette?

She cuts him off — Oh Mama Mama. My mother named our dogs all the time. One was named Brutus. The big guy on Popeye? This was before the Robert Altman movie. We had a cat named Snoopy.

Yeah, well top this. We had a dog named Quincey. After, you know, that show.

As I watched, my cock seemed to reach, with arms that weren't there, for her bedside table that wasn't there. She picked up her vibrator and began rubbing it on her cunt. My piss-hole. I, she, was writhing around, my cock was writhing around like a crackhead dancing to Gino Vanelli. I was getting fucking excited myself, I'll tell you, and my cock got bigger, she got bigger and harder and kept moving around even though she was stiff.

I was stiff and limber at the same time, or alternating, who can tell when you've got a dildo banging you? You know, I sadly said to the dildo, my father once told us not to call each other dildo. Me and my brother. We used to. So we switched to dingo. And fruit instead of fuck off. He told us dildos were things lesbians, women who loved other women, used. I thought they were nuns.

Sweet, the dildo said. Yeah, those lesbians. They were total fantasy objects for straight guys.

We're talking the arctic. We lived in the fucking arctic.

Fucking ice people.

Fucking ice people's fucking right.

But the thing about the dildo is it's a gun. It's a .22 rifle. I'm kinda disappointed, I'd rather a glock or elephant gun. But my gun and me, you know, we have a relationship. I keep it clean, don't share it too much. It doesn't mind getting dirty as long as I clean it. It's satisfying rubbing it, cleaning it, the brass weight and the flannel through the barrel.

And then the dildo, or the gun, he's got this fucking cappuccino machine. He lived in some trashed-out house, rotting into the ground and surrounded by surly illegal workers, a belching tar pit

and surveillance cameras. It was like how by the Cambie street bridge the raves and drug dealers lived across the street from the cop shop. What's a guy like that doing with a cappuccino machine anyway? Except that loser white trash like that have ones that they get from the dump or thrift store for a buck. And so dude dildo-slash-gun's there foaming up the milk, a cup with a couple ounces of nice dark fluid sitting on that shelf it has, the sheet metal shit with little holes or black plastic grid.

## CLINT NEVER MISSES

I shake the squeeze toy at the kid as its father fetched a pack of bootleg smokes.





*from*

# Ransacked

by Anne Stone

Dear Art,  
I'm sorry—but your  
—G.

Dear Art,  
About the bird  
d...

It's rainy.

Arthur will be wearing a woollen sweater for the rain, and his bird is dead. He has gone and his bird is dead. Dead dead dead.

It is very important to G that she gets this just right, and so, she begins again:

Art:  
The bird is dead.  
Dead dead deadD.

The bird, dead. Clever and dead. The sweater, woollen. Woollen and itchy. The weather, cold. Cold and wet. Cold and wet, clever and dead, woollen and itchy.

Dear Arthur, Your bird is dead and I met someone. Last night, I went out for a drink — the bird was the furthest thing from my mind. Last night I went out for a drink. The bar was dead, but it picked up — I wanted you to know that. That the bar did pick up, I mean it's important to me that you know that.



clever bird is dead.

Dear Arthur,

Dear Arthur,

the bird

your

Bird

It

is dead.

You are in a hotel room in the West, and here, there is a man named Marlin, *comme le poisson*. I met him by the wet of the sea.

But the letter makes G think there never was a clever bird. Perhaps she made it up, except for the insistent lump under the crumpled dish rag.

Yes, the bird is dead. And what's more, it's staying that way.



## The thing is, G feels

That walk we took when we were children, Arthur, more real to me than the woollen scratch of the sweater you wear because of the cold and the wet for Arthur, or she did. And then she didn't. Not at all. She didn't feel anything for Arthur or his sweater or the cold or the rain or the woollen itch.

No, I guess I don't love you, Arthur.

I don't love you because you steered me off of the sidewalk and the busted sole of my shoe grazed at suburban lawns like a sheep. So I didn't have to touch you or be touched by you.

Or your deadly clever bird.

Yes, I could tell that you would grow into the kind of man who would think he could own a clever bird, even then. Maybe that's why I kept to the lawns, so I wouldn't have to mourn it.

It is very complicated and difficult to explain. I know you are alone in a very large hotel room and that the windows are open. There is a draft from the west. You are sitting alone in the room. I picture the small auburn hairs on your arms, gently teased. Or they would be gently teased, if not for the blunt statement of your woollen sweater. Thickly greased as a pompadour. The smell of your hair oil is delicate and cloying at once. The delicate hairs on your arm are pressed flat under that pubic mass. Did anyone ever tell you that you have perfect teeth? Arthur, I do not like perfect teeth. Did I ever tell you they glinted that time we walked up through the old port? Some shiny thing glinted as we passed the hip-sliding silver boots of the whores on Ste-Catherine. I thought there might be a quarter on your tongue, tucked away for an emergency. But no, it was those Upper Canada teeth.

G walked like that, over lumps, sometimes losing her footing, all the way back. And so, something about the way that he didn't notice, or didn't care, that he'd forced G off the sidewalk trying to close a distance that remained constant keeps her from mourning his clever bird.

G went into the kitchen and got herself a glass of milk. She drank it very slowly.

They were ten years old. Now, they are thirty and the clever bird is dead.

## Dear Art,

I am sorry that your clever bird is dead. I realize it must seem insensitive of me, but I have given it quite a bit of thought and after I bury your clever bird in the garden, I am leaving forever. It's the best thing, really. We bring out the worst in one another. I bring out your dead woollen birds, and you, you bring this-me out. Arthur, I don't like this-me. It's not so much that I've found your continued company as delicate and cloying as that oily scent that so tenaciously clings to the pubic mound of your woollen bird, as it is that I think somewhere there might be someone else who will bring out a me I could live with. Good-bye, Arthur, I am truly sorry about your loss.

So you know, I will bury your clever bird under the lilac tree we transplanted from your mother's garden. I'll put the ceramic frog on top, the one with the spare key inside, so you'll know exactly where to look. There's some hamburger meat in the freezer, and the tomatoes are almost ripe. You should keep an eye on the lettuce, though, because I think it has aphids. The empties out back are for the slugs.

G.

the tip. A series of very small and very precise puncture wounds run down the left breast of your very clever bird. Any one of them could have been fatal. I don't think the lung was punctured because the bird struggled to breath for a while, and something like a soft and fleshy balloon pushed its way out of a little hole and began to inflate on the outside of its chest. I tried to make it go back in. I pressed there, Arthur, and a tiny whoosh of breath was forced out of the little bird's beak. I thought of you and held it to my mouth, trying to take something of its breath into me, for you. It bit me, Arthur, and then it died. I carried it to the kitchen that way, clamped on my lower lip. It was difficult to remove. I could only use my left hand to pry the beak loose, because my right hand was cupping the rest of the dead bird. I had to cup it, so it didn't drag from my lip. It was much heavier than it looked. Somehow, I managed. Before wrapping it in the dish towel, I examined the body. A stray cat was sleeping peacefully on our kitchen floor. I must have left the door open. Its forepaws were drawn up to its chest and its mouth was open, a little. It was sleeping so quietly it was disturbing. Someone must have tranquillized it. I thought that if I placed your clever bird in the mouth of that very stupid, very swollen cat, a pattern might emerge. I didn't think of Christmas with your mother, and God, how she always hated me — or worse, how she came to like me, later, much later. Smiling when I came to the door, and calling me a breath of fresh air — implying you were a sick-room in need of just such an airing out.

Arthur, your mother has always been right . . .



## G knows the letter

isn't about the bird at all. No, not at all. It's really about the yellow cravat, but she can't think about the cravat just now. When Art was dead, the second time, she would see him on the street sometimes when she bought a newspaper, and once she'd seen him on the news. Yes, one time Fiona Downey asked Arthur what he thought about the flowers the City of Montreal had planted, the billions of flowers. Art liked flowers, he said, the cravat at his neck as yellow as a daffodil. Arthur with his crooked tooth and his yellow cravat. Somehow it was easier this way. Much much easier, to take that yellow cravat from his neck, and gently closing his mouth with her hand, place a single finger over his lips as she stared at the naked place she had made, just over his throat, and let all the stories come from there.

This isn't like the other times, the times when G really forgets, I mean really forgets, where she lives and who she is. This is completely different. G remembers everything just now, she just chooses to remember it differently. No, it's not about the yellow bird at all, no, everything hinges on that god-damned cravat.

G could ransack her memories or his drawers to find some trace of it, but doesn't. There is too much at stake. She could even ask him. She could write,

Dear Arthur,  
Do you  
have a yellow  
cravat?

Or, even more casually,

I was putting together some clothes for pick-up by the Sally-Ann and thought of that yellow cravat you used to have. Do you know where it's gotten to?

By the by, your bird is dead.

But then he would know. He would know that everything depended on this, and that she'd seen him talking to Fiona Downey on the news, or how she'd seen him that time at the corner of Laurier and Jeanne-Mance, when she stopped to buy a newspaper. He would know she had seen him and said nothing, and what's more, he would know that she didn't know if she'd seen him in spite of having seen him herself. Unless he didn't have a yellow cravat. And G is afraid of what Arthur not having a yellow cravat might mean.

If there is no yellow cravat, no Borque-flowers, no Fiona Downey, no stopping for a paper at the coin-du-Jeanne-Mance, maybe everything that has happened since is already so very wrong. Maybe one of them never got out of the car. Yes, one of them might have stayed behind, lingering in just the wrong way. And who exactly was she living with? Who would this Arthur without the yellow cravat be?

Yes, G is sure, the bird is not the problem.



# The first thing

Arthur knows is that the house is too big and empty. He finds the note and thinks about G's arm. The place where her arm and shoulder meet. Arthur doesn't think of the name for that place, he just pictures the way time is slowly collecting there. He thinks of that place when they were young, and seamless, the skin was soft and tight and hairless. He thinks of that place when they are a little older, and she scuffed the flesh pink, little red spots erupting on skin unused to the rough scrape of a razor blade. In a long-ago playground, children are singing: "Art and G, sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g..." The way the flesh begins to fold, a little. Puckering up, just there. The way her age only showed on her face when she was tired, very very tired, but how it always showed there. How he would kiss that place, as their bodies loved. The slow see-saw motion as he entered her.

Arthur is tired and the garbage is filled with crumpled notes. Over the next few days, he will pull them out each by each and order them. His hands will brush away coffee grounds, leaving bruise-brown smears, as he lays each note out on the empty kitchen floor trying to make sense of things. There are empties strewn across the backyard. A whole lot of empties, and no slugs in sight. The ceramic frog is hammocked in a derelict baby stroller, and the key is gone. The stroller is nowhere near the lilac bush. The frog is staring at Arthur with ancient eyes, its abdomen is cracked, the freezer is empty, and they'd never bought the tomato plants they'd spoken of so often.

Arthur doesn't recall the walk she writes of in her early drafts. He doesn't remember it at all. Arthur has a very crooked tooth, and his mother died long before he met G. He hardly remembered his mother at all. When Arthur tries to picture his mother, he sees a series of warm and suggestive brush-strokes, the oranges and reds subdued. At first, it makes Arthur think of a warm oven. It is only later, sitting in a cane chair across from their empty bed, he thinks of Hansel and Gretel.

On the third day, G walks into the house with two bags of groceries. Her nat-tish brown hair is darker than usual. She hasn't washed it in a few days. G removes an elastic band from a clump of broccoli and binds her hair in a rope before putting the vegetables in the crisper. She doesn't mention the note or the bird. She puts half a dozen tins of cat food in the cupboard and brings a pot of water to boil, breaking open a bag of spaghetti. That night, as they are lying in bed, a bad smell leaking from the vents, G describes the photo she wants to take. In the photo, G and Art are hairless. She tells him that she will shave him from head to toe. They will lie, curled in twin fetal balls, facing one another. Their bodies contained in an aluminum pot. G says she will spray paint a cheap plastic pool silver, for the shot. Suspended in the cool broth around them, will be onions, carrots, and potatoes they've harvested from their own garden. The picture will be taken from directly above. G will jimmy a pole out their bedroom window, to which she has attached her



camera. She will put it on a timer and, hairless and naked, run down the stairs and slip into the pool. Or else, maybe Marlin will help, squeezing the small round pump in his hand when she signals him. Click. The smell persists. In the morning, they trace the smell to the laundry room hamper, to a crumpled dishrag and what is found there.

"Art," she whispers.

Together, they bury G's bird.

When G walks back into the house, her shoulders are trembling. Her back is to Arthur. She is standing at the counter facing all the little tea bags and all the pictures on all the mugs, and her shoulders are trembling. Arthur slides up behind her and kisses the place where her arm and shoulder meet.

"Who's Marlin?" he asks.

"Marlin!" she says, twirling round, "will be here in a couple of hours."

G smiles to herself and dices an onion.

## The day they moved into this

house, Arthur went blind. Not forever-blind, but blind nonetheless. G walked Arthur through the house, placing his hands on all of its surfaces, calling things by their names. Chair-Art, she said, and he felt the legs with his hands. Art-wall, she murmured, running his hands over the plaster braille, illegible until she named it. Gradually, Arthur imagined he could see vague, nebulous shapes, like slices of strange fruit suspended in gelatin. He moved very slowly and his limbs retained water. Arthur felt exactly as though he were underwater, or that the house was a giant mold filled with aspic. But slowly, Art began to see things as well as the names for things. It was a very odd time for Arthur, and as a result, G did most of the unpacking herself, only pausing to touch his hands to a thing, name it, as she took it from the box. After the house was tidy, and all the boxes stacked at the end of the lawn, G took his hands and ran them over her body. Her words came in a fluid stream. She said: hand Art arm Art shoulder Art breast belly thigh and Art wasn't sure which hand she meant, hers or his, which arm, which shoulder, which breast belly thigh. Our tongue Art our mouth. Finally, G led him to a little room and sat him on the word for a chair. She teased at his fingers, slowly, pulling each a little, gently, so he felt their shapes. And then she moved his hands, so that he held them in the air directly in front of his body. She pressed slowly down on his fingertips, adjusting them slightly, time to time. Arthur heard a clacking noise when she pressed on his fingers. Art-Art, she whispered, giving him a clear picture of a typewriter. The house and everything in it unspooled from there.

# Sometimes G

forgets the back-story, but she covers it up very well. Sometimes G forgets where she lives and with who, and sits down with her silver-beaded purse and all of the slips of papers inside of her purse, and puts it all together again. She simply figures it all out from what is found there. One day, after they move into this house, G goes to the store for a pack of cigarettes. It isn't important what she smokes. She doesn't know what she smokes, and chooses differently almost every time. Sometimes, though, she smokes a particular brand for a week. She brings the empty pack in her bag so she can ask for it a second or third time. Art worries, because if she ever gets lung cancer she won't know who to sue. Or else, she will have to sue everyone, and that, Arthur imagines, would be so much harder. On this day, G goes to the store and asks for a pack of Rothman's, to see if they stink of childhood, hair clippings found on a bathroom floor. Used clumps of mousy brown that gather their stale smell from old curtains, old carpets, old people's mouths. G lights a cigarette outside of the Greek Dep and forgets what comes next. Inhale, yes. Sit down on a bench, yes. Exhale, yes. Pet the dog that presents itself, here, tied to the pole, yes. Perhaps the dog is G's dog. She isn't sure. She looks at the dog. The dog eyes are round and liquid. When G looks into its eyes, she slips under the skin of the iris and her hair floods from her. She sees little Gs drowning in a gelatinous liquid, there, just under the vitreous skin of each eye. G goes through her purse, she finds a mover's receipt and on the bill, an address. The name of the street she lives on. The number on the street. G is sure she that if she finds the house she will recognize something. G stands over the dog, as if they belonged to one another, just to see if it is true. The greyhound wags its tail happily. The tail is long and curved. It is a delicate comma, a desperate comma. Anchored over a winking orifice, it tries to draw attention away from the pinkish hole, to itself. The manic tail greets her.

"Stupid bitch," a man says, and that's how G remembers her first and middle name.

G unties the leash from the pole and looks up. She pulls taut the trace line of the man's voice. He is sitting in the shade of a camero, on the passenger side, parked across the street from the store. "Yes," G responds coldly and the sleek little greyhound at her feet winks his hole happily. The man's voice whimpers underneath the anger. There is a hesitation before his answer. His hand comes to his head, a fist at rest. He fixes watery eyes on the dashboard as G stares into the dark surrounding him. After a long pause, he says: "You shouldn't fucking leave your dog tied up, he was fucking dying, lady. Tie your dog in the shade."

G thinks that the man sounds like he was a beaten dog. She considers telling him that this is a conversation he should be having with his father.



G thinks, yes, it's hot, but the little dog is fine. She says nothing. She waits. G doesn't know what she is waiting for, but she is eyeing this man very coldly. The man is staring at the dashboard and the flesh under his eye is twitching. G reads his expression, the doubtful fold of his fist. He refuses to look at her again. Sometimes, G is afraid at how very cold she becomes. The man doesn't frighten her at all. Her hands are not shaking. But she finds it disturbing. Something happens, and the bottom drops out and there is nothing in G but this terrible potential for something to go very very wrong.

G tells herself that she appreciates the reminder. But she hasn't moved. She finds herself looking at his soft skin and exposed neck. His body is vivisected by shadow and so, the torso is disappeared already. She sees the hand he's twisted into a knot against his hairline, as though he hasn't the slightest idea how it has shaped itself this way, or what to do with this fist now that he happens to find it in his possession.

A second man, with thick wrists, strolls out of the store and gets into the driver's seat. He tosses a pack of Players at the man in the passenger seat, whose fist winks into nothing at the precise instant it opens to catch the cigarette pack. The camero pulls away. The camero pulls away and G finds the bottom again. G finds the bottom and the way to the street with a name just like the name on the mover's bill, and a number just like the number, and tries her keys in the door to a first level flat on St-Urbain. The third key works. A man is sitting on a silver polka-dot couch, watching her carefully. The windows behind him are arched, and G can see passers-by on sidewalk, cars parked on the street. The man has a thin, long face, and prominent teeth. One of his incisors is crooked a little towards his cheek. His skin is pale and there are small, brownish spots on his gaunt hands. She likes the avian angles of his hands and, just looking at the way the skin gathers at his bony knuckles, G feels very lucky. The skin is pale, almost translucent. G traces a spider web of bluish veins from the back of his hand to his elbow, where the skin disappears into a over-large T. The T-shirt has been washed so many times that it has the consistency of gauze. There is a lump under his T-shirt that makes G think of a colostomy bag. The man looks very comfortable on the silver couch. The sofa has only one shoulder, and the man's elbow is resting there, calmly. His head is shaved, but G can trace the place where the greyish stubble gives way in patches to a fine and polished sheen. It isn't an established pattern, there is something random, clumpish, about this balding. But it seems familiar, somehow, and only disturbs her a little. She wants to run her hands over his nape and up, over the crown of his head. The man's eyes are very large and pale. Cigarette smoke blown into a dark room. His neck is narrow and ashen, a little bit stubbly, rough. The head seems overlarge for the thin neck, and G thinks of baby birds or babies peeped, their stumpyishness pulled long. The lines on his neck suggest drapes. Everything about the man is permissive, a little edgy too. An easy edginess, more unsettled than uninhabitable. The man looks from her to the greyhound and back again. "Y'know, G," he says, "we've never had a dog before."



The man offers to walk with her to the Dep. She accepts. The man is very thoughtful and brings a little plastic container filled with water. They tie the dog to the pole and put the water on the sidewalk. The greyhound laps at the water with a slim and pinkish tongue that is very elegant, G thinks, for all the froth. When the dog sits down again, the surface of the water is striated with thick spittle. The man and woman sit, together, on the wrought iron bench and wait. A little later, someone comes out of the store with three bags of groceries, and the dog wags its tail. And then the little dog is gone and, a little after that, G and Art are gone, too.

## G and Arthur,

sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes then comes then comes then comes then comes something G can't think about just now. No, it's better, so much better, that G occupies herself with the beef bouillon cubes Marlin has brought as a gift.

She has a box of them in her hand, just now, and is examining each perfect foil-wrapped cube. One falls from her fingers to the counter, denting the cube's corner and mashing the foil. G slips it back into the box.

Arthur looks amused and this annoys G, a little. Marlin is telling Arthur about how, together, G and Marlin are going to make broth very slick and very sexy. It's serious stuff. G is going to be so much more than just a shampoo girl. There will be an ad campaign and of course, a vernissage for G, too. A coordinated effort. Art and advertising, a proven marriage.

"People are going to ask themselves — what's broth got to do with serial killers got to do with the missing eight year old girl. But they know. Deep down, they know. E-ver-y-thing."

Marlin writes ad-copy for the company with the beef bouillon account.

"Everyone wants meat," Marlin persists, "they're looking for it on their plates, in bars, and through the telepersonals. We're going to give them the beef they want, instant beef, add-water beef, beef that doesn't plague you with phone calls after, beef that doesn't want to meet your mother, dangerous beef. But elegant, too, picture a little cilantro floating on the surface.

Understated beef. We're going to gender beef bullion cubes — they'll reek of sex so strongly that even CK will blush, we're going to give the cube the edge. Can you smell it?"

"I'm going to make G in the proces. She's got the edge I'm looking for. Provocative, terrifying, but not too terribly original. She picks up on what's out there already, puts a new spin on it. I've had my eye on her work for a while. Her images of human remains got me started in the first place. We'll find the serial killer later, much later. I won't go to the reps with this one for awhile.



But picture it: A lobster pot with a human hand, to begin, floating in the broth. A little cilantro, too. But what's that, bobbing just under the surface? — later, my friend, we'll go there later. We'll start with sex and when broth is gendered, then, then the clincher — death. What more could you want from broth? Broth is perfect for the twenty-first century — perfectly elegant. The only thing it's lacking, danger. Broth doesn't signify — yet. I am going to single-handedly bring sex and death to the broth industry. It's a revolution, an evolution. I'm not going to dance around the slaughterhouse like Jell-O. Fuck Jell-O. Everybody knows the truth about Jell-O. The rats. The rotting hides. I'm not going to hide a fucking thing. I don't need to see Bill Cosby pandering to the latest multi-cultural poster-child, some pygmy-child from Borneo with MS. No. Keep it simple, my mother always said: The principle, people, is slaughter — and what's more, people want it. They want it so bad, they taste it. So, you kill something. So what? Everybody is killing all the time. You put on a pair of brand-name shoes and you're pimping Malaysian kids. You turn on the television, buy a magazine, glance at a billboard horizon and you're implicated. I believe people want to be sold the truth — oh yeah, they'll pay for it."

"I call it the beef-squared account," Marlin says, pausing, so Arthur can picture it. "Get it? Beef-squared. For a while, I called it 'the cube,' but that hasn't caught on." Marlin waves one of his hands, a gesture of dismissal, and Arthur sees a series of ad-copy writers in little cubicles, sees each cubicle neatly wrapped in silver foil and deposited out of sight. "No one takes it very seriously, just now. They don't see the possibilities. So, I slipped in. I've got the account mewed up. And now, I'm going to bring broth into culture in a way that will change the way people think of it forever."

"Later, much later, we'll do the really wild stuff, stuff like what G and I talked about the other night. The really dangerous, scary stuff. The stuff that will have grannies pretending they don't know anything about it, as they buy the shit by the case, feed it to fat little nephews they secretly despise. Picture it. I want you to picture it. Some of it," and Marlin smiles at G in appreciation, "some of it would never get past the board, never in a million years — so that's where the tie-in comes in. I run the ad campaign, with the worst shit we can get by those fuckers — and G does the broth series in the best New York galleries. They'll eat it up, everybody will know about it. And we'll both be fucking rich. And it's the truth, I'm selling people what they want." Marlin smiles, sits at the table across from Arthur and cracks open a bottle of wine.

Marlin describes the vernissage they've planned. "The centrepiece, you follow, this is the photo that is going to get the press, whether or not we can run it as an actual part of the campaign. Picture it: A little girl, eight years old, hair natted and ropish. A little girl who hasn't bathed in a very long time, a very naughty little girl, wearing a torn undershirt. Nothing else. She is squatting, straddling one of the burners on a gas stove, legs spread over the pot. Blue flames from the jets provide the only light. It is a dim, sloppy picture, a

Polaroid perhaps. Maybe you can see a brownish smear on her ass. Details. At any rate, it is very amateurish, deliberately so. Dirt under her tiny fingernails. Maybe a couple strands of hair. Grey, wiry. A stream of piss flooding down, into the broth, a little cilantro scudding on the surface . . . At the base of the Polaroid, scrawled in a shaky hand, something terrifying in its simplicity. Just a date perhaps. A date. A first name. Maybe the place she was taken from. The name of a bus station, or maybe just a number. Details. But no face. You never see her face. In the actual ad, the Polaroid would form the centrepiece of a blank page. At the bottom of the page, in very small lettering, something about family values, something playing off of the whole Campbell soup strain and the name of the product. Simplicity. Terrifying simplicity. I am selling the people the truth. And people eat that shit up, they lap it up."

## G ransacked the streets

until she remembered the Polaroid of the little girl while walking up St-Joseph and talking to strangers.

The man was a bad man. A very bad man.

G suspects the man who gives her the poster. She thinks, it is always the man who gives you the poster while looking at your tits that's guilty. There is a police car at the intersection. The man walks beside her, telling her how long he has been a friend to the family, how long he has known the little girl. G is a little afraid that the bottom will fall out. She feels a concavity shaping itself under her, a space between her feet and the sidewalk that is very difficult to account for. The bottom is falling out and this man, beside her, is pointing to the picture of the little girl, and then to G.

No, G hasn't seen her.

It's always the one with the poster who did it. The one that looks uncomfortable when he spots the police cars at the intersection, and slips into the alleyway, saying it is a shortcut. G thinks of telling the police this, but doesn't know how. How to tell the police that she knows this man, who slipped into the alley way clutching his photocopies, killed the missing eight year old girl.

How to tell the police that he grabbed his nipples while talking to her. How he grabbed at his crotch, and tried to tell her about monsters. G knows all about the monsters the man clutches in his fist.



# DISPARUE / MISSING:



## G

**Disparue: le 7  
novembre 1977**

**Missing: November 7, 1977  
de / from: Montréal**

Langue parlée: **anglais**  
Âge: **8 ans**  
Granduer: **4'3"**  
Poids: **70 lbs**  
Yeux: **pers**  
Cheveux: **à la nuque,  
châtains**  
Peau: **blanche**  
Marques distinguées: **cicatrice au  
lèvre**

Language: **english**  
Age: **8 years old**  
Height: **4'3"**  
Weight: **70 lbs**  
Eyes: **blue/green**  
Hair colour: **light brown**  
Skin: **white**  
Distinguishing  
marks: **scar on lip**

### **Au moment de sa disparition:**

Jeans bleu, Levi  
T-shirt, chandail style Polo  
Souliers blanc et noir, Nike

### **Was last seen wearing:**

Levis  
blue Polo T-shirt  
black and white Nikes

**SI VOUS AVEZ DES RENSEIGNEMENTS / IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION**  
Service de Police de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal

Montreal Urban Community Police  
(514) 280-3492

**LE RÉSEAU ENFANTS RETOUR CANADA / THE MISSING CHILDREN'S NETWORK  
CANADA**

(514) 843-4333 / 1-888-692-4673

## G is walking up St-Joseph and a man,

a very bad man, falls into step with her. He is carrying posters of a little girl, eight years old. She has been missing for a very long time. Twenty years, almost. G and the man fall into step. The man is telling G about the little girl, he is telling her in French and G is having a little difficulty following. He has known the little girl for a very long time, that much is clear. The police have stopped looking, but not the man. The man will look and look and look for this little girl. He will always be looking for this little girl. The police are not looking for the little girl in fields now, not even under the grass. This makes the man sad. Very sad. The man clutches at his nipples, his crotch. "Le chien," he says, making his hand into a gun, pointing the gun at his temple and pulling the trigger.

A very bad man slips into the alleyway, clutching something to his breast. It flutters, the thing he clutches flutters against his chest as he runs.

## G ransacks the city for a man,

a very bad man. She walks up rue St-Joseph with other people's dogs. Sometimes, when she surfaces, she remembers to tie the dogs back up where she found them. At other times, she forgets, and ties them somewhere that seems obvious or at least likely, to her.

There are stories in the newspapers. G reads the stories out loud to Arthur, never guessing that she could be the cause of all that fuss. After all, she doesn't actually steal the dogs, and she always has a

What G doesn't tell Arthur: G doesn't tell Arthur that the dogs are never on the leash, it is G that is on the leash. The leash is only attached to the dogs' necks so they don't forget about G. G holds onto the leash for dear life. The leash may appear to be made from polysynthetic fibres, or even leather, but really, the leash is an umbilical cord through which G breathes when she finds herself underwater. She doesn't tell Arthur that she doesn't actually take the dogs, the dogs take



her. They take G to places that they love once upon a time. Sometimes, a dog will take her to a house, and inside of the house, there will be a family that doesn't recognize the dog at all. And that's how G knows that the dog lived there once, a long time ago, and loves the place still, and dogs enjoy her company, and she only wants to visit, a little. Sometimes the dog will lay on the grass, outside. Sometimes the dog will pull her right up onto the stoop, and if someone comes out, G will simply say, "This dog lived here once, and he's just missing home." People smile at G and sometimes let her in, giving her a glass of lemonade, and the dog lies down at her feet on a very familiar floor. If they offer her for the dog, G says, "No, that's okay, I brought some," pulling out a bowl and an Evian bottle refilled with tap water.

Sometimes a stranger smiles at her thoughtfulness and G feels a little like a fraud. But that's okay, too. It's not about the dog, after all. She holds onto the leash, even in these strangers' kitchens, because of the way her hair floods from her, wafts and waves on a horizontal plane. Before she leaves, G takes a Polaroid of the dog in the place it loves and slips it into her purse.

What G doesn't tell Arthur: G doesn't tell Arthur that all of the dogs, the bullish mastiffs and the monkey-eyed affenpinschers, the junkie-lean afghans and squarish cocker spaniels, the soft-eyed foxhounds and ulcerated basenjis, the Holstein-spattered Dalmatians, smug terriers, puckish bloodhounds and the border collies that herd G in the streets, the chow chows with flat huckleberry tongues, the carnivalesque poodles and slender, hot-tongued whippets, the foreshortened dachshunds and the bedlingtons G counts like lambs before falling into sleep, every last one of them, without exception, have the very same name.

No, G doesn't tell Arthur that name. G slips the name into conversations, sometimes, but Art doesn't seem to notice.

It's not a problem, really. Besides, the dogs ever takes the ones that are glad to see her. Most of them are. G doesn't worry herself over the dogs. It was the time with the baby stroller that bothered her. But that only happened the once, and luckily, it had been empty. She'd found it parked at the edge of a lawn, when a family was having a rummage sale. It was still out back, in Arthur and G's yard. Arthur hadn't said anything at the time, but when G came back from her walks, after that, Arthur was always at the window, waiting.

plastic bottle filled with water and a plastic bowl in her knapsack. After the second or third time, she remembers to bring plastic bags as well.

No, G doesn't tell Arthur that name. G slips the name into conversations, sometimes, but Art doesn't seem to notice.

# Stan Persky / GIRAFFES<sup>1</sup>: OR, WHY AND FOR WHOM I WRITE

One windy spring afternoon in Vancouver, shortly before travelling to Berlin, I was sitting in a dentist's waiting room, on the eleventh floor of a typically bland medical office building, leafing through a recent issue of *Time* magazine. The NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo had begun a few weeks before (in late-March 1999), and I wanted to check out *Time*'s line on it. But as I flipped through the pages, my attention was snagged instead by a photograph of a pair of giraffes. The photo was laid out in an eye-catching triangular shape, emphasizing the giraffes' at once ungainly and graceful bodies. One of the giraffes had curled his neck around that of the other. They were literally — in a way that only giraffes can manage — “necking.”

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1. Bank accounts are made, giraffes are found. Now the truth in this view is simply that if there had been no human beings there would still have been giraffes, whereas there would have been no bank accounts. But the causal independence of giraffes from humans does not mean that giraffes are what they are apart from human needs and interests.

On the contrary, we describe giraffes in the way we do, as giraffes, because of our needs and interests. We speak a language which includes the word “giraffe” because it suits our purposes to do so. . . . All the descriptions we give of things are descriptions suited to our purposes. No sense can be made of the claim that some of these descriptions pick out “natural kinds” — that they cut nature at the joints. The line between a giraffe and the surrounding air is clear enough if you are a human being interested in hunting for meat. If you are a language-using ant or amoeba, or a space voyager observing us from far above, that line is not so clear, and it is not clear you would need or have a word for “giraffe” in your language. More generally, it is not clear that any of the millions of ways of describing the piece of space time occupied by what we call a giraffe is any closer to the way things are in themselves than any of the others.

— Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (p. xxvi).



The picture was both comic and unexpectedly beautiful in its implied tenderness. The giraffe doing the necking had his brown-and-orange haunches to the camera, while the other giraffe stood stiff-necked, at a slight angle to its partner and the photographer, its small head quizzically peering into the distance.

The cut-line to the photo read: "Heavy Petting: Pairs of male giraffes often engage in extreme necking, entwining and rubbing and becoming sexually aroused as they do." The story was headed, "The Gay Side of Nature," and began, in *Time*-argot, "Giraffes do it, goats do it, birds and bonobos and dolphins do it. Human beings — a lot of them anyway — like to do it, too, but of all the planet's species, they're the only ones who are oppressed when they try."

I noted the *Time*-writer's cheery populist prudery in the use of the phrase "do it," as well as the photo caption writer's lazily cute "heavy petting" pun, both employed to make unorthodox sexuality less stressful for *Time*-readers. The story was derived from a new book, *Biological Exuberance*, by a linguist named Bruce Bagemihl, who had conducted a survey of same-sex pairings in the non-human animal world. "What humans share with so many other animals, it now appears, is freewheeling homosexuality," announced *Time*.

I'll tell you why I was interested in that particular article. First, I don't know much about giraffes and I was interested — as a homosexual — to learn, in more detail than I'd previously known, that they, and other nonhuman species commonly engage in same-sex activity. Since the countless nature shows on TV have somehow never noticed this phenomenon, opponents of human homosexuality make a big deal out of claiming that it's "unnatural." *Biological Exuberance* seemed to let some of the hot air out of that notion. I say "seemed" because we really don't have much of an idea of what's going on in the small brains of giraffes. In larger terms, the very idea of "nature" and what's going on in it, and what humans have to learn from it, is mostly determined by ideology rather than science.

Second, and perhaps more important, I'm interested in the context of the story. I believe, as a general rule of contemporary life, that the first question to ask about any event in the world to which you aren't an eyewitness is, What is the media's role in this story?

Since few events are unmediated, in order to get some idea of what's going on, we have to ask, How was this representation constructed, and for what reasons? If some media person asks me — among other things, I'm a public intellectual, so I often get asked to comment on public affairs — what about the war? my response has to begin with an examination of how the media are representing the war. If I don't do that, I'm colluding with the media's pretense that it's not mediating.

That's especially pertinent in this case, since *Time* is an iconic, ideological publication in American (and therefore, world) culture and has a long, influential history of treating the topic of homosexuality. In a *Time* feature about the subject done in about 1970, shortly after the first wave of public declarations of homosexuality, the magazine published a particularly vitriolic denunciation of same-sex relations, using all the clichés of the day — that it was “sick,” “pitiful,” “unnatural,” and a “substitute” for real sex, to which the magazine added the pseudo-liberal gloss that “we” (heterosexuals) should tolerate and pity “them,” a bit of consolation that probably didn't have much ameliorating effect in the high school washrooms where boys called other boys “faggots,” or in the dark public places where homosexuals were beaten.

Now, thirty years later, the editors of *Time*'s science section are sitting around a boardroom table in a spacious office on the 30th floor of some postmodernist-decorated tower in New York — or, for all I know, maybe it's a shabby warren of moveable room dividers. Somebody proposes to assign a piece to so-and-so (*Time* articles, once written anonymously in *Time*-style, are now by-lined, but the style book that defines how stories get written has been preserved in aspic from the 1970s) about a new book about same-sex pairings in the animal kingdom. Nobody around the table bats an eye or remembers the good old days when *Time* stomped all over homosexuality. *Time* is a time-machine that intentionally has no idea of history.

Third and finally, while I was being amused by the story and then, seconds later, began to reconstruct the process by which *Time* and America had imperceptibly rewritten social history — and, let me emphasize, this process of struggling over what's real, which takes place every minute of every day in every sentence created, is



what's at stake here — I recognized that this conjunction between odd factoid and the process of interpreting reality characteristically catches my eye, and forms the subject matter of much of my writing. The recognition makes me think about the function of writing, representing, interpreting, in today's world.

Meanwhile, back in a dentist's office in Vancouver, it occurred to me that the beauty of the giraffes in the magazine photo and the outbreak of thoughts that followed had completely relieved me of the anxiety about what my dentist was planning to do to me while poking around among my ever-diminishing-number of teeth. My dentist, by the way, is a nice Romanian woman who arrived in Vancouver by way of Israel, but that's as far as I've gotten with her story.

And in the meantime of those thoughts, I was pleased by the discomfiture the revelations of "natural" homosexuality would cause religious fundamentalists, cultural conservatives, or even the stridently heterosexual jocks I teach in philosophy classes at the college where I work. I giggled aloud, something I can't recall ever having done in a dentist's office — not, at least, since my teeth began to alert me to mortality every time I swish my tongue around my mouth.

Now, normally, almost everything about giraffes strikes me as funny — their gawkiness, their sudden grace of movement, their goofy faces with hooded eyelids, nub-like prongs, and prehensile muzzles. I suppose if I were to spend more time in their company, I'd stop thinking there was anything at all odd about them and begin to recognize their individualities. No doubt, it would take most people more effort still to seriously imagine the love-lives of giraffes, but I'm already predisposed to be curious about the untoward eros of nature.

While noting that "among bonobos, a chimp-like ape, homosexual pairings account for as much as 50 per cent of all sexual activity," *Time*, in the name of journalistic balance, also reported that "some experts believe observers like Begemihl are misreading the evidence. In species that lack sophisticated language — which is to say all species but ours — sex serves many nonsexual purposes, including establishing alliances and appeasing enemies, all things

animals must do with members of both sexes. "Sexuality helps animals maneuver around each other before making real contact," *Time* quotes Martin Daly as saying. He's an evolutionary psychologist at McMaster University in Ontario. "Putting all that into a homosexual category seems simplistic," he argues. I can't imagine why the *Time*-writer or the sound bite-providing psychologist think that sex among humans, *pace* sophisticated language, doesn't serve "many nonsexual purposes," too, including "establishing alliances and appeasing enemies."

Even the meant-to-be-startling bonobo statistic is slightly phony, since among non-human primates, one of the reasons young males play with each other is because the big, Alpha males won't let them near females of breeding age. But if a lot of bonobo same-sex is "substitution" — just as there's some same-sex substitution among human males in prisons, military barracks, boys' schools, and presumably among Mormons and Muslims, where polygamy is practiced — substitution still tells us something, namely, that same-sex stuff is functional (and it's not clear that all of it is substitution). Either way, pro- or anti-homo, the bonobo stuff is ambiguous.

But at the moment, I wasn't interested in debating the substitution argument or even asking what "real contact" means, although it's ultimately one of those fundamental questions. Rather, I was more inclined to bemusement at finding myself, once more, in a world that contained such incongruent multiplicities as Kosovo bombings, Romanian dentists, evolutionary psychologists (from my adopted country) on tap for *Time* magazine, and giraffes aroused by same-sex necking. Bemusement is one of my methodological strategies for accessing the world, especially, as at this moment, when I don't know exactly what I'm doing.

At the end of the giraffe story, after a paragraph or two of noodling over the deep philosophical and moral puzzles posed by animal homosexuality — which is to say, after pretending to think about "nature" in a cute, anthropomorphised way — *Time* brightly concludes, "Indeed, when it comes to answering those questions, Mother Nature seems to be keeping an open mind." Yeah, right, so am I, I thought.

I glanced around the waiting room to check that I wasn't being



observed, then quickly tore the page out of the magazine and pocketed it, before heading to the dentist's chair.

Okay, that's enough anecdote. What I'm most interested in is what occurred after I'd thought about the conjunction of factoid and its context, namely the question of what purposes writing might have now, what should be the content of books, and who the readers are. I'm interested because I'm at the beginning of something, and I don't know what it's about or who it's for. I'm feeling my way, which is another of my characteristic strategies.

I remembered that in the late-eighteenth century, works were frequently published with near-generic titles like *Remarks on Various Subjects* — the title given to a volume of aphorisms by Georg Lichtenberg in the 1790s — which suggested, at the moment I was thinking about it (shortly after I'd finished with the dentist), an almost ideal program for books today. But I'm not trying to reconstruct the intellectual climate of the eighteenth century, when Lichtenberg, a hunchbacked mathematics professor given to writing his thoughts in commercial "wastebooks," was, along with Kant, the co-presiding genius of the German Enlightenment. Rather, I was trying to think of the broadest organizing device possible for a book today. In fact, the "baggy form" has been a tradition in literature from the Talmud to thirteenth century "Chrestomathies" to mid-twentieth century school-readers with titles like *People and Places*, or *Adventures in Reading*.

Roughly at that point, I made a serious error. Here's what I thought: Books for our time ought to include solutions to the world's problems, scattered aphorisms and fragments, a few sexy stories, and a sure-fire new diet plan. They should take a mixed form, combining tales, essays, bits and pieces, prose poems, or whatever else. They should, I'm suggesting, ignore the standard conventional genre boundaries, since those boundaries restrict rather than open out reality. The underlying subtext (every book has one) ought to focus on the few and basic questions asked by philosophy, namely: What is true? What is good? What is beautiful? and How do you know? The purpose of books is to help the reader and author live more thoughtfully in the world.

Some of the above is okay. The part about the sub-text, for



example. But my imagination of a readership was all wrong. I was imagining a mass audience that could be amused by something that would take the mock-form of an all-purpose self-help manual for how to live in the world today, rather than thinking about the real problem of who the readers are.

I was partially on the right track. That is, I recognize that books aren't what they once were, and neither are we, as writers and/or as readers. Therefore we — books, writers and readers — have to take into account the attention-span and state of mind of likely readers living in a world of channel surfing, net browsing, and a landscape filled with information screens and in which one's location in relation to those screens determines much of one's consciousness.

Wait a minute. The likely readers of this are not people who are preoccupied with watching the *X-Files* or *Melrose Place* or whatever else is current on TV, nor are they people utterly immersed in surfing the net and anarchistically imagining that access to it will save the world. The readers of this are you, and I don't yet know who you are or what I have to say to you, or what we have to say each other, given that we live in an intersubjective lifeworld. About all I'm certain of is that you are indeed interested in the underlying sub-text of What is Good? What is Beautiful? etc., being made as visible as possible. If you weren't, you wouldn't have gone this far with me.

So, the mistake I was making was that I imagined pretending to write for a general audience while privately I knew that I was writing for a more limited audience of "you," and simultaneously imagining "you" knowing that, too. I was imagining "you" and I colluding in pretending that everybody was reading this in order to make up for the dismal reality that they won't be, and we both know it, whereas, if we do explicitly take the dismal reality into account it ought to have an effect on the content of what's being written. There are several simultaneous loopbacks going on here, as you can see, and that's part of (only part of) the content.

I still think that the proliferation of pixel screens is dangerous to all of us, readers and non-readers alike. I'll give you some examples, since I'm as affected by this condition as people who we think of as not thinking about it. Sometimes I'm in the immediate proximity of a TV screen, say, in my living room, where the Toronto Blue Jays are

playing the Boston Red Sox or, if you're a European, England's Manchester United is playing Germany's Munchen Bayern in the European soccer final. In any case, my mind is slowly filling, like a flooded basement, with useless statistics and tableaux of soon-to-be forgotten athletes, and I'm almost completely inside the virtual realm of the broadcast. That is, I've stopped being a human being, and am simply a media consumer seeking depressive distraction from the anxiety of existing. This can even happen when I'm watching "the news" about the war — although which war it is, in the virtual world of media, matters almost as little as which sports team. The only difference between the two is that the news attempts to create the illusion that I'm participating in the world as a human being.

At other times, the screen is small and far across the room of my local gay bar in Vancouver, the Routledge (or The Rut, as we regulars call it), mounted over the bar or in the corner above the pool table, and its middle-distance virtuality partially sucks me in. (The hapless Vancouver Canucks are skating against the invincible Detroit Red Wings; or it's silently telling me in closed captions what the weather is supposedly like in New Delhi.) The screen registers when my attention momentarily drifts from the familiar go-go boy (his name is Marcel; he's known in the bar as Marcy) stripping off his clothes as he dances on a minuscule platform to the thunderous beat of sound system disco. Marcel is a human being, the screen isn't. I've seen him nude dozens of times, and I've never been bored. When Marcel hops down from the platform and circulates among the clientele, eventually approaching me, we have, since we know each other, a conversation, a moment of "real contact," as the psychologist providing a sound bite for *Time* might say.

At other times, probably more rarely than at any time in human history, I'm meandering along an urban beach or sidewalk, without any screens between my brain and the world. I think it's important, as a matter of self-preserving sanity, to be more conscious of how much my/our preoccupations are "screened." If the first question to be asked about events to which we aren't eyewitnesses is, What is the media's role in this story? maybe the first question to be asked about our direct encounters with the world is, What is my role in



interpreting this encounter? But that still doesn't solve the problem of readers.

I was falsely imagining a readership (or colluding with you in pretending to the existence of such a readership) that needs various and frequently changed topics of variable duration, as on the TV show anthologies (from news to multiple story-line cop and hospital dramas), to which masses of people have become habituated. In that erroneous view, I was thinking: I don't imagine anything can be sustained for more than a couple of hundred pages these days. Something longer, and the reader is unlikely to get to the end, so why bother? In a culture that responds to all complexity, including human tragedy, with the maxim, "Let's put it behind us, and move on," why should authors immodestly expect more devotion than life itself now receives?

But that's mostly wrong. I'm not writing for readers who can't handle more than a couple of hundred pages, or who won't get to the end, or who believe that we ought to put it behind us, and move on.

So, let's get more specific about readers. Of the three or four billion adult humans on the planet, how many of them are more or less literate? One-and-a-half or two billion at best? Less? And half of them must be confined, due to what can broadly be called political conditions, to reading the equivalent of trash tabloids, which constitute a flow of data so distorted and preinscribed that it would dignify it to describe it as lies.

Or, let's do this exercise in numerical reduction from the other end: I live in a wealthy, technologically advanced, if provincial, urban region of about a million and a half people, 250,000 of whom regularly read a non-tabloid newspaper — for one of which I write a weekly literary column. The pages on which I write are read by about 50,000 of those readers, most of whom probably also engage in some sort of book reading. If you average all that out, we're at about three per cent of the population.

Even if that three per cent reads books, about two-thirds of that number probably reads what I'll neutrally call conventional writing, that is, writing that doesn't deeply challenge the assumptions of the world produced by the dominant ideological mechanisms of the *infotainment telesector*, as it's dubbed by some analysts. Or to put it another



way, how many copies of books by writers that do challenge those assumptions — let's say, just to name a handful of the writers I read, V.S. Naipaul, John Berger, Milan Kundera, or Philip Roth — are produced world-wide? Probably 200,000 or a quarter-million copies would do it, except in rare cases where a movie tie-in is involved. And those are among the best-known of that kind of literary writer, their work fully integrated into the dominant systems of book production and distribution.

For more obscure folk (including me), I'd guess about a tenth of that number would be close to accurate. For the poets I know — I'm thinking of George Stanley, Robin Blaser, Sharon Thesen, and George Bowering — who are more or less in the same oppositional relationship to the "poetry establishment" as I am to the official writing world, their readership must number in the hundreds. George Stanley appears (or claims) to be undismayed by this fact, but I'm driven crazy by its irrationality. What I mean is, is that his poems can be understood by you, and are valuable, so it doesn't make sense that you've probably never heard of him. For now, all I can see is that I'll have to write about poetry sooner or later.

Politically, it means that writers — "the unacknowledged legislators of the world," as Shelley called poets — are unlikely to have much political impact. A Czech writer, Ivan Klima, whose work I regularly read and whom I've met a couple of times, made an interesting remark to me a few years ago. During the years his writing was banned in Czechoslovakia, he was selling a hundred thousand copies or more of his books at home (in illegal editions imported from Josef Skvorecky's Czech-language press in Canada) and in translation. After the "Velvet Revolution" in his homeland, the large editions of his formerly banned work printed in the enthusiastic aftermath of the fall of communism soon were reduced to some 15,000 copies. A few years later, his novels were appearing in editions of 5,000. He said, with charming modesty, "Maybe 5,000 is the right number of readers for me."

In reality, I write not just for "you," but for partially overlapping, limited readerships, ranged in eccentric rather than concentric circles. The most limited readership (about one per cent) — which includes "you," some other writers, people who read the sort of

books written by the mostly European writers that I read and, finally, what used to be called the Muse — is for (literary) writing that challenges hegemonic assumptions, whether the assumptions are about being, politics, or anything else that's important.

If such writing offers too much of a challenge to received ideas, it can attract the attention (but not the readership) of witch-hunters, as evidenced by various hysteria-inducing campaigns in the U.S. As often as not, such campaigns are launched in relation to artworks that have as their subject matter some form of erotics of which the witch-hunters disapprove. Currently, and curiously, the subject of homosexuality continues to excite such witch-hunts, notwithstanding *Time* magazine's present views on such matters.

While the actual limited readership may find the subject matter inoffensive, the witch-hunters will be actively hostile, and one has to take account of their attention. So, for example, if, as a homosexual, I express in writing a desire for males between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, and I call the figures of my desire "boys" rather than "young men," I open myself (and others) to the witch-hunters' accusation of "pedophilia," or "child abuse," as the current phrase has it. It doesn't matter that the demographic group referred to is perfectly legal, or that the actual readership knows that by "boys" I'm not talking about pre-pubescent children. Even I'm aware, for all my dimness, that trying to distinguish between "pederasty" and "pedophilia" in front of a lynch mob is not a good idea. The issue is not the literal content, but whether the content can be associated with, assimilated to, that which is demonizable by the witch-hunters, whose strategy is to expand the demonized category ("child abuse") to the maximum extent possible.

At which point, I have to choose between resistance and self-censorship, and it's not just a personal choice, because often my decision drags my friends into the fray, trying to defend or protect me from the forces of darkness. My impulse is resistance. I think it's better — do I mean morally, or also practically? — to resist the witch-hunters rather than ducking them. I think you resist them by making explicit the concealed mechanisms by which they excite hysteria, by analysing their hysteria (do they want to protect children or simply to control both children and adults?), by standing your



ground, especially when that ground isn't legally exposed, but merely subject to hysteria. Otherwise, there's self-censorship. As the Yugoslav writer, Danilo Kis, who knew about censorship first-hand, said, "Self-censorship means reading your own text through someone else's eyes, a situation that makes you your own judge. You become stricter and more suspicious than anyone else could, because you, the author, know what no censor could ever discover — your most secret, unspoken thoughts, which you feel can still be read between the lines." That way lies perdition, Kis insisted.

A somewhat larger readership (about three to five per cent) is available for gently provocative journalism — the sort of column I write for broadsheet dailies — as well as semi-popular political writing, and certain kinds of non-obscurantist scholarly prose. The conservative-owned daily press, in response to its own perception of its public service function in a democracy, generally permits the regular publication of one or two writers who disagree with the paper's dominant presentation of its main political ideas.

To make matters worse, with respect even to this limited reading public, there's the phenomenon of the tribalization of reading, which results in people wanting to read only about themselves or people very similar to themselves, or else about unthreateningly exotic subjects. The issue is the loss of "general interest," as it used to be called, and the good will that attaches to and springs from an unspecific, genuine curiosity.

(However, one concrete bit of contradictory data is pertinent here: a couple of years ago, I helped start a "readers group" that consisted of about ten gay men. Although we began by reading a couple of gay books, the group ended up selecting books by Annie Proulx, Philip Roth, Simon Schama, Jose Saramago, and the like — i.e., simply interesting books. Maybe gays aren't as tribalized as other "identity" groups.)

The broader general newspaper readership (maybe fifteen to twenty per cent in advanced communications-and-service-sector societies) is, for various reasons, generally out of range, and won't be politically affected by people like me. Finally, the mass audience, capable only of consuming tabloids and entertainment TV, is completely out of my reach.



I'm aware that I'm leaving aside — and instead assuming — the differences between print, voice, and visual modes of communication, and simply implying my preference for the former. What I can't leave aside is the implication that writing — even “beautiful,” or literary, writing — is inextricably political, and the corollary suggestion that we have to take into account the political effect of any piece of writing. With respect to the latter, it's possible that political conditions are such as to completely nullify the political impact of a piece of writing, and yet I might write it anyway, simply as an existential assertion of being human. Writing is, among other things, political. It's for the *polis*, even as the city of citizens fades to a mere existence in the imagination.

I'm a little surprised by what I'm saying, although since I'm writing in an investigative rather than didactic mode, it's okay to be startled by what I discover to be my own beliefs. I don't ordinarily think of myself as a political writer, certainly not these days, or at least not as political as I seem to be calling for here. I've seldom felt less “political” than I do in the present period. I consider myself alienated from all existing (or imagined) political parties.

But let me make sure that I'm not misunderstood. I'm not calling for “political” writing. I'm calling for — and this is an idea that occurred to me about fifteen years ago — writers who are politically intelligent. Here's an example. Let's say you're writing a poem about a tree, a poem that refers to nothing but the tree you're writing about. If you don't know that, say, Goethe's oak tree in Weimar ended up enclosed in Buchenwald concentration camp during the Second World War — I read about this in Jorge Semprun's *Literature or Life* — then your poem about a tree will be subtly different from, somehow inferior to, an equally good poem about a tree by someone who knows there were concentration camps. I think this must be what Theodor Adorno meant when he famously remarked that lyric poetry isn't possible after Auschwitz. I mean, maybe he literally meant lyric poetry, or poetry itself, wasn't possible after the Holocaust. But I don't think that makes sense. What he had to mean — or at least this is how I read him — is that writing that challenges the orders of the day isn't possible unless you know about what happened to human beings at Auschwitz, and

unless you somehow take that into account in your writing.

So where does that leave me—and hopefully you? It leaves us with small islands or monastic conclaves of readers and writers who — in the face of relentless waves of interpretations of the world that suggest otherwise — feel compelled to remind one another to be human beings. Little wonder that a writer like Samuel Beckett said, “I can’t go on.” Greater wonder that he added, “I’ll go on.”



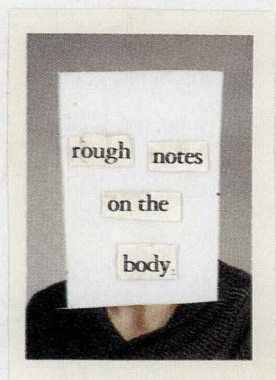
## Lorna Brown / CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Artspeak is a non-profit artist-run centre established in 1986 in Vancouver. Its early association with the Kootenay School of Writing served to situate Artspeak within a unique interdisciplinary community of writers, poets, critics, and visual artists. Throughout its history, Artspeak has played a significant role in addressing the historical, social, and intellectual conditions of cultural production. The centre presents a program of exhibitions of contemporary visual art by emerging and established artists and a program of publications, readings, and events to explore the relationship between the visual and language arts. Of particular interest is work that crosses the boundaries between the two disciplines, exploring their common areas of praxis — a distinct aspect of the history of cultural practice in this region.

Artspeak is pleased to contribute two new projects produced for this issue of *The Capilano Review*. The two artists presented here use drawing and collage to sculpturally intervene in familiar texts, evoking bodily memories of books as sensual and intimate objects. my name is scot's "Rough Notes on the Body" stems from two sources: the artist's collection of school annuals, accumulated since the early eighties and an ArtNews article which aimed to contextualize figurative sculpture in contemporary debates about representation and the body. The school portraits are cut loose from their captions, leaving only ambiguous clues as to their historical moment — hairstyles, eyeglasses, collars could be seventies, eighties or retro recurrences. The text fragments hover around specific meaning without quite landing — phrases become cryptic in-jokes, veiled descriptions of personality, or possibly snippets of educational policy and procedure. The anonymous, awkward phrases pictured here also float in an anxious, unfixed state. Marina Roy's drawings on the cut ends of paperbacks suggest a seclusion within the confines of the bookshelf: when held and manipulated by the reader, the drawings stretch and splay in animated shifts of perspective. Titled "Thumbsketches," the work leans upon and skews our associations of revered texts with irreverent, often scatological defacements.

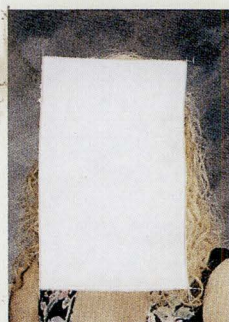
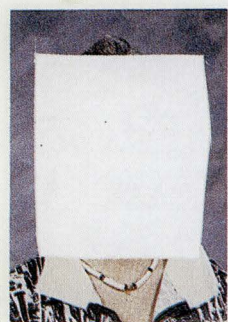
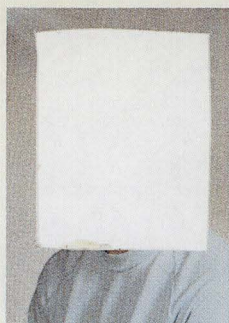
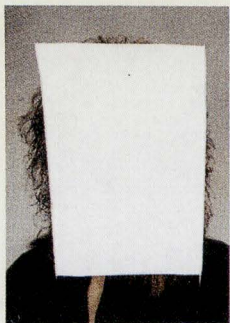
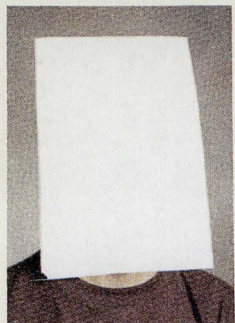




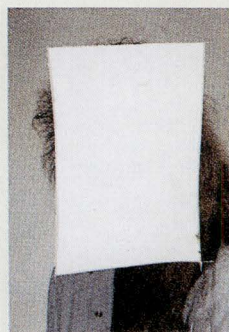
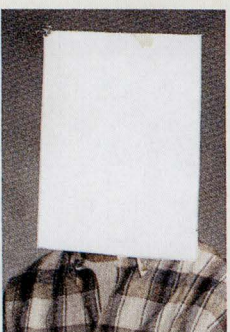
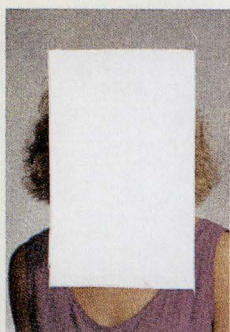


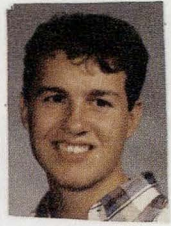
my name is scot





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because, unlike  
carrier of associations  
enduring importance,  
as translated,





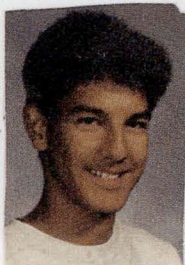
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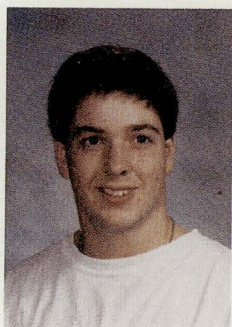
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both figure and fragment,



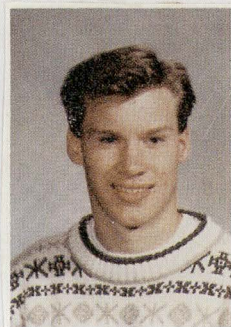




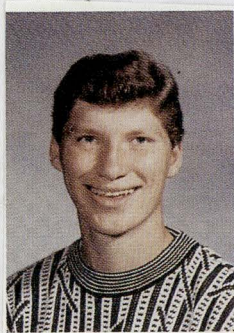
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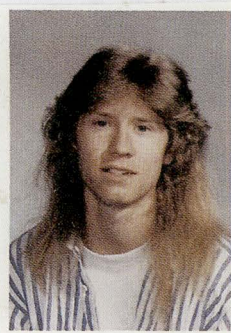
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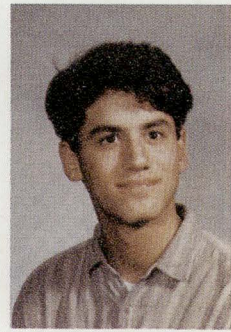
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with, that generation.





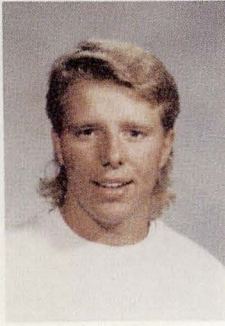
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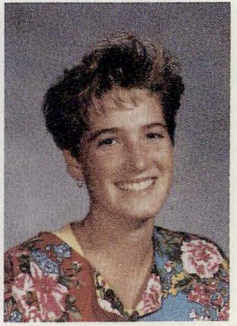
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now; their representative



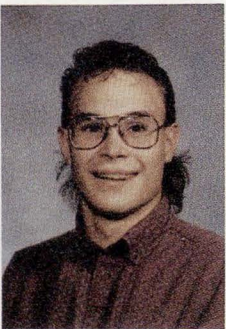
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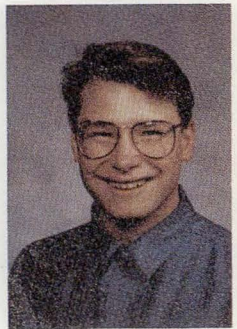
time, rife



same time



past and present, flesh

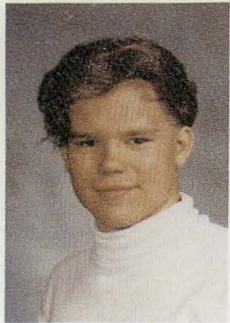


place in the

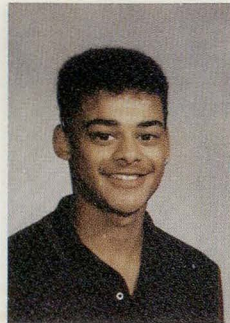




never departed from



are spectral presences



resonant with



and emerges from,



dominant and related



ambition, of course.



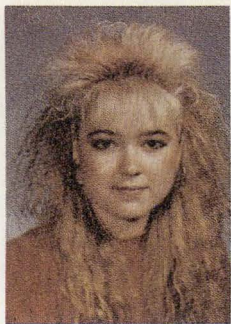
some aspect of



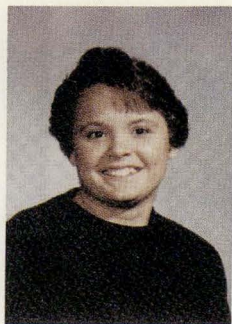
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In the same fashion,



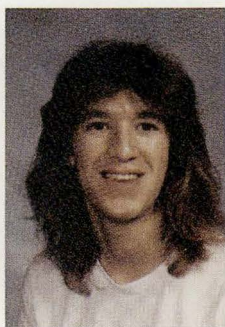
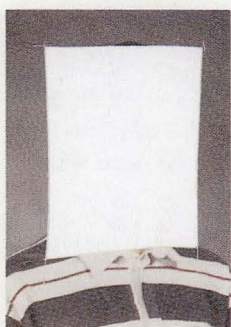
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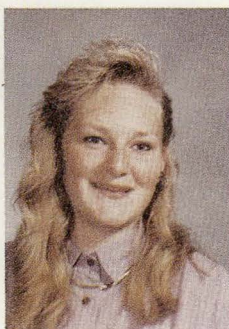
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them to compete,



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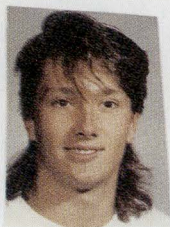


crudely but



the connection between





the figure, the fragment and the head.

how to translate

to evoke

seems more unabashedly

to revise

and the yearning

the flaws

suggests why:

to see

or concealing

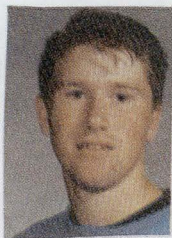
gestures, poses

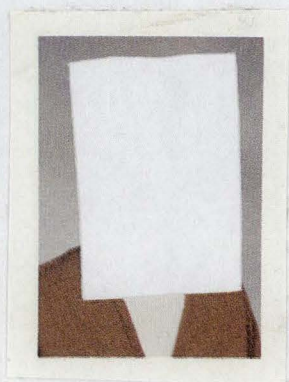
altering the surface

seeking to expose

identity as

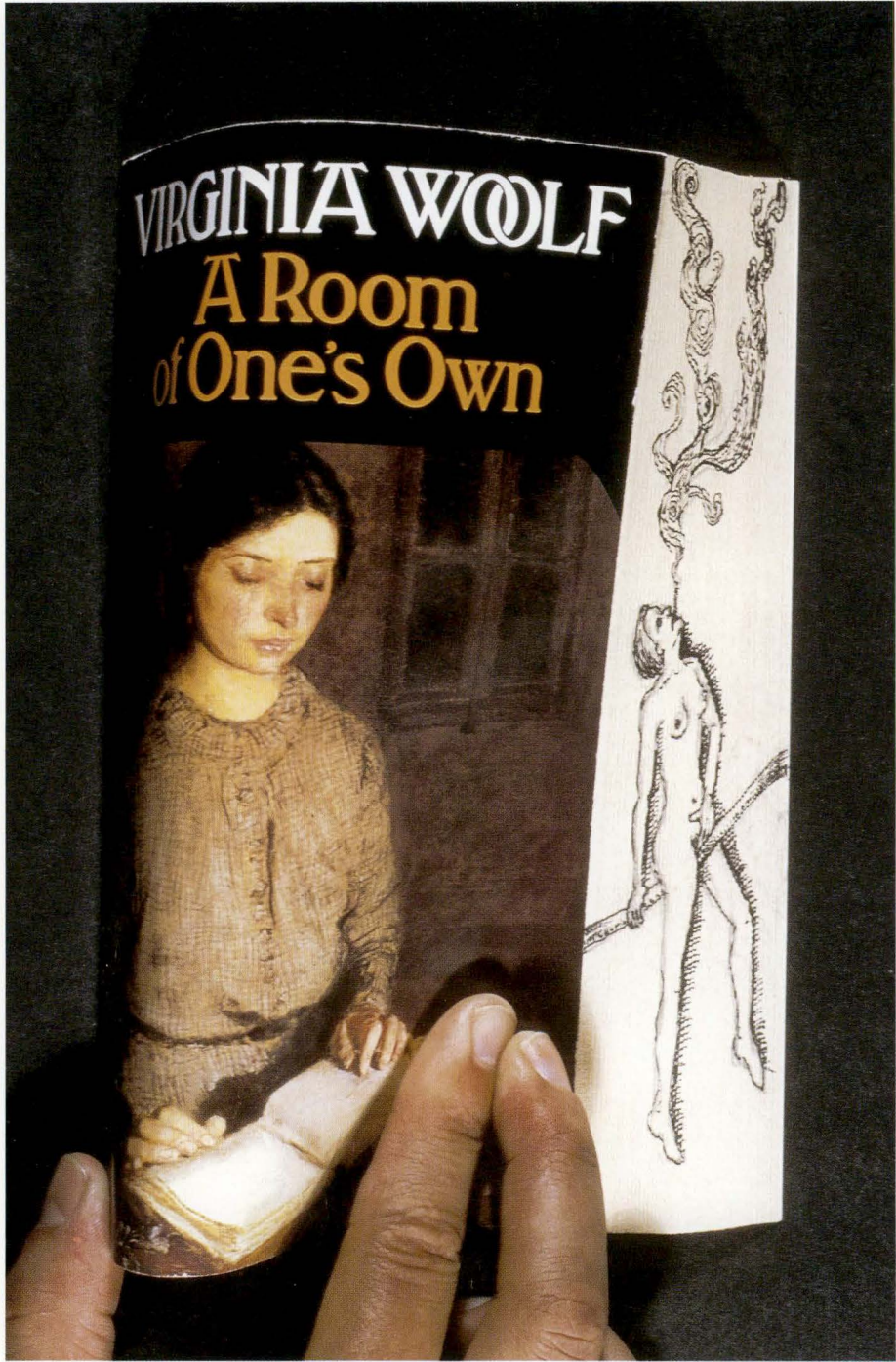
bodies.





Yet it was a pose,







English Library

# THE GOTHIC NOVELS

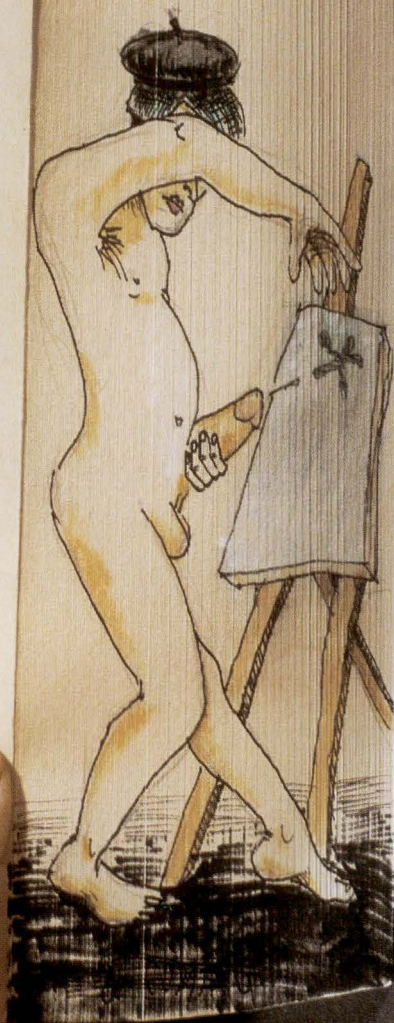
THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO  
BECKFORD/VATHEK  
SHELLEY/FRANKENSTEIN



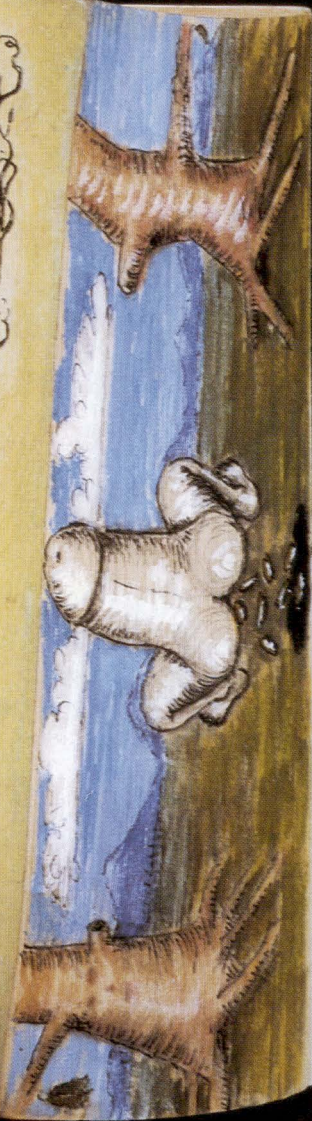
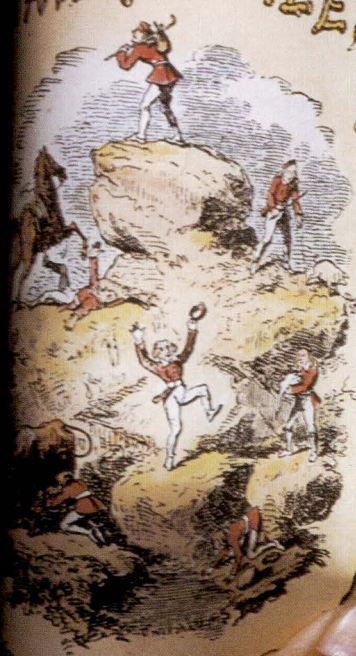


WYNDHAM LEWIS

*The Apes of God*



# GRIMMS' FAIRY TALES





de unamuno  
entiment  
que de la vie



S \$4.95  
IN \$6.50

"Straightforward  
to read and rich  
in suggestion"  
—John Barkham,  
Saturday Review Syndicate

# N AND SYMBOLS

VG





orges Bataille  
s larmes  
ros



# He plays the banjo.

I don't know anyone who plays the banjo anymore. Not since that awful movie — you know the one. Whenever we're out back, he comes up to us picking something old and weird like "Camptown Races." Never wears a shirt when he does this. And that voice of his — like nails on a blackboard. That's what you can expect if you buy the house next door.

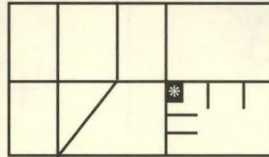
## SurDel

Michael Turner

## There's nothing right

about not having your own well. The idea of the city providing me with water makes me wanna puke. Whatever happened to digging your own? I fear I will

go insane if I have to live like this any longer. Water from a tap! Makes me wanna break something. Ha-ha-ha-ha!





We don't like him, but we thought it best not to say anything. Best just to ignore him. Last year we had the fence extended. Thought that might solve the problem of his incursions onto our property. Thing burned down while we were away. We asked him about it, and he told us lightning. Claimed he was at a friend's when it happened.



I make my living renting stuff out to the movies. DePalma's people said they'd pay me two grand a week for the spaceship I keep in my shed. Made enough on that one rental to live comfortably for the next twenty years. Didn't even make the final cut. Not that I care.



The day after we moved in he came over to introduce himself. He smelled so bad I thought I was going to vomit. Brought us a basket of root vegetables, which he claimed to have grown in his yard.

**Yams, potatoes, beets.**

We thanked him, of course. The next day I peeked over the fence. Nothing growing there but weeds, old cars, and a huge puddle of oil. The vegetables went right into the garbage. Organic my ass.

My family has been in the Lower Mainland longer than anyone except the Indians. You know that famous picture of the Vancouver fire, the one with the aldermen standing in front of a tent? That's my great-great-grandfather on the far left. He was among the first settlers. A very upright guy. But because he didn't have a drinking problem, they couldn't name anything after him.





You know, you work and you work and you work, and at the end of it you think you might find yourself a nice little place to settle down, but no—there's always some creep living next door, playing heavy metal music, laughing like a ninny every chance he gets. And there's absolutely nothing you can do about it!



I'm somewhere in my thirties.

There was a flood when I was young that soaked up all our records and my family as well. Tried looking into it once, but the government had no records of my life either. Seems strange that just because somebody's born at home they don't exist anywhere else but there. That's why I ain't moving. I don't care how much I get.



Police caught him spying in our window. I thought that was it, thought we were rid of him once and for all. They frisked him, and what should they find but my wallet! But get this: He tells them he found it in the street—and that he was only trying to return it! There was no money of course. And the cops believed him! We raised hell, but they wouldn't have it. Said we were lucky to have such an honest neighbor. Said we were lucky to get the wallet back at all.

I have two good friends who come over once or twice a week.

I'm not gonna tell you their names on account of they're private types; but one's an artist who used to take pictures, and the other works at the Co-op. Usually we just sit on the back stoop and shoot pellet guns. Once a pellet hit a trailer-hitch and the damn thing ricocheted back and took out the eye of the artist. Couldn't work after that. Squished it like a grape. I see more of him than the Co-op guy.





When we decided to renovate he caught wind of it and wanted to help. Showed up at seven the next morning with a utility belt full of the rustiest tools I've ever seen. Some of them looked like they were fashioned out of old tin cans. Guy went through the whole belt, telling us what each of them were for. Idiot. Showed up everyday after that, eager to work. Contractor had to pay him to stay away. When the bill comes, it's itemized. He's got the guy's salary under Miscellaneous. Three hundred bucks! Told him we weren't gonna pay it, and he threatens to sue.



**My training's in carpentry, but what I'm best at is social work.** I've got really good people skills. Unfortunately, what you need for that kind of work is a piece of paper, and I don't have one. So I got my artist friend to make one up for me. A Masters degree from the University of British Columbia. Looks pretty good. Looks even better photocopied. That way you don't see the white-out. Have it hanging by my front door. Any time somebody knocks, asks if I got a moment, I just point to it and smile.



## Didn't see him for a couple of months.

Thought something might have happened. So I went over and looked in his window. There he was: lying on the floor, totally out of it. He had one of his tools in his hand, and in the other what looked like an extension cord. I ran back and called 911. The ambulance shows up and I rush out and tell them I think he's electrocuted himself. They tell me to get back inside. A minute later he comes out with the attendants. Everyone's laughing. I ask if he's okay and they just look at me disgusted, like I'm nuts or something. Then the driver points at me and says if I ever pull another stunt like that they're gonna have me institutionalized.

**I like my life.** Sometimes I wish I had someone to share it with. Gets lonely in the winter, what with the days so short. Thought about getting on The Net, meet some people in those chat groups they have, but I know I'd just end up playing Battleship all day, and that's not very healthy. Every time I get lonely I just go for a walk. Better to meet somebody in the flesh than get cancer staring at a computer screen.





We can't have kids of our own, and that's a source of tension for us. So we volunteer at a couple of youth groups. I got involved with Little League because they were short of coaches and I used to play semi-pro when I was younger. Anyway, who should our first game be against but *his team*. We had no idea. But there he was, wearing an adult version of the kids' uniform, smoking and yelling at our guys, telling them they're all a bunch of assholes. I mean, they're just kids, right? But get this: In the fifth inning, with his side down a run, our best hitter comes to bat and he makes a pitching change. Only he's the replacement! He's a grown man and he's about to pitch against a twelve year old boy! He starts warming up and I run out to stop him. So what does he do? Throws the ball right at my head. And who gets dragged off the field

but me! Apparently I'd said something to provoke him, but of course I didn't. Claims he was only doing his job, doing what he called a transitional warm-up, because the next kid

pitching throws harder than most adults. Everybody but me seemed to know that.

I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life.



My house is the oldest house in the neighbourhood. It was built in 1913, and everything else came later. The house was built by my great-grandfather; he had a dairy farm, the biggest in the valley. All this used to be his. Sometimes I

climb on the roof, smoke a bomber, and squint until everything disappears. Then I let the cows out. And every cow I give a name. There's Belle and Tawney, Mr. Moo and Naveed. Some of them are Jersey cows, some of them are Holsteins. Every now and then, if I'm really into it, I have my imaginary border collie Misty run around between them. It's a great way to pass time, providing it isn't too cold or wet.

There was this girl who used to visit him. We recognized her from the Co-op. She used to sit at a card table and sell raffle tickets for one of the churches. I



think she was developmentally delayed, although I'd hate to be wrong about that. The first time I saw her I noticed her name-tag said Charlotte. But then the next time I saw her, her name-tag said Justine. It was the second time I saw her that she asked if I'd buy a ticket. I told her I didn't feel comfortable buying something from someone named Charlotte one day and Justine the next. Because it's true—I don't. When I get home there's a note nailed to my door. It's from him. The note reads: If you don't apologize to Charlotte Justine, I will never speak to you people again. That was one of the toughest decisions we've ever had to make in our life. But we did it for her, not him. After that, he was coming over every day for a week, offering to cut our lawn, paint the house, clean the chimney—you name it.

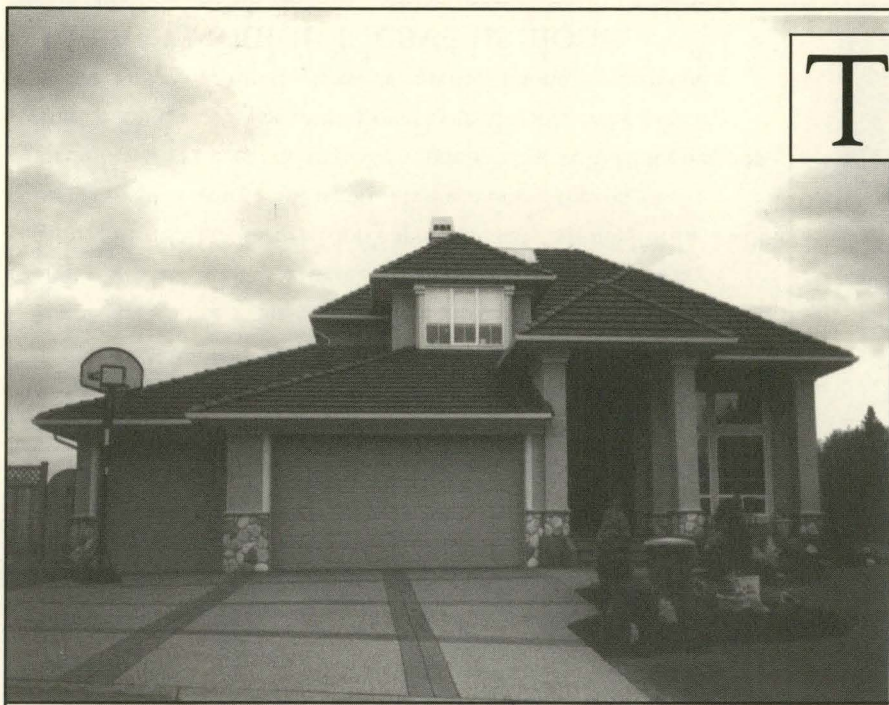
**He just wouldn't leave us alone.**

My mother always told me the world is full of three kinds of people: the good, the bad, and the lonely.

**Most bad people are lonely, so the trick is to make them not lonely.** And once you make somebody not lonely, you make them good people. I think that's how it goes.







# There was an incident a few months back.

We were going to Hawaii for Easter and my sister was coming to town for a course. Naturally we offered her the house. A week before we were scheduled to return we get this phone message. It's from my sister. The message said there was a For Sale sign on the

house next door—*his house!* We were ecstatic, danced a little jig. When we got back, there were all these trade vans parked out front. I went over to ask who the new owners were—and who should answer the door but him! He told me he thought about moving, but that my sister convinced him to renovate instead. I phone her up, and she says she has no idea what the hell I'm talking about.

## Di Brandt / REVISITING DOROTHY LIVESAY'S *THE HUSBAND*

Dorothy and I were drinking coffee in The Green House in the library tunnel at the University of Manitoba. It was the summer of 1991. The cafeteria was closed. We were trying to content ourselves with foul-tasting instant dispenser brew. Dorothy was passing through town on literary business, I was researching a project in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library upstairs. Coffee with Dorothy was a cultural event: she was a keen-eyed matriarch of the Canadian literary scene, full of strong opinions and news. That day she was worried about the experimental writing being done by west coast women writers such as Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland. Though she had been highly experimental all her life in her own life and work, she mistrusted the theoretical shift toward poststructuralism and deconstruction that had occurred in the mid-80s. She also tended to be harder on women's writing than on men's, perhaps in part because she cared about it more. These were writers whose work I admired, so we were immediately in disagreement.

Changing the subject, I mentioned her novella, *The Husband*, which I had recently read and liked. Still, I ventured, I have a question for you about the ending. I was convinced by everything except the part at the end where Celia, the narrator, sends away her sweet young secret lover and goes back to her unattractive depressive ageing husband. I don't understand why she did that, after feeling so creatively energized by the love affair. I expected a sharp reply, but instead Dorothy sighed. Your question confirms for me what I felt all the time, she said. The editors convinced me to change the ending, to make it less dramatic and more conventional, more conciliatory toward the husband. I didn't want to, but they thought it would sell better that way. But it hasn't really done that well, and I wonder how many other people feel as you do. (In fact the novella received mixed reviews, a number of them enthusiastic.)

I was amazed. Was this the same Dorothy whose feisty poems took



on the whole world, unflinchingly facing down factory owners and literary critics and motorcycle gangs, and single-handedly rewriting the code of what's permissible to say about women's sexuality in Canadian print? Of course I didn't know then the history of the novella, how it had taken years to find a publisher for it. Indeed, I had little sense then of the kind of stamina it had taken for her to create her astounding *oeuvre* altogether, going so persistently and courageously against the grain of the acceptable mainstream with the slimmest of institutional support throughout her long, prestigious career.

*The Husband* was written during Livesay's writer-in-residency at the University of New Brunswick in 1967, the year she won the Governor General's Award for Poetry for *The Unquiet Bed*. Several versions of the manuscript were collected among her papers at the University of Manitoba Libraries' Department of Archives and Special Collections along with a wealth of other unpublished works (as catalogued in *The Papers of Dorothy Livesay: A Research Tool*, 1986). Several publishers have since recognized the merit of many of these works and brought forth new publications, including, most importantly, *Archive for our Times: Previously Uncollected and Unpublished Poems of Dorothy Livesay*, edited by Dean Irvine (Arsenal Pulp Press 1998), and *The Husband* (Ragweed 1990).

Why did she leave so much high quality writing unpublished? Livesay may have felt *The Husband* was too experimental in both style and subject matter to be acceptable to a Canadian audience at the time of its writing. There is evidence that the manuscript was submitted to Ryerson Press in 1967 and rejected (*Papers* 179), which is surprising given the success of *The Unquiet Bed* published by Ryerson that same year. As with much of her unpublished work, one has the sense that she spent much more time and energy writing, than organizing submissions to editors. Livesay's prefatory "Author's Notes" in the book refers delicately to the twenty-three year hiatus between the writing of the manuscript and its publication, alluding to the distance she often must have felt between the cosmopolitan outlook of her writing and the guarded Canadian milieu: "this [a forty-five-year-old woman's marriage of estrangement to one of reconciliation, through the medium of an intense love affair with a

younger man] had been an acceptable theme in European literature, especially in France, but I believe that in the sixties and seventies it had not yet been explored in Canada. Happily, by 1990, my contribution will have seen the light of day."

The novella is epistolary in structure, consisting of a series of letters written by Celia, a middle-aged housewife and sometime artist, married to an ageing and retired husband named Hugo, who has recently suffered a debilitating stroke and is recovering slowly and without grace. The couple has come from Toronto to Fredericton for a few months in order to be close to Hugo's brother and sister-in-law, George and Lily, and the university community they are part of, and presumably, to reconnect with the landscape of Hugo's childhood during his convalescence. ("You have to hand it to an author who can reveal the plot in her foreword and still have you tap-dancing through a book to see how it turns out," comments Christina Montgomery in her review for *The Vancouver Sun*).

Celia's letters are addressed to various people close to her, her stepson David (Hugo's son from a previous marriage), her sister Maudie, her former art teacher Max, whom she likes to call "cher Maître." There are also occasional "Notations," private observations sent to no one. The novella documents a fall and winter in the life of Celia and Hugo, during which, feeling displaced in the provincial Maritime town and desperate for spiritual companionship while nursing her morose invalid husband, Celia falls into an emotionally satisfying romantic liaison with a young English boarder named John. After several months of erotic and intellectual companionship between them, Hugo suffers a bad fall, looking for his wife in the night (in fact she was upstairs in her bed, alone, but had left a light on by accident in the living room downstairs), and ends up in the hospital with a broken leg.

At this point, stunned by the accident, Celia realizes her first loyalty and duty is to her husband, despite convincing evasions of this point to both John and Maudie previously. "I see more clearly now that my loyalty is to Hugo," she confides to Maudie, "because he needs me the most. It is mainly because of me that he has kept going, kept from wishing himself dead . . . there's no way 'round it, is there? You cannot put your own desires first." She firmly and



abruptly dismisses John, for his own sake, as she puts it, not hers: "You must be free to find your own mate, your own age" — a statement we must surely hear as fraught with ironies, at best, given the highly problematic discrepancy of ages in her own marriage.

The novella ends with a hasty — this is where I find it most unconvincing and unsatisfying — brief gesture of reconciliation between Celia and Hugo. We are asked to believe that the fall has somehow improved this depressed man's spirits, that having to nurse a broken leg as well as paralyzed one is (mysteriously) uplifting! "Hugo seems much more philosophical — almost his normal, pre-stroke self." Celia, for her part, is suddenly, inexplicably, willing to abandon her own interests, in order to devote herself to "cleaning, cooking, reading to Hugo; or listening to radio or TV, with him." This after nearly a hundred pages of high tension over the lack of enough room to pursue her own desires sexually and artistically in this marriage. Even her plans for painting are, as she tells Maudie, "in blackout," and she hardly has time to write letters now. We might read this outcome as desperate or tragic (as indeed Barbara Gowdy does in her perceptive review for *The Globe*, calling the home Celia must return to a "prison"), except that the final letters are liberally sprinkled with words like "happiness" and "joy," and the novella ends on what is surely meant to be a symbolic, hopeful note: "Hugo had got the fire going."

I am interested in this novella from a readerly point of view, despite its failed ending — with its strangely Calvinist belief in the notion of happy catastrophe and sudden guilty retreat from its own premise, namely, the importance of women's desire — for many reasons. Generically, it is a delicate experiment in telling a complex story through simple but intensely poetic language that somehow belies its slim length: it is a novel written by a poet. The epistolary structure, always difficult to manage plotwise, here becomes the occasion for a series of opinion pieces by Celia which are part essay, part exclamation. Yet in their profoundly dialogic nature, they achieve the kind of intersubjective communal sensibility we associate with oral and dramatic works. The narrative moves along quickly without a lot of external events happening, driven by Celia's intense inner experiences. It is preceded, unusually, by a list of "The Cast,"

in which only Celia is designated by profession: "The Artist." The rest of the characters (in an interesting reversal of social conventions *vis a vis* gender) are named only by their social relation to her: "Her Elder Sister," "Her Husband," "Her Boarder." (And indeed we never do find out what Hugo's profession was before he retired.) In other words, it is a profoundly cross-generic, hybrid, and slyly experimental text that offers illuminating insights into the limits and possibilities of both genre and gender.

The character of Celia is startling to readers accustomed to Livesay's ebullient assured poetic and public voice. Livesay has taken care here to underline the constraints of women who are conventionally married and find themselves in restrictive social situations. Celia is more keenly aware of these constraints than some wives might be, having had a tumultuous relationship with a young "wild" lover, Michael, in her youth. She has also grown up, as she recalls to Maudie, "rootless" and "bohemian," in strong contrast to the genteel landed folks she finds herself surrounded by in Fredericton. It is fascinating (and wrenching) to see the spiritual contortions Celia undergoes trying to play the patient dutiful wife to the morose depressive Hugo, while desperately, one might argue heroically, trying to keep her own adventurous passionate artistic spirit alive.

It is tempting, of course, to speculate about the autobiographical nature of *The Husband*. The "First Draft" manuscript is unapologetically listed under "Autobiographical Fiction" in the Archives catalogue. Pamela Banting confidently asserts in the accompanying archival note that the novella "derives from Livesay's love relationship with a younger man during the 1960s" (*Papers* 173-181). As far as I can see this claim is made without evidence, and contradicts the highly stylized nature of the work. Yet surely we must hear in Celia's intense frustrations, her repeated self-questioning and frequent apologies, particularly to her sister Maudie, a version of the kind of frustration Livesay herself must have felt, and has expressed in her memoirs, living for years in an emotionally unsatisfying marriage, and prevented for many years from earning her own living due to arcane marriage laws. On the other hand, Celia's character is much less self-assured than the Dorothy Livesay



we are accustomed to encountering in her essays and poems.

Kristjana Gunnars, in an archival note on Livesay's bibliographical clippings, observes that almost all newspaper profiles on her work described her "as either someone's daughter, someone's wife, a housewife, and later as someone's mother and grandmother. Seldom is the writer spoken of as a writer only." Dorothy Livesay, comments Gunnars, "has always faced some form of conflict between her self-image and her strongly held convictions. Her press and journal coverage goes a long way in explaining this conflict" (*Papers* 22). Celia's highly conflicted self-identification as dutiful wife, on the one hand, and expressive artist, on the other, can in this sense be read as a version of Livesay's own long-time struggle to be both a woman and a free spirit in Canada in a time when these categories were considered to be mutually exclusive.

As to the motif of the rejuvenating love affair, I am interested to see, a decade after the publication of the novella, how many women around me are acting out variations on this theme, having secret affairs to renew themselves in unsatisfactory marriages, then going back to their husbands; juggling the personal satisfactions of long-term secret affairs with the public obligations and privileges of marriage, with varying degrees of comfort; or finding the secret affair to be a perhaps unconsciously intentional dramatic action that propels them outside of marriage.

Perhaps, as Celia observes to John, the French and the Italians are "much more reasonable about these matters" than Canadians, accepting triangles as a normal part of the marriage arrangement. Certainly the notoriety around the Clinton-Lewinsky affair these past two years suggests that North Americans in general are not comfortable with a narrative involving adultery (even in the much more conventional configuration of older married man and single young woman), however many people are actually indulging in versions of marital unfaithfulness secretly. Here, as so often in her career, Livesay seems to be in the vanguard of arguing for women's independence and freedom, both professionally and erotically — though not without a sense of accompanying social responsibility, caring for those one has committed to caring for, not taking advantage of the young, and so on. The novella does not end with

death for the heroine, as it would have a hundred years ago (even in France), but with a restoration of domestic peace and harmony.

*The Husband* holds many additional delights. The cosmopolitan, literate Celia indulges in keen observations about the social niceties of New Brunswick society, steeped, as she experiences it, in provincialism. One of the novella's prominent themes (one might argue its major theme) is a multifaceted discussion about aesthetics. There is the lively ongoing conversation with John, the young lover, about the relative merits of objectivism and expressionism. He, as the "poet," is a mouthpiece for a modernist imagism; his collection of poems is called *Still Lives: a precise delineation of the object seen*, a poetics to which Celia, painter and narrator, adds Livesavian socialist consciousness and passion: "I fear, the artists in this area," she writes to Max, "although experimental and original, have not come to terms with such subject matter. Could it be that emotion is lacking? The feel for the please [*sic*] of work, that you'd find in Russia or China?" Elsewhere she engages in issues of gender and technology and spiritual transformation in art. Livesay's deep connection with nature, similarly, what we might now call her ecopoetic concern, finds eloquent expression in Celia's lyrical description of the rural landscape around Fredericton.

What was the unconventional and less conciliatory original ending of the novella? How much would it change our reading of this innovative text? This question took me eventually to the University of Manitoba Archives, where I was astonished by several things. First, by how little the manuscript was changed from the "First Draft," except for the ending. This made identification of the editors' interventions a relatively easy task. More astonishing by far was the discovery of how radical these interventions were, not in terms of number of pages, which are relatively few, but in terms of altering the text's meaning. The publishers/editors at Ragweed at this time were Laurie Brinklow and Louise Fleming. When I asked Ms. Fleming by telephone whose idea the revisions were, she said "It was a collective decision." To what extent the editors were influenced by Desmond Pacey's earlier critical comments on the manuscript, expressing what were evidently similar views, is something I can only guess at. (It was Pacey, then Vice-President at



UNB, who facilitated her writer-in-residency there in 1967; Livesay presumably requested his commentary on the manuscript at that time. It appears among Livesay's papers in an undated four page note (*Papers* 82)).

The original ending is so dramatically different from the published one that I am tempted to make you, dear reader, guess at it. However, since its revelation is after all my main point, I shall have to forego the suspense — in a moment. In fact, there are two versions both marked "First Draft." I assume the tidier of them is in fact a second draft, and have identified them here as First Draft A and First Draft B, respectively. There is also an unmarked file of incomplete and disordered draft pages, presumably an earlier version in progress. In the comments following, I have chosen to work from First Draft A, which in almost all respects is identical to B in terms of content.

In First Draft A, then, Celia and Hugo carry on extensive conversations during their reconciliation after Hugo's accident, both in the hospital and later after he comes home, which establish several key points. First, they read together and discuss a passage written by "Colette's husband" (presumably a chapter from Colette's third husband Maurice Goudekot's memoir, *Close to Colette*), which addresses the question of disparity in ages between marriage partners, among other things. This has been Hugo's suggestion. Afterwards, he comments on the husband's devotion to Colette's writing career and haltingly apologizes to Celia for not offering her more similar support in her artistic endeavours: "I've been thinking . . . if you had had more of a break . . . from the demands of the family — my family, that you took on?" [typos corrected from the original].

His question brings tears to Celia's eyes. "He had never before admitted anything like that," she observes; "Why Hugo," she responds, "I didn't think you cared . . ." "I care," he replies, stroking her hair. It is the first sign of renewed tenderness between them, though we have been prepared for this moment by the image of Hugo's eyes lighting up whenever Celia comes into the room in the hospital several pages earlier.

Celia is more deeply implicated in Hugo's fall in First Draft A

than in the book. There are two differing accounts of what happened. In the first, described in a letter addressed "To David," Celia hears, from her bed, her husband getting up in the night and starting down the hall (they sleep in separate rooms). Following him to the stairs she sees that he doesn't have his cane, and cries out "Hugo!" whereupon he slips and falls halfway downstairs to the bottom. In the second account, addressed "To Maudie," she is woken by the crash of Hugo falling and rushes to the stairs.

I assume Livesay intended the second account to be a glossed over version of what really happened, since Celia is clearly on the defensive in this letter to the sister, who is after all privy to her affair. (It is, however, the first and only time we perceive the narrator as unreliable, which introduces some ambiguity in terms of authorial intention.) In both accounts Celia feels a certain guilt for Hugo's accidental injury, which is absent in the book, and this guilt precipitates her return to him — though it doesn't stop her from experiencing heightened passion for John and enjoying several more erotic encounters with him.

In fact, the separation from John is presented as a much more passionate and wrenching event for Celia in the manuscript than in the book. Compare the rather cold-hearted goodbye note to John in the published version: "Please! It is finished, John. Not only for my peace of mind, not only for Hugo's need — but because of you, also. There is no future for you, with me . . . In time you will see reason" (77), with this emotional declaration from First Draft A:

To John:

Now it is hitting me hard! I am in chains — more so than ever before. I cannot get out at all. I cannot see you.

Thank you for phoning. At that hour, it is safe. He hears nothing.

O my dear. Every meeting with your voice, even, arouses me again. It seems unbelievable that I cannot touch you, also. So I begin to see that the situation is impossible. I want you too much. (77)



There is a light-hearted moment in the hospital in First Draft A, where Celia surprises Hugo “sitting up, not in — but beside the bed!” There are chrysanthemums on the table, the radio is playing, Hugo is smiling. Celia expresses her delight, only to hear a voice behind her saying, “It was not such a difficult job, after all.” The voice, it turns out, belongs to “a very young, trim nurse, with straight short reddish hair under her cap.” As she and Hugo teach each other, Celia feels a kind of twinge, “to think it was not I who could give him back his *élan*, but a young girl.” So there is a hint at re-establishing a dynamic of equality in their relationship here; this episode is followed by tender gestures between Celia and Hugo, evidence of their love for each other returning.

There are several other changes from manuscript to book, such as the regrettable deletion of a particularly playful, erotically charged, slightly naughty conversation between Celia and John, which I cannot resist quoting in its entirety here, given its spirited levity, so necessary to a text shot through with many kinds of grief:

- Why do you lie there just shaking with laughter?
- Because you're so ridiculous.
- I'm not ridiculous.
- Not, 'a subject for ridicule,' but *ridere*, to laugh. You're a laugh, my dicky.
- Tweet! . . . If I'm dicky, you're batty.
- The eminent Mr. Batty.
- Because you're batty to take up with dicky.
- Take care, or I'll beat you up — with my bat.
- No. But seriously, John!
- Yes?
- Are you paying attention?
- I am all ears — see!
- Well then: why do you love me?
- Because you are so ridiculous.
- And I love you for the opposite reason!
- What's that?
- You're so serious?
- Am I really?

- Yes . . . And gentle.
  - M-m-m. Doesn't sound very masculine.
  - But you are a man, as well. You take control. And that's really why I love you!
  - I wouldn't be surprised . . . No one has ever found out before, how to handle you . . . Is that it?
  - I guess so.
  - You little shrew, you.
  - My parents didn't believe in corporal punishment!
  - Well, I don't hold with those new-fangled, modern methods — Come here, you! Now I will beat you up. I will!
- (First Draft A 68)

There is also the revision of several letter headings from “Unsent Letter” or “Notations. Unsent Letter” to simply “Notations.” This was one of Pacey’s ideas: “I find the device of an unsent letter rather bothersome,” he noted in his commentary on the manuscript. “Would a better way be to intersperse journal or diary entries with the letters? A woman might put into a diary what she would not put into letter” (3). Yet several reviewers of the book commented on the breakdown of the epistolary structure in the Notations. Personally, I find the notion of the unsent letter much more poignant in the context of Celia’s consistent efforts at communication and their frequent frustration. I also disagree with another comment of Pacey’s, which Livesay and her editors happily did not take up: “could anyone report dialogue in such detail!” Pacey clearly has not spent a lot of time with women whose oral memory for conversation is often astounding — my own mother could quote lengthy conversations with considerable accuracy even forty and fifty years later. And what about the vivid sense of memory that is after all the basis for all autobiographies and memoirs? (Happily, not all of Pacey’s other suggestions have been taken. He takes exception, for example, to Livesay’s critique of Maritime educational practices: “You begin,” he complains, “from a prejudice (how acquired?) that NB is old-fashioned and behind the times” and goes on to boast, “I was the first matriculation examiner in Canada to break away from



the old formal grammar questions" (3). Nevertheless, Livesay's scathing description of Maritime public schools as rigid and stifling, and even the university as a place where "young people are walking about in chains . . . longing to shake them off" appears unchanged in the book (51) — raising the question of what kind of influence he actually had with Livesay or the publishers).

By far the most dramatic difference between the original manuscript and the book involves the surprise outcome of the affair with John. Shortly after Hugo returns from the hospital, he and Celia have a long heartfelt conversation in which Hugo reveals himself to be both sensitive and articulate. It becomes clear that he knew about the affair, and he gently offers her her freedom, if it is what she wants. Celia, touched, breaks into sobs and then delivers this bombshell: she's pregnant! (There is a short episode earlier in the manuscript, also edited from the book, where Celia and John briefly discuss birth control; she expresses the opinion that at her time of life, age 45, when she's begun skipping the occasional period, she probably doesn't need it anymore.) Hugo responds, surprisingly, with a deep sigh. "That's what I should have given you, Celia." Since no one else knows who the child's father is, though we suspect that Maudie at least will surmise it, they decide to keep the child and settle into their greatly altered and profoundly renewed relationship.

Desmond Pacey, in his critical notes on the manuscript (according to pagination he is reading First Draft B), questions this highly dramatic outcome to the novella: "Is it a good idea to have her get pregnant? I can't see that it adds anything, and it risks a soap opera touch." As a woman, frankly, I can't help chuckling at this remark: it seems this outcome adds rather too much than not enough for Pacey's comfort — both a baby, and a large generous apologetic gesture from Hugo! After all the risk of pregnancy is a central element of women's sexuality, and unintentional pregnancies are common. As for Celia's dramatic lack of precautions throughout this whole episode, both in terms of birth control and protecting her marriage, any woman who's been through the extended and unpredictable hormonal ups and downs of the perimenopausal will find both the sudden desire for an illicit lover

and increased risk of pregnancy during the body's last gasp of fertility and suddenly arrhythmic cycle easily credible (!) In this way, the novella's major motif might be said to be a meditation on women's experience of menopause, with Celia continuously bemoaning her age and loss of stereotypic youthful beauty, and John continuously contradicting her with hefty compliments, the largest being the gift of their mutually conceived child. How many menopausal Canadian fictions are there? Hardly any. In this deafening silence, Livesay, with typical panache, plunges ahead with exuberance and wild abandon. Think of Morag Gunn's discreet sobriety and dark lack of a sense of the future at age 47 in *The Diviners*, by comparison. (One of my young male students once remarked: "What is Morag Gunn's problem? She's kinky. She's 47 years old and still wanting sex." This was blatant ageism, of course, but it is possible that no one ever told him . . . )

Whether or not the narrative outcome of the First Draft is soap opera-ish (and aren't pregnancies, especially surprise ones, melodramatic by definition; and isn't menopause itself, for those who've been there, one long melodrama?) Livesay's outcome explains everything that's missing in the book: how Celia could bear to return to her husband; how the affair literally renewed her relationship with Hugo by providing her with a child, and him with the possibility of making amends for his former self-centeredness, and preoccupation with things other than his wife; how each of them gives up something huge and important for the sake of their renewed relationship, she her lover, he the role of father and patriarch; how their separate and shared pain and generosity toward each other in this vulnerable, truthful moment actually brings about the desired transformation in their relationship. If readers wonder how Hugo could bear to accept the parenting of another man's child, it is after all not very different from what Celia has been doing for many years, parenting his sons from another marriage.

It is so strikingly different an ending that I am moved to ask why, besides being possibly influenced by Pacey, an authority figure, the editors/publishers would have chosen to alter it in the way they did. Was it for commercial reasons, as Dorothy implied in her conversation with me? Was it because they lacked courage and chose



a less challenging (though also much less satisfying) outcome? Was it because, as usual, Dorothy's emotional range and vision far exceeded the acceptable norm? Whatever the editors' personal investment in the narrative was, it seems clear that the revised ending contradicts the whole imaginative thrust of the novella. Returning home to cook and clean and read to the husband, with her romantic secret untold and putting her own interests aside, may be an improved fate for Celia over the Victorian spectacle of lost drowned poisoned suicidal adulterous women, but it does smack, as Barbara Gowdy suggests, of "prison." Surely, the original ending is not only much more convincing but also much more consonant with the whole project of liberating women's sexual and creative desire, which includes, in Livesay's view, both the desire for emotional affiliation and family and, profoundly, self-expressions, that informs so much of this extraordinary poet's work. I challenge the publishers to re-issue the novella with its original ending (and naughty bits!) intact.

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Alice Tepescuintle / from *THE YEAR OF THE  
MIRROR MURDERS — A MYSTERY*

UNRECOGNIZABLE CORPSES  
ARE OFTEN SOME(BODY) ELSE

It's an old trick:  
the face disfigured  
by a shotgun blast

On Pineapple Mountain  
a body lies in a pine glade

Back in Lagoonville,  
a missing trombone player  
walks away from a nightclub

Behind venetian blinds  
Sergeant Maple  
of the homicide squad  
looks out thoughtfully  
over the marquee lights  
of the old movie house  
on Orange Street

a body in a pine glade  
could be (any)body

At 4AM  
who remembers the face  
of a trombone player

leaving a crowded room  
or the billowing sound  
of transparent curtains  
by a balcony window  
thrown open to the night



## MURDER OF A BOOKWORM MAKES THE LAGOONVILLE DAILIES

(Captured in essence  
by a passing journalist:)

On a Friday afternoon  
Detective Barracuda  
— convincingly disguised  
behind thick glasses —

takes a stroll/ down  
to the Lagoonville Public Library

Through the double doors  
a matrix/ of hovering shelves  
obsessively organized

provides a suitable foil  
for a five-time killer

drawn by/ the natural reticence  
of the library setting

Projected crime scene  
for victim number 6  
the hypothetical “body”

a man/ believed to be the driver  
of a shiny black automobile

enmeshed in/ the heavy textbooks  
of the medical profession

At closing time  
a scent of lilacs  
drifts/ through the enormous room  
while/ out on the streetcorner

illiterate cops  
puff a dirty cigarette

unperturbed by an echo  
of approaching footsteps



## MYSTERIOUS LUGGAGE

well-travelled/ and smelling  
of seawater  
(nondescript in description)  
clangs a forgotten doorbell

— empty apartment echo  
of faraway furniture —

Defunct residence/ of  
a certain Mrs. Merle (dead now)  
who worked without complaining  
for seventeen years  
down at the telephone service

the contents in question  
in context of  
a murder investigation:

Unfortunate Arm  
of a shop window dummy  
severed/ in several places

(no piano player)  
lying negligently  
inside her torn négligé  
the attached card:  
reading “sent by a maniac”

prompting/ a killer's laughter

and the well-oiled lurch  
of a caged elevator  
plunging six stories

through the coiled stranglehold  
of a spiral staircase



## THE WOMAN WHO WENT OVERBOARD

Inside the Green Maze  
an orchestra leader  
with a head for figures  
spies an hourglass:

a blonde/ with  
a tolerance for emeralds

*déjà vu* in blue swells  
or the double-doll  
who could've been/ her twin sister

advancing advantageously  
towards/ the roulette tables

Who can understand  
the shock of recognition  
of someone so long dead  
crossing a hazy nightclub

accompanied in person  
by the split personality  
of a phony ship's captain?

"Floored by the floor show"/ or  
numbed in the middle  
of a musical number

— somewhere in the orchestra  
a trombone stops playing —

her name/ like a skip  
in a phonograph record  
sounding over and over  
inside his head



ALL BLONDES ARE THE SAME or:  
NO ONE NEEDS A MOTIVE  
FOR KILLING THEIR OWN HUSBAND

Sordid scenario  
evidently ordinary:

Sultry showpiece  
languishing in gangland  
meets a man/ lousy with money

mendacity mogul  
dressed as an alligator

A three-time sucker  
for a nightclub leg  
and waterfront vernacular

easily disposable/ after  
an impromptu proposal

Matrimony/ is immaterial  
to a hardboiled bride  
handy with a candlestick  
— remarkable *sang-froid*  
of a trademark style —

and/ a history of homicide

Women have always  
enjoyed a rotten reputation

“Hang it on the blonde”/ because  
who else would wear perfume  
smelling of lilacs

In the realm of fact/ an un-  
satisfactory conclusion

but what the hell  
— horror of a sunday  
for forlorn picnickers  
who stumbled on the body —

turns out/ she did it all  
for the ski champ

six feet of dreamboat/ and  
the only one that mattered



## EDITOR'S APOLOGY & GRATITUDES: AN ERRORATUM

The editor offers up  
his abject apologies  
to Trudi Rubenfeld

(sorry, Trudi)

for misspelling  
Trudi Ruebenfeld  
& Trudy Ruebenfeld

twice issued  
in issue 2:31.

The editor he  
gratefully acknowledges  
design

work in this issue  
Anne Stone provided

for her excerpt  
from *Ransacked*

& Jason Le Heup's  
(we miss you) design  
collaboration

with Michael Turn-  
er for *Sur-  
Del. Ta.*

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

DI BRANDT's award-winning poetry titles include *questions i asked my mother* (1987), *Agnes in the sky* (1990), and *Jerusalem, beloved* (1995). She met Dorothy Livesay while co-editing *Contemporary Verse 2* (founded by Livesay), and currently teaches Creative Writing and Canadian Literature at the University of Windsor.

LORNA BROWN has exhibited her image and text-based installation work nationally and internationally since 1984. Between 1989 and 1999 she taught in the Schools of Visual Art, Media and Critical Studies at ECIAD as well as at SFU's School for the Contemporary Arts. She has served as a Board Member for Or Gallery, the Association for Noncommercial Culture, and Burnaby Art Gallery. Brown joined Artspeak as Director/Curator in July of 1999 and is responsible for the operations of the centre and the curation and development of its programs and publications.

CLINT BURNHAM lives in Vancouver, where he teaches at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (postmodernism, cultural theory, Marxism) and runs a liberal arts program for people on the Downtown Eastside. His books include *The Jamesonian Unconscious* (criticism, Duke, 1995), *Steve McCaffery* (criticism, ECW, 1996), *Be Labour Reading* (poetry, ECW, 1997), *Airborne Photo* (fiction, Anvil, 1999), and, forthcoming, *A4isms* (aphorisms, House) and *Buddyland* (poetry, Coach House). Work has appeared recently or is about to appear in *Sulfur*, *Queen Street Quarterly*, *W*, *West Coast Line*, and *Matrix*. He can be reached at burnham@istar.ca.

my name is scot has exhibited in Canada and abroad since 1993, most recently at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Plovdiv, Bulgaria in June, 2000. He studied Philosophy of Art and Medieval Studies at the University of British Columbia, followed by Interdisciplinary Studies at Emily Carr College of Art and Design. His practice, which includes photobased constructions, installation, and site-specific text interventions, is concerned



with the effects that image and language systems have upon the creation and/or control of identity.

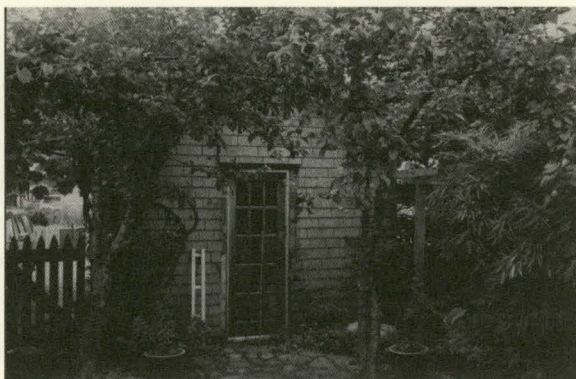
STAN PERSKY teaches philosophy at Capilano College and in TCR's Writing Practices Program. He is a literary and political columnist for *The Vancouver Sun*. He's the author of *Then We Take Berlin* (Knopf Canada, 1995) and *Autobiography of a Tattoo* (New Star, 1997).

MARINA ROY has exhibited work nationally and internationally since 1992, and her practice includes a wide range of media including sculpture, printmaking, painting, photography, and bookworks. She holds a Master's Degree in Visual Art from the University of British Columbia, and she completed her undergraduate studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Prior to her study in visual arts, she received a Bachelor of Arts in French Literature from Université Laval. Roy currently teaches in the Visual Art Program at the University of Victoria and maintains a custom bookbinding business.

ANNE STONE is author of the novels *jacks: a gothic gospel* and *Hush* (Insomniac Press, 1999), as well as the chapbook, *Sweet Dick All*.

ALICE TEPESCUINTE doesn't care how you spell or pronounce her name. Her weird cowboy novel, *Rattlesnake Hill* will soon be appearing on the Edgewise ElectroLit Centre's website ([www.edgewisecafe.org](http://www.edgewisecafe.org)) along with some fabulous illustrations by Nicky Rickard. She hopes to finish her mystery book this fall and to one day die surrounded by artificial palm trees, dirty cocktail glasses, and trashy rock stars.

MICHAEL TURNER



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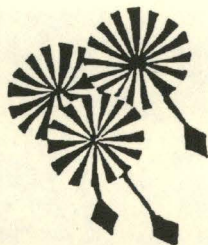
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