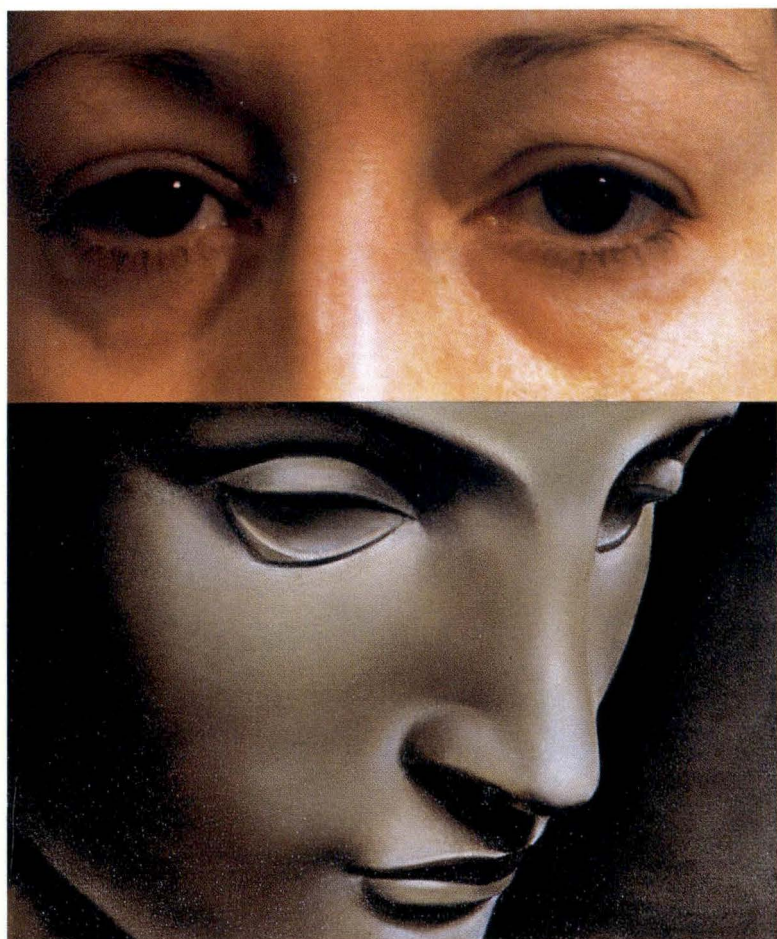


THE CAPILANO REVIEW



Read this orchard as the Roaring
Boys who course the town at night: tawdry, flecked and billowing
behind their silky fluted pricks — their short lines syncopate as ripe
fruits shake the lawn.

— Lisa Robertson

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Terrence Reid / NOT A VENUS FLYTRAP
Antipodean Summer, 1990

On this day of Christmas my true love gave to me, flies in a pear tree.

Its 12:37 a.m. *Finally*, I can't stand it anymore. The sharp stench of peels of oranges sitting on the cutting board for days. Whistling up your nose when the kitchen door opens. Twisting as they dry and mould. Cockroaches enjoying what remains of the juice as much as I in summer.

Fruit flies floating close to motionless, suspended animation in orb, but remain in orb rather than follow to their grave in a plastic garbage bag where I place the corpses of oranges. Not usual flies, these.

Where do they come from? Fruit flies are never seen elsewhere. They are never seen travelling to fruit. Are they the offspring of fruit? Sprung from juicy loins for this final inheritance?

Not usual flies, these. Not greedy like the sticky black flies. The mocking black flies that came close to making me insane that spring when they emerged from winter and the cool winter sun in the back-blocks of Sunraysia to discover me in their midst. In this hinterland the blackfly is supreme. Nourished by and bred in the cowshit and sheepshit that is shat by the stock that has built and made this nation prosperous for flies.

They drink from the corners of your eyes. They share your sandwiches. Don't mind mustard. Cannot be bullseyed. Though you slap yourself into unconsciousness, they fearlessly return to the very place on your face you have just bruised with the killing intent of your hand.

The flies fly faster than I run. No use running. The 4-wheel outdistances them at legal speeds on paved roads. But we were not being paid to escape the blackfly horde on open road. We were being paid to search and destroy plaguing rabbits between

vineyards in bush corridors. also home to the blackfly who propagates in dung, searches for me.

Flies, flies, continually in your face, in your eyes. Chinese Water Torture, Australian Fly Torture.

I put the rubbish bag out. Wash the handjuicer.

Ker-rash! A noise on the street. Sounds like a window being punched in. What? Why, it's cute Karen Baronenko-next-door's cosy new boyfriend.

I ask, "How's the balls of your feet?"

Not a cosy mood but he hasn't got any blood on his hand so I let him come in to roll a cigarette, which he smokes, talks, rolls another, smokes, talks, rolls, smokes for quite some time.

He's pissed. Opens the game awkward. Then abruptly moves his Queen forward, complaining about love. "We're *too* involved and very aggressive with each other, y'know. I dunno, she's got bald spots from me pulling her hair out, you know, and I've got'm too. She goes wild. She broke my \$1,000 bass *and* broke my acoustic over my back."

He shakes curly rock and roll locks. Heavymetal twiggling with sincere sex appeal . . . Hey, Kylie, this is Randy. (Can a kid from here be named that? Rex or Lance, maybe. But never Randy.) Hey, Kylie, meet Randy. And! HE MEANS IT! Mean Thrash Music that you and Michele are going to learn to adore.

I'm exaggerating. This is not actually exactly true. That it's Thrash. Or at least not anymore anyway. Although I couldn't have guessed by the name of his band, Gore Hounds. Could just as well be Spectre's Revenge. Or Purple Throbbing Graveyard Gristle. Or anything else Grunge that you or I may want to add.

Despite the name of the band, I'm told, "Well, we've given up Thrash. We're getting into serious stuff. Sensible, you know. Solid music. Sort of fluid. But the rest are all a lot younger. 21. I'm 25. It makes a big difference. They're too serious. Loses the fun."

I say, "Yeah. Having fun is half the fun. Or, at least Guru Adrian said so. And he was only 9 when he said it."

"It's rough," he says, "being broke. I'm down to 14 hundred in the bank and only get 120 on the fuckin' dole after getting paid 420 in the hand every week. 14 hundred will only last me 3 fuckin'

... , no, 2 fuckin' weeks. NOT MUCH TO PISS UP THE WALL on is it!?

"Gee," I say, "420 a week's OK. What didja do for that?"

"Typesetting," he says. "But I quit before Christmas. No, actually I got canned. I went out on my morning break for cigs and ran into a friend I hadn't seen for years, so, what do ya do? We went to the pub for a beer and 3 hours later I got a girl in the bar to phone up and say I was hit by a car.

"The bad part was, I took Karen up to the Taxi Club for drinks that night, and who comes into that scrunge-hole but one of the Co-Directors. He's a faggot and comes in with his boyfriend. Then he sees me. Can't see any dents. Then he says, 'You're BUSTED.'"

I tell him I reckon Karen Baronenko loves Randy. I pretend I'm sleeping.

And out he goes into the night in the same direction the rubbish went.

Whisper:

J.D. Says, "if you have to write, well, write. But if you don't have to, don't."

When I quote him, J.D. says, "I never said that!"

I re-read what I've written. Check the punctuation. I like lots of punctuation, and am not entirely satisfied there is enough.

Step out the front door; there are no front yards in Shoebox Lane, into the street to consider the matter under the stars and dim flickering of the streetlamp.

The plump black garbage bag lurks in the darkness. It's 3:30 a.m.

Up the street comes, not Randy The Jerk, coming back, but Andrew the Pretender, Karen Baronenko's live-in ex-boyfriend, returning from the graveyard shift of Dee Jayng at the, which club was it tonight, Andrew? The Freezer? Or was it the Site? Oh, you were doing the Train to Skaville show on 2SER.

Andrew is a Reggae historian who, sometimes with a posse, toasts the music of Jamaica. His pretense has therefore been

earned in the realm of Reggae; Antipodean Colony. In this Jamaican system of entitlement he is permitted, nay, encouraged to be and to call himself Prince Andrew. And so he is known in the white Australian world of Black West Indian music. White knight with a lance in the nether world of night clubs. (The other Prince Andrew is another rose by the same name.)

"Howdy doo Prince Andrew? What do ya think of a cup of tea and read what I've written about flies and your ex's new boyfriend?"

"Naw, can't. Really have to get some sleep. You can give me a read tomorrow night. Gotta go. Gotta get up at 6."

Night Owl Prince Andrew will soon be slaving away at his day job in the sleeping-bag factory.

I am not fabricating this. This is fact.

It is 5:30 a.m. If I don't find cockroaches sipping on my teabag I'll squeeze another cup out before sleeping.

I did not start writing this until past midnight so morning now brings *the same* day of Christmas my true love gave to me . . .

. . . At 6 a.m. I reflect on the joy of victory that the flies endless in their numbers, could not rout me from this land.

Whisper:

Not A Venus Flytrap is

also *Not A True Romance*.

At 6 a.m. my shoes are off. Toes still dirty from an afternoon in blown-out sneakers. Sun just up. Birds whistling *their* national anthem. Sounds like Reveille, not Dixie. I close both doors to cool night air and welcome summer dreams of Shakespeare.

end, 1st part

Radio Ozone
Sydney, Australia

1990

SOUND BITES

*(alternate between
confidential voice
and public address
voice)*

America is building 6 more White Houses. One is to be in Germany. The Chinese are building another as a Friendship Venture. With 8 White Houses and uncountable golf-carts, there will be little hope of a direct attack against the President proceeding with success.

But more White Houses are ultimately only more dams for those damned free-trading carpet-bagging beavers.

(Scene from Dances With Beavers)

From The Coca-Cola Kills, with George Mannix.

Radio Ozone
May 1992

*(personal message
voice/surprised excitement)*

GAZZ get this message to John Owens

There's an amnesty on for polygamists. If you turn yourself in before the end of next month, you get to keep your extra spouses. Maybe Graeme Smythe should get his ass to Canada.

Radio Ozone
June 1992

(from personal to
declarative voice)

GAZZ

... gone through the adjustments to what I barely recall to be readjustments to all life's mundane details: Quarters, Nickels and Dimes. A Quarter is what would have been a 20 cent piece so the count has been often out, reminded only when I notice this 20 cent piece has antlers. *Then* you know this is Canada. No pouch on this Moose.

Pennies, as 1 cent pieces are called here and in the States, most often offer Maple Leaves, but here and there Lincoln solemnly stares. Flipside protector of the land of milk and maple syrup.

The closest thing that Canada has to the Platypus (20 cent signifier, if I remember right, for the numerically illiterate) is Beavers inhabiting Nickels. Canadians should have taken the Duckbilled Platypus for their own. A perfect cross of Beaver and Canada Goose that includes a change purse.

So what is Monticello doing here in the palm of my hand on the back of a Nickel? No immediate sign of life. No face peers out a window on this memorial coin of Washington.

But hark! Great truths reside in small things, for lo, as these coins shift and jingle in my hand, Beavers and Cariboo are inching slipping out of a forest of copper maple leaves and into a silver Liberty Hall. Next, they say, the White House.

Radio Ozone

May 1992

*(recorded message
voice)*

Select artists' secrets, i.e.; is a secret, acts as or is like a secret, refers to secrets or requests them, masquerades as or masks a secret.

Radio Ozone
March 1992

(declarative voice)

VANCOUVER OLD PORT EXTRA DOUX

(personal voice)

I have gotten over the completeness of my fascination with collaging small bits of daily jetsam that describe the sameness and difference here onto postcards bound for Australia: Young city port scene postcard of here with fragments attached from an Old Port cigarillos box, traités au rhum et au vin.

The reference here is to me; drunk with seeing again for the first time through the distance of decades to here and now height of high mountains plunging into harbour depths.

My drunken salute. Salute of drinking within these recent buildings in recent city that fails to obliterate the land from overwhelming view. Postcards provide so inadequately scenic a rendering, as close as can be sent of what is here to be seen, but no window nor my eyes at all.

I salute folly in my attempt. I salute drunkenness. I salute my folly in drunkenness.

I salute sitting

I stand and I salute.

And I folly.

(declarative voice)

Ce produit peut causer le cancer Extra Mild.

Radio Ozone

May 1992

AMERICA'S 10 MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN. Fuck off!

*(informative voice,
building passion)*

Tokyo is the financial centre of the U.S.A. The broad expanse of America is Tokyo's economic suburb. Canada has only provided the lumber for the suburb that Jack built. What's left is stumps. Just enough for the bottoms of Totem Poles.

After millions of years of uncannily returning, the salmon are seeking new homes while Jack builds his Dream House.

"America's 10 most beautiful women," the magazine cover tells me without hesitation. They have cast my vote again. That's politics. 8 are from a gene pool of bleach, 2 Spanish green eyes, 1 Black but paling. Zero for China. Minus zero for Japan in a House of Illusions.

Canada?

(2 voice part)

Al Capone and Tom Stylianos Thomas chorus, "Canada? What street's it on?"

(pause, thoughtful voice)

Brenn Robertson replies, "Canada? It's on Sesame Street."

Radio Ozone
June 1992

(recorded message voice)

Secrets are everywhere: Social Science unmask restraints,
Journalists blow the whistle, Insiders leak to the press, Investigators

Radio Ozone

March 1992

ROSE V

Tell Gazz. A rumour is as good as a fact. Best sent by phone.

Gazz, how can you say an Adelaide Festival crowd is redneck? Bourgeois maybe. Pretentious possibly. Good in bed, no chance.

Was planning on getting this message on Gazz's answering machine but here I am putting it on yours. Tell Gazz about the middle-aged guy busking on Robson Street, Vancouver's little Golden Mile, heart of the Souvenir District.

Guy middle-aged and gray-haired. Whomping out Blue Suede Shoes as I go into the Drugstore to post a letter to Maggie in Oz.

Coming back past the blonde mystic with the dove and the cockatoo, Unique Spiritual Readings for \$1 a minute, whose geese have disappeared (one into a coyote's belly and the survivor into the Animal Hospital), 5 motorcycles spill away from the curb, drowning out the Jug Boys.

The funny one with the normal hair calls out to the crowd, "Replay on the motorcycle!" Then adds, "Arrest that smell!" The kids from Iceland watch with heads of hair in coming Spring of '92 still frozen, as the cockatoo is permed, in high coloured crests.

Boom cars pass. Powerful sound systems with gut-punch on wheels. They move slowly, showily down the street, punching and punctuating the air regular with a one-one beat.

King Anderson was at Paul Howl's studio for a downtown video party. Last night the studio was full of guests and beer. It is also full of paintings of 6 foot high creatures. Some are mythical, the others live with him in the studio.

The Amazon parrot. Giant soft-shelled turtles. Large black and gold goldfish. (The small ones are raised for the turtles to eat.)

One parrot with clipped wings fell off its perch and broke its neck. Immortalized in death and decay in paint.

The 3-foot iguana escaped from its cage into the walls of the building and hasn't been seen since. Fewer insects as well.

Well, they were drinking beer and yakking up a storm and looking at the fish tank and the box hooked up to the big stereo speakers so they had Tron and Robocop right there in the room

yakking with them.

That barfly, Faye Dunaway, got to the party late; drunk.

(pause)

King got back to The Street after Faye had her say. Me here, 5 stories above with Cindy Lee and the 4 cats in the castle.

Didn't notice the quiet with the sound of words shifting around in my mind, but it was quiet enough to hear Cindy's p.c. burp with indigestion; Cindy there, working it into the 11th hour, mouse in hand, 2 cats in lap.

Enter King. The p.c. stops.

(pause)

"The police shut down The Street. Just blocked it off end to end, and the action went elsewhere. The urban primitives moved out for the night," he says.

He's right. It's very, very, very quiet.

(seconds silence)

At times like these, King Anderson calls a sneeze a nasal orgasm.

Radio Ozone

February, March 1992

CAFFEINE DRIVEN OMNIBUS
on the Bondi Beach run to J.D.'s

1. At the bus stop, Taylor Square

Lo. Guy passes with skull tattooed on neck. Surrounded by flourishes. A burning skull?

Difficult to tell without staring. Without rudely riveting my eyes on his neck.

A burning skull. As if to say, Be warned! I am an agent of the Angel of Death.

I looked at his face. His profile.

● only of despair.

I think I remember, this short time after, a dot tattooed on his face. A jail dot tattoo.

An icon for a deep-felt nostalgia for blackheads.

(pause)

Poophead. The poor poophead. No pity for the poor poophead. My crime is the crime of right.

*(long pause,
low voice)*

Neither he nor I pause to vomit.

2. On bus, en route

Two very elderly women look alike like sisters of an age. Both trim. Fine features.

Something less than chauffeur affluence in this crowded bus. One beside me. The other facing in the one reverse seat so that I am able to count the hairs in her eyebrows.

It's easy. The eyebrows are single thin lines of paint, and the thin line of her lip bends awkwardly on one side to stretch around some internal foreign growth.

The lips, despite this small abnormality looming large, are lipsticked normal.

Kissable youth. Red for desire.

I hike myself up on the monkey bars of the bus, over the woman beside me, into the dense crowd, forced by the density to catch one of her knees with my leg as I swing awkwardly past, so that for a moment her knees are parted.

Radio Ozone

1991

(declarative voice)

Secrets waver between concealment and revelation, are probed and shielded, yield equally to moral concern and ethical goose-chases or resist both with obedience, blind or otherwise. Secrets are the stuff of State and Mind, from A for Autobiography to Z for Zealot.

Radio Ozone
March 1992

The rubbing of crotches. She brushes past the drinks holding males at this gathering, hand gliding casually across crotches. It sounds almost as if she says, "Oh, excuse me," with a slight intonation of surprise and apology with each incident. But no. It sounds right, but something's wrong. What was it she said? What can it mean? Did I hear that right? It sounded like, "Oh, the blue rhino club."

None of the touched are particularly aware, or if aware, concerned that others have also been touched. With a kind of nonchalance they casually drift toward her. She has magnetized almost every sly-dick in the room. And there they are, surrounding her in growing numbers, vying for her attention in witty smart ways.

She is listening, smiling, eventually stops their conversation with a question, asked quietly with quizzical eyes, "You do know who I am?"

A curious attentive silence. She reaches into her handbag, their eyes affixed, and calmly lifts out a small folded leather wallet. She flips it open like Dick Tracy. And there it is in their eyeballs. Her badge. Her fuckin' badge, Roger! No eagle on this badge. This one's got a bull rhino. The badge of the Blue Rhino Club.

She folds and replaces the wallet, slipping out of the circle which remains empty and baffled for moments.

Now, in some unspeakable way, they know.

Radio Ozone

May 1992

Mark Jarman / CAPTAIN KIRK

I'm stuck in the cheap seats back beside the barking vowels of the engines and I can't hear half of what is said. I have dull nausea and cocktail napkins for earplugs. I'm beside a raven beauty who is journeying to North Carolina. We flirt, tamper mindlessly with the movement of blood from heart to hair. Flaps move on the plane and we move off the map.

"Captain Kirk has turned out the seatbelt lights. . . ."

Passengers snicker, whisper: Captain Kirk, ha ha.

Captain Kirk goes crazy. "You think I don't hear you? God I wish that damn show had never been on." We regret our snickering and turn to the windows for solace. At 33,000 feet the high plains are a thing of beauty, water-worked with scars and depressions, oxbows and crazy twists. We swim over them and I can see a flimsy matchbox town built in an ancient riverbed; what if the big river returns?

We fly through an electrical storm. From the back I watch a glowing wheel roll down the aisle toward me, a ghost's bowling ball, a whirling of lit knives. I'm looking for a parachute, for God.

"Ball lightning," says the calm North Carolina woman, "it happens to me all the time." She feels she may attract this particular phenomenon, as my face attracts sticks.

Years ago I took Billy Smith's goalie stick to my chin: 18 stitches and a piece of wire that won't go away. There wasn't enough skin to close it. I have a sizable screw in my ankle. Now I wait to trigger the more delicate airport alarms.

Our plane stops at the mountain airport. The snowplows are out on the runway. Everyone recalls what happened before with a plane and snowplows at this exact crappy airstrip. A red light flashes on our wing and reflects in a glass an old man holds over his chest, precisely where his heart would be. It is as if I am hallucinating his pulse. The plane jerks to the right and his red heartbeat is gone. We are a line of portholes flung back into black air, over Doukhabor colonies, plane

lurching between sawtooth peaks. I reflect on the plane being made of the same material as beer cans and I reflect on the rows of rock teeth below and beside our alloy skin. There is too much time to think on planes, on buses, lost in the ozone.

Waitress X is leaving in August for journalism school down east. I both dread and want this. I don't know what I want. To touch her blouse. "They're still there," she says. "Now I know what you do," says Waitress X as we hug. "First you grab my ass then you touch me here." I realize we've hit an expiry date of sorts; I've become predictable. I have to stop. It's over. What if she calls me on Tuesday? Say sorry? I don't know that I can. But I know it's over. Waitress X can't pay her rent, is moving back in with her mother to save for school, yet she's always trying to buy me things. I in turn offer her an airplane ticket and can't believe I'm doing it. My cells vibrate after I see her, I forgive all.

"What are we going to do?"

"How come when I finally stop asking that, you start?"

She had a slow night but made \$100 in tips. Her girlfriend Judy said to her, I saw your new boyfriend with his wife. Meaning me. Her friend doesn't approve, doesn't like me and I don't blame her. Her friend Judy says to her, "So it's just sex then." JUST sex? I wonder. Waitress X asks, Can't she smell my perfume? Good question. Isn't it written on my face? I wonder. Can't everyone tell?

Waitress X pilots an old fashioned \$5 bicycle, skirted long legs lifting, Frisson, a basket of fat blackberries and speckled eggs as a gift (breakfast my favorite meal). Her brown hair pulled back. She smiles, we don't really know each other. Her father drank and died in a plane. When young she found a note from her mother to her father, pinned to their pillow. She ran away to the ravine briefly because of what she read, part of which was a sexual slight related to her father's drinking. Will this happen to me? A note? A fax singing through the lines? There was a cave she hid in before returning home the next night. Her mother made her see a psychiatrist. We're necking. I want to run off with her to a cave in Mexico to solve things, to have a happy ending. Her black bra is visible under her loose knit sweater. Laughing, she points this out, "See?" I see. I see that this won't last, that she'll tire of the problems, of sneaking around in the afternoon, and I

could tire of her body I suppose, though it does not seem likely at this moment. It's wilder because we can rarely see each other, but can never just go to a movie, go on a nice date, eat supper at home, laze on the couch. It's "just sex." She picks up every lunch tab, pays for everything, says she pays for all her boyfriends, they're always bums. She finds this somehow amusing about herself. On my birthday she brings more gifts: pepper pat , purple grapes, barbecue chicken, Mumms. I abuse her, call her my plaything, my sex object and she just laughs, says, "You're funny." She has her own wit. Waitress X gives the pack of dogs a good talking to. The dogs snicker at first, then realizing their mistake, they try to look more serious. The waitress' blonde-brown hair streams into a city and lanterns of a metropolis swim under her bare feet. Down the hill we make out pink neon of Babel, of Babylon: Girls Girls Girls, Cold Suds, Karaoke, Ask About Our Famous Deathburger. I have no name for the colour of her eyes. There's a sign on the Team entrance: WINNING STARTS HERE! We lose. Coach shoves the talking heads from our locker room. Get your fat sorry asses...get...and stay away from the damn coffee machine...bunch of freeloaders...wouldn't piss on us if we were on fire...Put that in your column, ya backstabbing dead beats!

I have too many women and am lonesome. I know; I complain no matter what. Another Coincidence Dept.: Their periods are at the same time. Both had a sister die of cancer when they were younger. Neither seem to talk to their surviving sister.

Yet Another Weird Coincidence: The Intended gets a new advertising job right beside Waitress X's apartment building. 30 feet between their doors, between a desk and a bed. What exactly are the odds of this happening in a city of 700,000? I can no longer drop by during the day. Waitress X finds this hilarious.

I didn't ask but am told of the latest opiate of the peoples: Universal, Nautilus, speedwalking, gravity boots, 50 situps a day for a new order. Listen: I have spent the family retainer, the advances, the signing bonus, the salaries, the money from local carpet commercials, from Mr. Plywood ads. I have spent money I don't have, borrowed from family, from women I slept with who hate me now, from dipso players who wanted a drinking buddy. I ran up my Visa, hit the limit five times and they keep raising it like a poker game. 50 situps isn't

going to do it.

Once more I'm planted in the cheap seats, flaps altering their stance as our celestial metal slum crosses Mountain Standard Time, crosses the standard dangerous mountains and doomed bears snoring in sparkling caves. The team plays cards and wears garish ties to denote a road trip. The river below returns as our plane moves off the map again. Under the makeup, under the No Smoking sign, the stewardess sings her weary pantomime and Captain Kirk tells us what we can and cannot get away with in his narrow hurtling kingdom.

Michael Winter / BECOMING FRANK

1.

Frank was a runner, a long distance runner. He ran over every road in town, the city map covered, then he ran into the hills. The woods' roads and transmission lines. He couldn't get enough road into his lungs. When you run you can ignore rules, you can run with the traffic, cross on the Don't Walk, run one-way streets the wrong way, break the speed limit (a runner's goal). He reached the Top 30 in Canada and that was it. All he could do. Started driving. Motorbikes, Datsuns, Beetles, and Rabbits. He drove like he ran, an erratic habit, and he slipped further into his rules.

He took flying lessons, wanted to be a busher. They grounded him for going under power lines, strafing highways. I'm sure his way seemed normal enough to him, but you get acting strange so often it makes you see screwy, your sights are crooked. You think you're shooting straight but you're four feet off the mark. And if someone brings you back to the bull's eye, it feels uncomfortable. You liked shooting at periphery.

2.

I understand. You want a physical description. Contents of the room as last seen. I found him sleeping. His boots were drying on the open oven door. Bottom element was cranked up, orange as a forge. Curtains closed, thin ones you could see the day through. Roaster on the stove with two chickens picked over in it. Nothing on the kitchen table except a pack of smokes and a salt shaker. And a tiny wrench. A stripped-down V-8 between the table legs. '57 Bel Air, I think. Spare tire on the kitchen counter. Two fifty dollar bills thumbtacked to the wall. Box of condoms on the toilet. I'm telling it as I see it. Hotdogs and a bottle of Baby Duck in the fridge. Out back the tv was still there. Up against the shed by the beat-up bonnet. We put it out last week.

Big floor model. He said it only got one channel. It was raining and it felt wrong, the water on the wood. All those wires inside.

3.

Remember Joe the black and white Dad brought to dump and I snuck the gun? We followed him on the 650 Honda and we stopped on a red and Chris Murray saw the 12 gauge on my back and asked and I said We're going to rob a bank. The gulls, the fat gulls in the garbage thousands of them picking them off with a number 4 shell and that huge granddaddy one I got with a slug. He disappeared they couldn't learn, Joe. Wings they couldn't use just check out what's in the pick-up and they're hopping on the tailgate and me with a bead on 'em.

And there's Dad with the boulder. The tv all alone without the living room around it. Car wrecks, plastic, picking through for rims and axles. Pieces no one knows how to fit together anymore and Dad with the boulder at his waist, swinging it for momentum till I thought He aims to squat a gull, but he heaved it over and through the air to the tv, the boulder passing through the screen, not bouncing off. No power in the tv when the plug's on the ground looking for the living room. Boulder lies half in half out the green screen hanging in triangles and the seagulls on top to see if there's food. But Chris, Where you going? To the bank, I said. What a look!

4.

Room smelled pretty bad. Hot and stale from the oven being on. No, he didn't say much. I remember him rubbing his eyes saying *Joe, Joe what a dream, what a dream*. And he had this dream where he was on the top floor of this big house, in the dark, but he was familiar with the house. It was his house, the house of his dreams all two storeys and an acre of land with a pond attached and a woman in one room and a slew of kids in bunk beds and him proud of the feat with a two-ramp garage and employees. And he knew he was in his bedroom and there was a light above him and a string hanging from it and when he clicked the bulb on he'd find a woman's head below him and Montreal's body in the sheets and he'd climb in beside and say *This is all right I can get used to this*. But snow on the window blocked any light

coming in and though he knew exactly where the string was, when he reached up to turn it on, he couldn't find it. He moved his arm back and forth, his forearm high to increase the area of touch, but he couldn't feel it. He just stood there waving his arm, the darkness around him growing, the walls drifting, the bed fading and the woman falling until he wasn't sure where he was anymore. Then he heard me knocking.

5.

He did up a van, put a bed in, a sink, a propane stove. I guess he'd been planning to run for a couple of months. He bolted his toolboxes behind the bucket seats. *There's no way they can steal the tools without taking the whole van, Joe.* The ignition key is a Robertson's screwdriver. *Canadian brand. They don't make them in the States.* He drove to Daytona, three thousand miles in three days. He sent a letter.

6.

Somewhere near Daytona. Perhaps in Daytona. Yes, by the 500 speedway, the first in the world. They used to race on the beach in the winter, the beach I face where the sun'll come up in a parking lot of one of the hotels. My van is there still black but soon I'll spray it white the sun too hot it'd melt the paint in March just five minutes from Flagler Beach. Work on a hurricane-proof condo that's just a frame and blueprints. Shovel cement and carry blocks all day a hundred feet from the beach. The boys call me Fireball Roberts after a driver killed who's got a grandstand. Wish I had my Pontiac or something to weave the traffic.

Been here four months just before Christmas with my UI in the bank. At the end of my ballpoint trail down the seaboard south of Jacksonville where that hurricane hit — a hurricane's the severest storm on earth, Joe. There's sure no cities on the southeast coast. Oh man I want a block of land in the woods not too far and build a house — you need money though for windows cement lumber doors, Joe. They cost money no matter how much you build. Shingles wiring.

Paid \$40 to drive my van inside the speedway. Watched the Rolex 24 hour race the Japs' Nissan won. They change drivers every so often so he doesn't get

tired and fuck up at 200 mph. I think that's less of a sport and one guy should do the entire 24. I take pictures of very fast machines, I go to the airport to shoot the big jets taking off under full power. They land in Gander to refuel. The ocean is still the ocean only not as powerful as ours. I'm here with the geese from Howley — I'm sure I know some of them, I'd love a gun now. I cook chops and chicken on the barbecue and I wash in the hotel. It's good but it's lonely, I haven't patience to wait in the post office line but I need to hear from my brother, we're tight no matter what, Joe. Let's just say I blew it with a woman, it's a lonely proposition. The cops they know me now and leave me alone, though they count the geese.

7.

This story is not about my brother. That's why I chose 'becoming' in the title. My brother is becoming something, becoming the Frank in this story, perhaps. Nothing is ever anything for long and so if my brother does become Frank, he'll soon not be Frank. In fact, this story never becomes Frank until the end. I have to have Frank dead so that he stops becoming. Death fixes things, freezes them, and then it's up to memory. Time passing distorts the truth and Frank, instead of becoming, is at the mercy of our own becoming. We remember Frank from a new perspective, so Frank shifts. He builds himself and we change the code. We are in the midst of becoming and Frank will be here once you leave my story. Perhaps that's why I'm relying on testimony. Cold, written facts; letters; notes. Anything that's fixed, pinned to a time. He was so quick, so hard to hold down for a minute. Like I said, he was into fast things.

8.

I fell in love with this car last week, it's a 1953 2-door Chevrolet Power Glide. The guy wants 1800 US. If I can ship it home I could get 5 to 8 'G' for it, so it's an excellent investment. Can you find out how I can stay in the US for three years, I think you're only allowed to be in for 6 months.

Joe, I believe in God because of what Grandma told me once and the two narrow escapes from death I've had — killing the moose in the Rabbit and hitting the 18-wheeler in the O.D. Also, I nearly got it once while flying in the

Cessna and trying to spin the plane more times than the manufacturer's allowance, but I got out of that one myself, I think.

I met this UK guy at the track and he liked my way and loaned me 1500 US to buy the car — I have to have him paid back by April 1st because he's buying a house in the Keys. He just opened his wallet and passed me 15 'C' notes. I have to meet him and his woman at the Daytona 500 Sunday, 16 Feb. if you get the chance watch it on tv and I'll be parked inside the infield, standing on the roof of my van at turn #4.

9.

She sat on the hood of his pick-up. The hood was hot, from the engine and the sun, and as she lay back against the windshield her bare arms left traces of sweat on the glass. Frank jacked up the wheel with her on the hood. The pick-up looked over the Atlantic. They were in Ferryland past the lighthouse. Frank drove over the grass to the edge. There was very little wind, which is rare. He took out a tiny wrench from his tool box. It shone silver like a caplin with its mouth open. *Cute, hey?* It looked too tiny to be useful. *Be even cuter once it grows up.*

Frank met her at the Top and Bottom Club. He was head bouncer and she was a dancer from Montreal. They fly in weekly do the tour in Corner Brook and St. John's. This guy's got a strip club franchise. She found Frank and wanted to get off cocaine.

The perspiration marks must have done something to the paint because you could see the contour of her rear and her heels on the hood. Two sets of symmetrical shapes mirrored like the print of paint in a fold of paper. *I guess the heat baked her into the paint.* Like enamel in an oven. You could find Frank looking at those few spots like they were all that was left of her, all that she gave him. And from those few fragments he rebuilt her, idealising what she had been from the memory left to him.

When the pick-up was totalled in a head-on with a Big Wheels transport he was good about it. He salvaged the engine and transmission for the van and cannibalised the rest. He hauled the bent-up hood off its hinges. The F and the R had always been missing from the front. *My O.D. pick-up.* Now all the letters were gone, a no-name brand. He didn't use the bonnet again, just leaned it up against the side of

the shed. The cracks through the finish rusted the marks she had left in the paint, and finally one day he looked and she was gone.

When Frank got his interprovincial papers, he left for Montreal. He found a job and got his tools sent up. Had to put them on the subway from the train station. *One and a half tons of tools, Joe. And I'm dragging them around on the subway. I was just lucky none of the casters broke.* The job lasted three months and then he was back. Came back alone.

10.

You can tell a lot about someone through little things. Like Frank's three drains had no plugs. His kitchen sink, bathroom sink and bathtub drain. I pointed this out and he said *No, Joe I guess I don't.* He wasn't surprised or saying Yes I've been meaning to get some. Plugs weren't important to him. He didn't have a reason to hold water. He showered, he washed dishes under the faucet, and to shave he ran the taps in the bathroom sink.

It's erosion that moves him. He doesn't create anything. He lives on erosion like water on stone like a river and when you look at it that's what it's about, isn't it? Choked on silt. His force is natural, is all. It's his part to tear things down. You got to live with it. You try taking away what's making him go and there's nothing left. He's supposed to fix things but strength comes from the wreckage. The rust and accidents. The ability to bend, tear and mutilate, that's what he admires. And don't we need it? The decay, the breaking down of things?

11.

Didn't get the Chevy it needed too much work. Bought a Pontiac Trans-Am instead — a Turbo 301 cubic inch engine! A racing street car, Joe. I've parked the van to rest it and I tear around town in the car. It's the most powerful I've ever driven. I had to get a Florida driver's license to get plates and insurance. Then the police would leave me alone as I'd look like a local and not a tourist. They pick on Canadians that stay too long, they can lock you up for whatever reason. They arrested me for obtaining a Florida driver's license through fraud and I spent three days in jail before Dad bonded me out on \$2000. I guess he's

not happy about me, but I was trying to be good!

I told them my address was 105 Hamilton, that's my General Delivery, and they asked me if it was a house or an apartment and I went for the full thing and said a house and they checked it and found a post office and then my bunk in the van, so that's that. I hired a good lawyer for 1600 US and I pray he gets me off with this bullshit charge. I am thinking about running for home but Dad would lose his 2000 and I would never be allowed back in the US, but there's the UK guy too who's looking for his money and I should've known he was expecting interest. Apparently there's a fixed rate when you deal at the track.

12.

Frank asked about the tire, if he could put something in it. It was just before he left. I asked him what in particular and he looked at the fifties and said *A package about that size, maybe six inches thick.* So I asked him if it was valuable and he said *Yeah, like of course it is.* So I told him maybe he should put it in the bank or a safety deposit box but he said *No, it's got to go in your spare tire.* Like that was it, the only reasonable place for it. So I said *Is it drugs Frank,* and he said *No,* and I said *So it's like the Top and Bottom job,* and he said, *So you know what it is now,* and I said *You were lucky that time but the cops they know right,* they're just waiting for you to do something extreme. But he's always talked like that. Always getting on with stuff. See when we were young he'd tell me things like there were ships in the sewers. And if you crawl down a manhole you'll see the decks, the floating teak rails on a river of toilet flushes. And the masts, he said, sticking out of the sidewalks with their wire rigging. The sewers full of them.

13.

Joe, I'm back on the Condo tower. Trying to figure a way to pay the UK guy and my lawyer's fee. I sold the Pontiac for 800 US. Jail is gross down here — the food is drugged to make you sleep all the time. I go to court at the end of March and everything should be cleared up by April.

Daytona 500 was fantastic. I was trapped in the middle of 5000 RV's and it took 14 hours to make it 1 mile in the infield while the cars were doing 3 miles a minute around the circuit. On the photo you'll see four sparks behind

the car. That's caused by a bump in the track. The steel plate that protects the oil pan hits the bump at around 130 mph. It's like your ribcage, Joe, protects your heart. The gas tank is your lungs — the car breathes on gas but you need oil to keep everything fed. Now Joe on this car after a hundred laps the steel plate wore through and he started leaking oil and before he could pitstop there was a slick three cars slid into and crashed. I didn't see it but I heard it and you knew who it was when they didn't make the turn. Strange waiting for them like that and then you forget them until you see a replay on the monitor. 3 day party I thought I was going to die with a hangover in the most expensive car park on earth.

14.

I saw him on tv. I got it videotaped. I fast forward the race so that the cars are going a thousand kilometres an hour. He was sitting on the roof of his van at turn #4. I can press the pause button and hold him there. He's taking pictures as the cars pass. He's wearing the long-sleeved shirt our mother sent him. He needed large shirts to hide his arms. *I'm not big enough for the Club, Joe. They're all on steroids and they're massive, see. If someone gets rowdy I got to wait until they're drunk and then I can take them.* Once last summer he said *Joe, does my nose ever hurt.* From getting sunburnt? I asked. *No, from getting hit.* Funny how sometimes when he talked about her, he wouldn't say Mom, he'd say *My mother.* He forgot that we shared the same mother.

15.

Dear Francis:

Happy Birthday! I hope it fits. If it doesn't you can exchange it at Sears — but don't tell them I've reinforced the buttonholes!

With love, Mom

X X X X X

16.

They say he must have left some drawers open. They found wrenches and screwdrivers strewn all over, some almost a kilometre away. When the van flipped he drove himself against the wheel so hard it left a blue arcing ridge across his ribs. Hanging there upside down his arms up like he was under arrest. A parachutist stuck in a tree. The weight of the tool boxes tore the floor out.

Physically, he looked fine. You would think a wrench might have got him in the head, a screwdriver taken out an eye. It was just that blue crush across his chest all caved in like that. The seat belt left a faint bruise across the blue like a Don't Smoke sign. Open casket.

Witnesses saw the van swerve. He held the front wheels straight but with the weight and the speed over the new tarmac, they use too much oil in the compound, he just slid over the surface. As the van turned it twisted over onto its side. Scraped the road for a hundred metres. The driver's-side mirror was flattened smooth into the door. He had his window down and there must have been sparks. The van would have stayed that way if it hadn't been a turn. He would skid until friction stopped him. He'd climb out the passenger door, pat his hands and say *Well that's that* and start hitchhiking. But the turn came and he skated straight through the guardrail. The nose dug in to a retaining wall and the van flipped onto its back. The floor caved in an hour later.

The police said he shouldn't have been driving on those tires. They were bald and undersized for the weight and he was lucky to have gotten this far. They didn't say anything about him running, that he was supposed to stay in the State and here he was in South Carolina. He was heading for Montreal, I know that. It was spring and he figured he could make the border before the call got out. It'd be warm enough in Montreal to get work and she might be there. He'd shag the lawyer and pay off Dad and keep the UK guy's money and stay in Canada. That was the plan all right, but the police never made anything of it. I guess they figured with him dead like that it'd be too much paperwork and for what purpose. The crime rate being what it is.

Bob Strandquist / DREAMING IS A RELATIVE THING

A man is standing between the rails, somewhere on a vast dry plain, north of forty-nine, just east of Love. He is gauging the temperature of the day by counting ties. Yesterday he counted to sixty-three. Today the tracks lose their solidity, become fluid looking in the heat waves, at fifty. It's hotter today.

Last night he dreamed. He doesn't remember any of the dream's details, but something in it dealt him an overwhelming desire to masturbate, to stand naked in the dust of the yard, to fling his grain into the fine powder, and then to be ashamed. He needs to feel shame. From behind the screen door he watches the dust rooster tail of a red car passing.

He lays a slice of bologna between two sheets of white bread. The bread is stale. The meat by-product is sweating and a darker brown around the edges. He fills a glass tumbler with water from the plastic jug he keeps on the floor by the door. For some reason he believes it's the coolest place in the cabin. The refrigerator hasn't worked in months. There is no cool place, anywhere. He eats his lunch under the big white umbrella in the front yard. The shaft of the umbrella goes through a hole in the center of a white tin table. The chair is flimsy as well.

It's true what they say, he thinks, about a blank sheet of paper being death. His pen won't go near it. His thoughts make tracks in his mind like rain on a river, impermanent and uncountable. The river, his river, the Fraser river, fifteen hundred miles to the west, flows underground now through everything he thinks. Everything he constructs in his mind he builds on soggy ground. He should write about it, the river, the past, bring it to the surface. But he doesn't want to miss that river. He will not regret selling the houseboat. He will not populate his expatriotism with those hateful amateurs he left there. He forces the pen to the blank page and writes: *The children here have*

dry faces, the dogs lick themselves because they can, the men... lost, without their precious cold war... He crumples it up and tosses it onto the driveway. There is no wind in this place, and no rain; your mediocrity stays where you drop it, for months, perhaps years, maybe forever.

At midnight the eastbound train is hastening past, shaking the earth, on towards something important, but nothing is, so it's just on. He is sitting as close to it as he dares. He is inches from it. He needs to feel the wind it makes. He needs to feel the fear. His hair ruffles in the giant's little breeze. His face cools as sweat begins to dry. Fear provides him a measure of peace.

He stands in the driveway, his toes in the silky dust. The ball of paper he threw there centuries ago hasn't moved. The sun is directly overhead. He is surrounded by cricket sounds. It's hard to say for sure how many crickets there are, ten, twenty. Take a step in any direction and they stop. He is incapable of the subtlety of movement required to get closer. He has never seen a cricket. He doesn't know if they are black or white, or if they have any features at all besides their monotonous countdown.

Doug needs to talk to someone. To begin to like this place he needs to tell someone how much he hates it. An expression of anger would be refreshing. To share an afternoon like bread would be incredible. He walks down the driveway and crosses the tracks. He takes the silky road that winds up the hill. There is a man who sits in the doorway of a small farm house on the hill. He sits there most days. He wears a baseball cap. He seems to be watching, though is too far away to be accused of invasion. But he is gone when Doug gets there. Feeling abandoned, embarrassed, he tramps the river of dust back down the hill.

The eastbound train goes by at midnight, the west at five, just before dawn. Between trains he is lying on the tracks staring at the sky. The stars remind him of eternity. Eternity is cold. The air is hot, still; even in the middle of the night it's unbearable. With his hands he absorbs coolness from the steel rail. He gets on his knees and puts his cheeks on it, his forehead. He lies on his back, lifts his long hair out of the way and puts the back of his neck on the rail. For the first time in months he doesn't regret being here, or regret spending the money from the sale of his houseboat to pay rent on this fate. The next train

is hours away.

He falls asleep.

They are installing an air raid siren on the bank above the grounds of Hume Elementary School. It's a big sky blue trumpet with a motor. They are going to test it today. Everyone is waiting. The teachers stand together near the entrance with arms crossed, while the kids sit on the bank to wait. They said they were going to test it yesterday too. They haven't gotten it working yet. Everyone is anxious. They show a film about what to do in case of an air raid. It shows illustrations of people living in a basement. They have blankets and food and other supplies. They are calm. They have camping faces. This is an adventure. It also shows a boy and a girl who have dug an impression in the earth. They are smiling. They have placed branches over the impression, a protective dome. The illustration shows little dots like black snow. The dots are not getting past the leaves on the branches. The boy and girl are safe.

The sun is on his face like a starved rat. The rails are hot as fever. He leaps up in a panic, as though the train is almost on him. It's not. There is only cooked silence. That there was no train this morning, an amazing stroke of luck, sends a thrill through him. He ejaculates. But maybe there was, he thinks. Maybe he's already dead. Maybe death is a relative thing. He touches the sticky wetness in his pants. He smells it. Was there a derailment, a stubborn animal on the tracks? What? He tastes it. His heart is wet with shame. It helps him feel normal, enough that he is able to write a little:

He is racing home on his bike. He takes the alley. It's a short cut. Barely slowing at cross streets, block after block, the five minutes it takes him to get there seems a life time. He drops his bike against the fence in the alley and runs into the house. His mother is crying. Mum, guess what! The president was assassinated. He says this with rapture. He wants to be the first to tell her the news. Assassinated is an amazing new word he learned today. Mum, the president was assassinated. That means killed. The TV is on. She already knows. Walter Cronkite has beat him to it. His disappointment is toxic; it makes him dizzy. He goes looking for his little sister. Maybe he can make her understand. But she smiles the wrong smile.

At the side of the cabin the porch light illuminates the landlord's garden. Doug pisses into the dust. He looks over the large green leaves

of the rhubarb, and the pumpkins that are bigger than a man's head. He decides to get drunk tonight. He opens a warm beer and puts the cap in his pocket. He drinks slowly. He revises what he's written. By eleven o'clock he's had ten beers and has revised his paragraph to death. When he reads it again he hates what it sounds like. He crumples it up and pulls out a new sheet. He will start again. He opens another beer and forces himself to drink it down.

At midnight the train arrives. It comes from the east out of nowhere and leaves to the west going nowhere. It is only briefly material, while it's before him, in his senses. The caboose rushes hopelessly to catch the engine and falls off the world into darkness. The sound of its rushing remains for a while afterwards, like the echo of a falling man, the memory of an echo, the memory of a memory.

He stumbles into the garden and lifts a large pumpkin and twists until the stem breaks. It's larger than his head, as deep as his chest. He takes another gulp of beer and closes his eyes to let the dizziness pass. The man with the baseball cap is sitting in his doorway, lit from behind, a silhouette. Doug takes his beer and the pumpkin to the tin table in the yard. Enveloped by darkness, the man can't observe him. He closes his eyes to stop the dizziness. He carries the pumpkin to the tracks and places it on a tie between the rails. He takes the bottle cap from his pocket and puts it on the rail.

He wakes up on the ground, entangled in the folding chair, under the sun umbrella. Its shadow has just passed off his face; the direct sun awakens him like a fire alarm. He staggers into the cabin, takes a handful of Tylenol, and drinks three glasses of water. He makes a cup of coffee and wishes he had a cigarette. He fixes himself some soup and makes a sandwich. Sitting on the porch he prepares to eat. He rolls his shirt sleeves past his elbows. He combs his hair running his fingers through it. He contemplates the silence at the center of his suffering. He can hear it if he moves slowly enough. He remembers last night, and looks to the tracks where he placed the pumpkin. He finds the bottle cap in the gravel, flat as a coin. The pumpkin is gone.

A car rolls in from the west. It's the old red car that goes back and forth every weekday. The woman driving has long brown hair. She seems young. She is extraordinary. All women are extraordinary when their hair is long, he thinks. She glances at him, but pushes the car on

past and up the hill. It winds up the river of dust and doesn't slow down for blind corners and potholes, higher and higher until it slips like a drop of blood over the wavering top. The man with the baseball cap has just lit up a cigarette. There is a pumpkin on the steps beside him.

At five minutes to midnight Doug is placing a fresh pumpkin between the rails. At midnight he is sitting beside the tracks. At three minutes after midnight he senses the train. He tastes it before he hears it. Something about his teeth, the film on his teeth, some minute chemical change that alerts him. Then his hearing picks it up. It's alarming how quickly it comes into being once that sense is working on it. The slim earthquake surges past and provides an unsatisfactory breeze. He brings the pumpkin into the light and examines it. It is not damaged, or even scored. At four in the morning he takes a fresh beer with him to the tracks. He kisses each rail then lays his body between them. His heart is pounding. He thinks about the long-haired woman. He stares at the stars. He is a pool of adrenaline reflecting the stars. He tastes the train, explores it with his tongue. He hears it. He is paralyzed with magnificent fear. He is swallowed by sound, all the sound in the universe, so much sound that when he screams he becomes air. He is rocked and held by the mother. He is devoured by her and pushed to the center, and then born out again, left on the tracks like a babe in a basket. He lies without moving until dawn breaks. He is full. He has the train inside him. It's just big enough to fill that empty room in him. He puts his hands inside his pants and gets sticky wetness on his fingers. He puts them in his mouth.

It's a two mile hike into Love along the tracks, across the artless prairie, a more direct route than the highway, with no shade, and no turns. It's hot, a fifty tie day. When he gets there, he enters the Laundromat and drops his pack sack on one of the four washing machines. He buys a Coke Classic from the machine against the wall. He drinks it down without stopping to breathe. He exhales hard to cool the burning sensation. He dumps the contents of his pack into one of the machines. He adds detergent and inserts four quarters. He goes to the bar and picks up two cases of beer, then into the air-conditioned grocery store that sells liquor and asks for a bottle of Black Label rye. He also gets two dozen wieners, some canned vegeta-

bles, canned fish, a gallon of purified water, a handful of chocolate bars, a dozen oranges and some ground coffee. He gives in to an impulse to buy cigarettes. He smokes one on the steps of the Laundromat waiting for the rinse cycle to be finished. The dryer isn't working so he puts the wet laundry into his pack sack, puts as many groceries into it as will fit, ties the water to the pack with rope. He puts the rest of the stuff in pockets and starts back down the tracks, a case of beer tugging at each arm like dull children. When he gets back to the cabin he drops everything onto the kitchen floor. He turns the cold water in the shower on and soaks himself with his clothes on. He didn't have time to take them off; he was about to pass out from the heat. He hangs the wet laundry up on whatever will hold a piece: the porch railing, the door knob, deserted nails on outside walls. He curses not talking to the landlord about the broken refrigerator. The chocolate bars are liquid. The beer is hot. The clothes on his body are beginning to dry. He soaks himself again, and goes outside to feel himself evaporate.

He lights a cigarette. He sits in the shade at the side of the cabin. He stares without blinking at some obscure point deep inside him. Half the cigarette burns down before he takes another drag. An S in the dust moves towards him. He puts his foot on its tail and pinches it behind the neck with his thumb and fore-finger. He remembers tying a garter snake to fishing line and a rock and tossing it into Rose Valley Reservoir. Just below the surface of the water it formed and reformed the letter S. It carried on as if movement was important and distance not necessary. He and his friends wanted to know how long it would take to drown one. But after an hour the snake had not drowned. They had tossed it out of reach, and had to leave it to its fate. He still doesn't know how long it takes to drown a snake. He releases the one he's caught. His fingers smell like snake. Even after washing he can still smell it.

He dreams of snakes. He ties a red helium balloon with fishing line to a large garter snake. He releases it. He can see it out there, the balloon, on the hillside, or above the fields. At other times it doesn't move for days and he thinks the snake must be dead, but it then appears the next day someplace else, on the other side of the tracks, or behind the cabin. He ties a blue helium balloon to a king snake

and sets it free. The balloon moves steadily towards the horizon and eventually disappears. He ties a yellow one to a small rattler. It rises in the air. It makes the same endless S. It floats up higher than the cabin, higher than the hill. Doug dreams that it will eat birds, and cherries from the tops of trees, that when the rattler grows larger it will begin to come down, that it will be a snake that understands more than other snakes, and that it will come back to kill him for it.

From the outside, the windows of the hospital appear murky, liquid; ancient faces appear to float in them. Doug's heart feels bloated, sickened, on the verge of emotion, death. He cannot stand out here in this imbecile heat any longer. He sits on the brown lawn in the red brick shade and smokes. A yellow balloon floats above the town's water tower. He thinks about the cool, disinfected air inside the building. He's afraid of the sick and dying. He's more afraid of the living. His dad is in there, waiting for something.

A pumpkin in a wheel chair rolls down the hall. A potato face stares disdainfully. Through open doors he smells rotting matter, compost. Sound worms bore holes through emptiness — moaning, timers, phones. TV sets panic like mental patients in straight jackets, an endless cycle of resignation and panic, over and over until the end of time. Loneliness cranes at opened doors. A pink hippopotamus is cranked into the air on a stainless steel contraption that will lower her into a bath. She smiles like a whore at Doug. A faceless nurse turns the crank.

His dad's back is to the opened door; he is watching TV. He pulls the hearing-aid ear-piece out of his ear and spins a toothpick in it. He is scratching a deep itch. The ear piece hangs too close to the hearing-aid pickup creating a high-pitched feedback that his dad can't hear. He coughs loudly, a deliberate explosion of air, and again, and again. He is scratching an itch beyond the reach of the toothpick. Doug has seen this ritual a thousand times. The old man's skin is shiny with sweat and oil. His short-sleeved shirt hangs loosely on his frail body. Doug shudders at the image of what's underneath: bones, a log-jam of bones. And then he moves, hoisting himself on the stainless steel floor to ceiling pole beside his chair. He roots around the top drawer of his dresser and comes out with a bag of cookies and collapses back into his TV program. The desire to get drunk explodes in Doug's chest.

At the grocery store he buys a case of beer. He also buys a carton of cigarettes. He can't afford this. Before he left New Westminster he put his few remaining possessions in a storage room. The thirty dollars a month rent seemed like nothing to him then. He has already received one letter from the storage company demanding payment of overdue rent. They will turn his stuff over to the auctioneers eventually, he knows. His precious stuff: his masturbation machines, his women's underwear, his pornography. His depravity will be sectioned and sold off to the highest bidder. He will be exposed for what he really is. He can never return.

He remembers driving around New Westminster with his dad. It's Sunday. Later in the evening they will have a drink together. They have spend Sundays this way for the past three months, ever since Mum died. Doug is getting up the nerve to call his dad by name. Stanley. But when he puts the word in his mouth he can't move his jaw. The word seems abusive, vaguely sexual. He never gets a chance to say it. His dad becomes distant again. He turns off the life that was beginning to trickle between them. He announces his intention to move back to Love to take care of his own mother who has just entered the hospital. The next day he's gone. Doug's Mum was born in Love. His Dad married her in Love, and is going back to Love because he wants to be near the grave. He cares about his own mother about as much as he cares about Doug. They talk on the phone every other month for three years. They have a good telephone relationship. They seem close. Then his dad makes a suggestion, that Doug move out to Love too. He doesn't know why. He doesn't care. This is what he craves: to have his dad command him, and for him to obey. After a thirty-six hour bus ride, he stands in the door of his dad's hospital room, holding his suitcase, and his spent one-way life. There is a dispirited sounding *Well... so you came...* The voice comes from an old man of ninety, devastated by Parkinson's disease, not one of sixty as he's supposed to be.

He dumps the case of beer and cigarettes onto the kitchen counter. He strips and stands in the shower. The water is not cold enough. Not nearly. He throws on some pants and a shirt. He pours a glass of whiskey, grabs a pen and some paper, and sits out under the sun umbrella in the yard. He stares at nothing, his mind blank. He is alone

on a vast, empty sheet of paper. When he looks up, there is a child out of nowhere at the foot of the driveway. She is curious. She picks up a handful of dust and throws it towards him. A plume hovers around her for a moment. The child's name is called from far away. She runs across the road, and disappears in the sea of grain. A truck is parked at the far end of the field. He takes a drink of whiskey and opens a beer. He writes:

He hates his homesickness. He surrenders to it like a despised lover. He remembers his river. Giant ships filled with silence and space moved cautiously as hours past his place. And stepping onto his dock he could listen to the river licking to the sea. Recently, two bridges were built, one up river, and one down river, both far enough away not to intrude, but close enough so he could check on their daily progress. He had a small motor boat he would slip over to the market in, to have cappuccino afternoons, and write in his journal. He had his university degrees, all three of them. He had a houseboat, on an amazing river. He had it all. And it vanishes like a daydream in a slammed door.

He looks up from his writing. It's dusk. He smokes a cigarette.

At five minutes to midnight he walks down to the tracks. He takes his shirt off and lays it carefully beside the tracks. He takes his pants off and puts them with his shirt. He settles his body on the rail, lengthwise. He absorbs the coolness of the steel with his stomach, his thighs, his arms, his legs. He can taste the midnight express. He is rubbing his erection on the cool rail. Maybe he's dreaming. Maybe dreaming is a relative thing. When he reaches orgasm he rolls onto the ties between the rails as the freight shrieks over him.

When the train's last echoes are absorbed by silence, he drifts into sleep and dreams of walking. He is headed east away from the setting sun. His head is bent; he is deep in thought. He hears boots crunching over gravel. A huge rattlesnake appears in front of him at eye level. He sees it suspended from a yellow balloon. It opens its mouth and begins to swallow him. He wakes. He's in the belly of the snake. He hears an eerie laughter, gluttonous, sexed. He feels bones break. He is being killed with a baseball bat. He screams. He has no air. He feels wetness. He is pissing himself. He is bleeding. He is dreaming again. He is eaten.

He regains consciousness in a shroud. It consists of blankets draped over him, of plaster that encases portions of his body, both

arms and one leg, of bandages that cover most of his head except for the tiny tunnel his is able to peer from, and of drugs, large doses of something marvelous. He feels angelic. The universe is a place he explores with his tongue, with his fingertips, with his penis. A doctor's face examines him. *And then God created doctors in his own image.* Now another face is peering into the cave where Doug dwells. This face is sarcastic, angry. This face was created in the image of cactus and stone. He recognizes the face. It recognizes him. There is a tear in its eye. It makes Doug feel warm and happy. He feels his heart beating, his breathing calm, his mind focused. He is real. He has been searching for his true self all his life. Now he has it. His father is shedding a tear for him.

The nurse has long brown hair that won't be contained in the nurses' cap. She drives a dusty red car. She pushes his wheelchair through the glass doors and out into the garden. The garden consists of autumn, of clean smelling air, except when a passing car dusts it, then it smells of traveling, of unfamiliar places. There are white plastic chairs, a table, a small brown lawn. There is a row of yellow flowers without a name. Doug notices the nurse's woman smell. He doesn't know if he can move his jaw. *Cigarettes*, he says to her. *He can talk*, she replies. She lights one and holds it to his lips. He smokes to kiss her fingers. He loves those cold hands. He loves that neutral face that neither blames nor praises. She tells him a story about Jesus Christ. He knows she wants him to be impressed. He imitates listening.

The cactus-and-stone man scurries along the hall like a giant ancient cockroach. He hasn't stopped in for a few days. They say Doug is improving. He tries different strategies to stay sick — he doesn't eat, he complains to the doctor about terrible pains in new places. He fills his bed with his own excrement. Cactus-and-stone man asks the doctor about Doug's latest infirmity; but he won't shed another tear. No matter what Doug does to appear sick, his cheeks take on a rosy glow, his eyes get clearer, and his fever flutters like a butterfly around normal. Cactus-and-stone stops coming by altogether.

Dougy is walking slowly home from school. It's Friday. His dad gets home today from a business trip. His dad usually spends the week on the road. He sells things to miners: front-end loaders, conveyers. He knows the remotest corners of the province. Dougy expects to see the

Plymouth in the driveway. He expects to feel his heart sink when he sees it. He cuts through a neighbor's garden. He stops under the maple tree in the back yard, studies the windows, expects to see his dad's face floating in one of them, but doesn't. He scurries across the lawn and bobs up the steps at the side of the garage. The car isn't there. Either his dad is late or he's had to stay on the road over the weekend. This happens some times. Dougy grins into the house, saunters down the hall, picks his nose and flicks snot against the bathroom door. In the kitchen he asks Mom where Dad is. She tells him he's not coming home until next weekend. She is smiling to herself. She is also relieved. She has been baking bread. The kitchen smells wonderful. She has saved some of the risen dough. She cuts it into strips and fries it in oil. She calls them dough-gods. When they're brown and crisp she scoops them out and puts one on Dougy's plate. He smears it with jam and pours a glass of milk. She puts one on her plate and sits across from him. *What could be better*, he is thinking, as he smiles at her, *dough-gods and you*. It's going to be a good night. They always have popcorn and cherry cola and watch *Mitch Miller And His Gang* on TV Friday nights when Dad's not home.

Afterwards Mum tucks him in. She puts her palm on his forehead, as she does when he has a fever, then puts her lips on his forehead. She turns the light out as she goes up the stairs. The furnace motor kicks in and lulls him. He is edging sleep when the motor shuts off, and he becomes aware of a sound outside, far away. It's a falling sound, a whistle, a descending whistle. He is startled awake. He knows what it is. He's seen enough films. He must have seen a hundred A bombs fall. The descending call gets louder, nearer. Fear mushrooms like an erection inside him. There is no place to hide. So this is what it's like, he has time to think. Then a truck roars by on the highway outside. It was a truck. It was the wind whistling through something on a truck, a mirror tilted just so, a hole in a fender. Fear stays in him for a long time afterwards, as though it forced an opening, and lived there; and when it's gone he misses it, his heart rate slowing, returning to not quite innocent.

Ashok Mathur / DANCE ME PLAY

— a narrative outside the *mahabharata* —

Scribbling, narrating, telling and toning, edging out a story under guise of a poem, and still my rhythm slips away, tells itself, and this tale becomes another, other than mine. But my:

Fold under lips slender touching of lips of
thigh of calf, of slowly rolling under a purple
sunset melding bodies of a sigh of desire measured
whispers of lovetaking so a leg roll of hip pressed
in high and a quivered water flowing over her, breezing
breathing by and rendering forward a moment of regression
before the hip quicks and ankle knocks and the crack intake of air
sucked in placed back, gasped gap, and wheeze-snap of breath follow
hold forth now a heightened whisk, a quicker crack a shimmying
clack-*ca-tack*, a riveting clack-clack-clack and over and over and
another brevity of crackling energy into over her him and thigh
moistly rests and lips quiver stoply slowly, body heaving
of breaths up and down up and down up and
drifting now off into droning of breathing
and sighing and drumming

Arjuna placed his hand on the warm brow and felt his fingers slide over moist skin, felt his own heartbeat reflected from her pores. Beneath the restful gaze of his fingers she shuddered into sleep and he lifted his hand from her forehead tentatively, hovering above brown skin. He wanted to kiss her along black hairline, feel her heartbeat then with his own lips, but resisted and fell away from her, away from her bed, away from warmth and into the darkness that was giving way to a cold morning. He felt his body soften and as he moved away he swallowed and for just a moment could taste her again and would

have moved back if the conventions of the world would let him. But he held still, kept his body still and felt it dry in the cool air above the duvet, watched ripples and swatches of coloured memory play upon his temples. He waited for the moment to leave him and it did. He would have cried just then, if he had known how, because he knew he should cry when moments of separation arrived. But tears only bubbled near the surface and then subsided, sinking back into the cavity of his throat, stinging his tongue and tickling his larynx. His eyelash fluttered, encouraging him to close in, to lie and drift down, and he might have given in if the tremors in his chest were not so loud, so echoey, so cavernous.

“I couldn’t leave her for the world.”

Those were his words, just like that, just like he’d popped from a fairytale soap opera, just: “I couldn’t leave her for the world,” said Arjuna. He looked toward the driver’s seat where his friend Krishna sat. He looked at the round, happy-but-solemn face of his friend, and he conjured up a mental image of Krishna’s name: *Ka-rish-nha*. That’s how it sounded. A mental image of a sound. Bisyllabic shifting toward a Tri. Arjuna visualized the name scripted out: *Kṛṣṇa*. With the sub-dot on the *s*, making for a *sh*-sound, so the name came out like Kṛshna, not Chris-na. Nonetheless truncated, the *i* implied, forced between the sounds of *kr* and *sh*, a connective bridge. (But this is too much background for such a simple tale: forgive me. I’m a poet, and poets are always creating, even creating themselves, working themselves into their work. Egocentric some say. Essential I say.)

“I couldn’t leave her for the world,” Arjuna said again.

Kṛṣṇa nodded. He’d heard the first time. He made a gesture as if to clear his throat, then swallowed hard as he negotiated a turn between two large embankments. He spoke: “Maybe you have to leave her ... for the world.”

Arjuna digested this statement. Kṛṣṇa always did this to him. Always made his terse announcements sound so profound, made Arjuna feel like an idiot. It was up to Arjuna to ask his friend what he meant. But this time Arjuna waited. If he waited long enough, sometimes Kṛṣṇa would continue. They drove along, in silence as it were. They passed between two more embankments; one was dark and

rocky, the other light and smooth, but both appeared insurmountable to Arjuna. He looked at Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa nodded.

"Perhaps you have to leave her, *for* the world."

"You mean," said Arjuna, "leave her for the *sake* of the world, or leave her *to* the world?"

Kṛṣṇa braked to let a herd of dark creatures caterwaul across the road. He turned off the engine and rolled down the window. He reached through the window and grasped the door handle. Kṛṣṇa opened the door from the outside. Arjuna always wondered why his friend did this. Kṛṣṇa got out of the car and stood up so all that Arjuna could see through the driver's side door was Kṛṣṇa from the shins up and from mid-torso, about nipple-level, down.

"I mean," said a voice from above nipple-level outside the car, "leave her for the world. And leave the world for her. Let's go for a cigarette."

And so Arjuna got out of the car, opening the door from the inside, but Kṛṣṇa had already disappeared, another habit of his which was quite annoying. Arjuna thought he saw a speck ambling along in the distance, and having decided the speck's amble more or less resembled Kṛṣṇa's peculiar gait, rushed off after him (or it, as the case may be.) Now, I'm somewhat older than Arjuna, and considerably less nimble than Kṛṣṇa, so I got left behind. (So strange, being left behind by my progeny, my own story.) I amused myself for some time watching the dark creatures who were, by now, playing sloppily in the ditch. But poets like me get bored quite easily when there's nothing substantial to poeticize about, and dark creatures slithering amongst themselves makes for an imagistic haiku at best. Hardly the stuff of epic material. And it took me some time to realize that darkness had fallen and neither Kṛṣṇa nor Arjuna were coming back for a while. Feeling somewhat tired, I fashioned a hammock out of the spare tire, and slung it between an oak tree and another, younger tree whose name escapes me at this time. And I rested here, wondering when they would come back for me. And this wondering gave way to wishing, and before long it occurred to me (poets are long on images but short, sometimes, on memory) that I could will them back, or, perhaps preferably, dream them back. So I said to myself, Vyasa, old man, drift

yourself off into a possibility, and I did just that.

Dark turns into a rain turns into a blizzard of snow wet yet hard at the same time driving down and up through the ground stinging turns into flocks of strange birds their feathers fluttering crazily crashing deafeningly upon opaque eardrums turns into legions of armies staring and stilling one another on a drenched battlefield turns into war and blood silkscreened onto a blue-wisped sky turns into a hated haze that dissipates dissolves into horizon purple with morning sun and drums a wood slowly as a heartbeat and Arjuna sleeps fitfully beside his new love who was an old old love and he reaches out to her and turns into

Love. Is it known, he wondered, as he lay beside her shuddering in the damp morning light, through its presence or its absence? Is this a woman that lies before me, Arjuna thought to himself muddily, and he reflected upon the silvery shimmer that reflected upon her skin, bouncing mercury vapours off a dirt-wet street in through the open venetian blinds, to cozily coldly flat their rays on gypsum skin. A woman beside him sleeping and crying in her dreams, he knew, because she knew that he was always leaving her in his heart and never with her in his mind, and why was it so important that he be there in the first place if his presence always made her sad, she said, because it signified his already-formed intent of leaving? A woman who had taken him to her, who had possessed him in the way the moon possesses light, only hers to give away and that in perpetuity. Like the woman before her, or rather, beside her (not in space but in time) she knew that he would leave and almost willed it so, because if she could share that other woman's desire for Arjuna (or is it that "other" woman's desire?), then she could know his return even as he left. All these things he feels, but who is he? I wonder, who am I but a poet without an anchor, and is it this which feels? Or are these feelings from Arjuna, can he claim to know his lovers individually, let alone as two women who share a knowledge (of him of each other of herself) across miles and mountains? By his now-lover, the woman whose brow

is painted in expressions of fatigue and sorrow, perhaps at his departing, perhaps in memory at his arrival, perhaps because his presence isn't absent? She, who would have him inside her, so she once said, but his body held back and would come to her only by tongue and touch as hers would come to him; love as non-entry, non-entity. Can this be love?

She doesn't know. The shes don't know. They know Arjuna and, they say, the shes, they say they love Arjuna. And Arjuna says he loves her, the hers, the shes, the both of them, the all of them, and love remains as unnamed as the shes to Arjuna, the shes to each other, the shes to us. Arjuna wonders about love. He will have to ask his friend.

"I'll have to leave her." Arjuna said this straight-faced, staring straight ahead, deep down the prairie road that ended in a foothilled horizon. "I always have to leave her." He was talking about his second love (but second to none?), of leaving again and yet a departure of a different kind because it was a departure from a different woman. Arjuna didn't explain that to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa knew.

Kṛṣṇa adjusted the rearview mirror and pulled into the middle lane. He slowed down. A large moving-truck roared past on his right, thundering its disdain or approval with an air horn. At the same time, an oil tanker rumbled by on his left, spraying bits of grit and gravel back onto the windshield. Arjuna winced. Kṛṣṇa smiled.

"I know," said Kṛṣṇa.

"But why?" Arjuna asked, intentionally leaving the question ambiguous.

"Not too far from here," Kṛṣṇa said, "I came upon a rancher's pond. There were women bathing in the water, beautiful women, ranch-hands all of them. I could tell by the cut and wear of their clothes, which they'd left upon the bank, that they were cowgirls."

Arjuna nodded. Kṛṣṇa's stories were often obscure but they usually came clear. Usually.

"I stole their clothes. And I hid in the bushes. When they came out of the water into the prairie sun, they couldn't find their clothes. Finally, they saw me laughing in the bushes. Some of them were angry. Some of them laughed themselves. But they all forgave me my playful indiscretion. One of them, her name was Gopi, fell in love with me

and I fell in love with her. We danced until dusk, and then Gopi insisted I wear her clothes and she wear mine. So we exchanged garments, and as I pulled her kerchief tight around my neck, she pulled me up to her — she was several inches taller than me — and her eyes gazed down upon me and I could feel her breath upon my lips, between my teeth. I became dizzy and reached out to her, with my hands and voice. I asked her to make love to me. She laughed and said we were already lovers; we had loved in the past; we were past lovers; and past love. And that we would love again and that we never would. And then my body went soft and I woke up in the middle of a cool night but my skin was warm and damp.”

“Were you still wearing her clothes?”

“No. Yes. I wore no clothes. I wore her body.”

“Did that love stay? Do you still love each other?”

“To both questions: no. Wonderful, isn’t it?”

Arjuna stared at Kṛṣṇa for a long time, a very long time. Kṛṣṇa’s face was dark as they drove past the first of the sloping foothills. If Arjuna stared hard enough he could see the blueness of Kṛṣṇa’s veins pumping blood past his temples. Arjuna loved Kṛṣṇa although neither man knew of love. Or they both knew of love which was a dream, always. Of life which was a dream, always.

There are some concepts that are difficult to explain, some that are impossible. Even poets like myself get all tongue-tied when it comes to the intricacies of matters like love, dreams, war, and play. Funny, isn’t it, how love dreams war play are really bottomless subjects. Find me a poet who doesn’t write about them, and I’ll find you a poet who isn’t. That’s what I say. But find me a poet who *understands* them, ah, well that’s another kettle of wax. Find me a poet, hah, find me anyone, woman man or innocent child, mother brother or sister-in-law, lawyer shaman or ascetic, anyone who really *knows* these words and I, Vyasa, will lay my poet’s sceptre at the feet of such a guru. Maybe Kṛṣṇa knows, who is loved by so many. Maybe Arjuna knows, who loves two women who love him back (but do they love each other? there’s the rub). Maybe scribbling elephants know, furious recorders in and out of time, good lord untusk me now. Maybe I know, maybe Vyasa isn’t the quaint old fool after all, but maybe I just don’t know

that I know, or don't know it yet, and maybe the poet's creations will give him light in the end. Or maybe the women know, as women know, as know women knowing women:

See Saw touch my touch liv for her
and her giv for lov lip on lip wetted hair lightly
bristle for dewed scent of her over her sliding
fingertouch tremor for enteringly lazy reminder of
shes energized into dozes of hers under hers for their
softening vees and for swimming in lov of desire and
zephyring higher and higher and upper and upper and over and
of her and up her and in her desire resisting a
zenith of azure and purple desisting now sinking
now sliding now over now under now
of her now on herno her fall together

Arjuna is ... not here. *Va-va*, he the absent lover, but if not him then whom? Put this thought in your trunk and smoke it, *Sri-sahib*. He plays dreams (of love of war) away from here unpresent. In place are Padi and Drau, replacing Arjuna, women who in loving him must love without him. And loving becomes a closed circle, so unloved Arjuna is now unpictured at present. And in his stead, or as they would have it, not instead but in presence, these two, Drau and Padi, love. Only two? no, three, with one un-there-d, but conventions interfere again and displace five-in-legend with two on three, or one apiece. And publicly propertying themselves, these two, women, to each other.

"Your body's still warm," says Padi, curled up on the corner of the single mattress.

"Uh-huh. A high metabolism. You feeling cool?"

"Hm. A bit. Not bad."

Drau sits up in bed and looks at the fetal form beside her. She genuflects. She frowns, guttering a pattern on her dark forehead, and finally asks more than states: "I suppose you'll always be leaving too?"

Padi's still body seems to tighten, or maybe it's just those mercury vapours mingling with dawn upon her exposed, untanned shoulder. "I wonder if always is the same as never."

"You sound like him."

Padi giggles and turns to face Drau. "Maybe I am him. In disguise."

Drau leans over and kisses a patch of purply-lit hair: "You can't be. Cuz I am."

Now Padi frowns. "Do you love him less or more than me? Do you think?"

"Do you mean do I love you more than I love *him*, or do I love him more than *you* love him?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"To which question?"

Drau bites her lower lip and grins. "You figure it out."

I'm sitting in the back seat, neither behind Kṛṣṇa nor behind Arjuna, but sort of in between so I can see out the front. I'm trying to write down what Kṛṣṇa's saying but he's speaking too softly, the radio's too loud, and my hearing's not what it used to be. Plus my hand's beginning to cramp. I give up on the scribing and try to remember everything instead. Maybe someday I'll have someone write it down for me. Like an elephant, I'll have to be, never forgetting.

Kṛṣṇa says: "... universe ... of illusion or *maya* which isn't illusion exactly but ... experience of the veil ... of which *kama* or love is a part ... call it *dharma*, not quite duty but more like ... fight when you must and love when you love ..."

He goes on and I'm not sure I'd understand even if I could hear every word. Arjuna questions him, and I can hear him better because his voice is deeper and he's aware I'm trying to listen: "But if I know *kama* is part of an illusory world, why love? Or why do anything?"

"*Dharma*." That's all Kṛṣṇa says.

"Because we must?" Arjuna looks for confirmation. So do I. This is Kṛṣṇa's story, after all, and I'm responsible for getting it right. Almost imperceptibly, Kṛṣṇa nods. I think. Arjuna presses for more: "But if I fail to love, to fight, to do *dharma*, what becomes of me? Of my *dharma*? Why should I go on? If I refuse ..."

Kṛṣṇa's hands tighten on the steering wheel. Both Arjuna and I look ahead. Coming toward us on the narrow highway are two vehicles. A logging truck is trying to pass a flatbed carrying a bungalow. I

reflect: raw resources and eventual product, both hurtling toward us. We're going to hit one or the other. Then Kṛṣṇa relaxes. He begins to speak. I can hear every word clearly, like his voicebox is attached to my brain.

"*Dharma* is *dharma*. What you do is what you do. *Kama* is part of *dharma* and all is part of *maya*: the illusion that is — oh, but this is all too serious. Re-read Rao for all this either-or metaphysicism. Real/unreal, it's all rather like commercials on television: one unreality to another." The trucks are filling the windshield now. Kṛṣṇa accelerates. Casually, he flips the visor down and points to the hand-painted script, white on black, that now obscures my vision of the trucks. No, not exactly. I can still see the massive grilles bearing down on us. But the visor cuts off the house, cuts off the logs.

Kṛṣṇa points to the lettering.

"Play," he says, as if that explains it all. "*Lila*. Cosmic play. As the child plays and forgets, plays and forgets. Play, as the light across a face, streamers in delight. Ha. Not doing *lila*, but being *lila*. Swirling and twirling because twirling and swirling. No other. The dance that makes you sweat but, love, you don't stop."

"But death," Arjuna adds with a hopeful tone:

Kṛṣṇa smiles: He says: "But Kṛṣṇa," enunciating carefully the *kr* shifting into the subdotted *s* including the subtle short implicit *i* and ending with the exhaled *a*. "And Vyasa. But Draupadi."

But Arjuna, but Vyasa, but trumpeting tricksters on a Himalayan quest:

Kṛṣṇa flips up the visor. The trucks are gone. The road is gone. I look around me and the car is gone. I cannot see Arjuna or anything. I hear Kṛṣṇa's voice: "But *maya*."



Jane Southwell Munro / FIVE POEMS

ROMANCE

Falling in love with him pulled me
out of myself like pulling a wet hand

out of a leaking rubber glove.
I would say it had nothing to do with him —

the glove fell away from my grasp, inside out.
He seized upon a woman I hadn't allowed myself to be.

Snake drops its former cover, crumpled scab.
I'd say it wasn't him I needed, but me.

Snake splits when it's ready, naturally.
Falling in love with him did what seeing mystic lights,

listening to good advice, reading novels
hadn't accomplished. That wildness.

Of course it had to do with him. We flew
out of wet gloves, bare hands gesturing.

Have you seen D'Sonoqua's mask, Old Woman of the Woods?
Falling in love, I paid tribute to a cannibal spirit.

Little piles of gloves: marigold, pink, yellow
in the forest below her white face, her mouth like an O.

HELICOPTER BY THE LAKE

Its blades turn invisible,
but their chop
has destroyed the membrane
in which she'd closed his voice.
His drumming in her thoughts
is gone, though little pulses of his intonations
still peak and fall through her skin.
The air oscillates
between her and the metal dragonfly.
Pentecostal, a wordless conversational uproar
transports her attention.
The lake's batiked crinkle
crumples with waves.

Waves from the rotor, waves from the wind,
waves from the moon and sun and passing boats
subside. Still, there's no silence.
Not that she's listening for silence.
She's trying to hear the future, and thinks silence
might help, but what she keeps listening to is him.
His eyes close; hers stay open.
A man's purr as he almost snores,
her ear on his clavicle.

He never finished his story
— it disintegrated in the event —
suggesting accident, perhaps a precedent.
A glinting little worry she lets wing away
as the helicopter darts across the lake.
No whirlwind lifted her from the grassy shore
— chances are, she won't fly over the rainbow —
and indeed, she can no longer sense that roar.

IT'S IN THE KITCHEN

mostly I hear music
while we're eating dinner
or fixing food
all the sensual pleasures
towards the end of day
set my hips to circling
fingertips converting
keyboard chop
how the final measure drops right off

now if I could counterpoint
here amidst the line
some fancy sister's pyrotechnics
you'd listen to the melody's sequins swing
and then that long wry stabbed-heart plea
she sings — a good man, she claims
is hard
to find

coming or going
she's got a handy man, handy
with the stride
of opposites
his left hand, sometimes slighted, stomping her
rocks across two octaves
lifts a saxophone elegy, its full hunger
love, she sings again, is a child believing

oom-pah below the tinkling
picked bones shimmy

we're cooking in the kitchen
garlic smoking
slicing zukes and cukes, mixing
me, myself and I licked off a finger
leaves above the eaves, and a child out in the garden
singing the blues and crying
where peaches hang like globes of honey
along branches of an orchard in a darkened heaven
plums, gleaming like aubergines
become the jam of this year's kisses
to have found your place on earth
no, no, they can't take that away from me

deep rhythm captivates me
it's not just the tension
of swing, curve of a horn
deep in the centre of jazz as it's sounding
is sweet confirmation
we're human, honey
swaying and cooking
regrets syncopated — it's that little delay
without your love
that's not quite safe
lordy, how it wrinkles the mind
we're funny that way

FISHING SONNET

Eating perfectly sauced red snapper, curled improbably in
boneless rosettes

instead of waiting for dusk, rowing along the cliff,
trolling a line until it tenses: yanks heavy.

You've been out there day after day, trailing your pole,
burning in the sun, idling, shifting, paddling along.

You cast, dawdle, jig — diddle the layers of deep water

in which things invisible live: your flimsy line, the plumb
seals, the canny finned flock

— but this evening, a hidden fish pulling on your wrists,

its struggle echoes in your belly. Rod bowed, one end wedged
against your hip, the other scribbling across the lip of air
pulled back from bare water,

and then: so alive: the quick flipping body:

twitching — flopping over aluminum frets across the bottom of
the boat. At your feet

as you catch another. Another. Five red snappers. Mouths
sucking air. Club each fish but it slips, jumps again.

Chill as you rip the cord to start the motor. Noise. Noise.
And the beach boulders bang, your shoes and cuffs soaked

in the cold water. Clean them fast. Slit, scrape, the bloody
back bones still alive. Fish nerves. You know someone with
such nerve. Almost, the fillets leap.

Cook them by lantern light.

With each bite, sweet greenish flesh of ocean tinged with
slaughter, your throat too tense for conversation.

DREAM TIGER

A woman confronts his liberties
in her conversation with the houseguest,
this night's tiger.

His stripes simply won't stay put — they detach,
rippling on the air's current, permitting
risk to permeate the dining room.
If he were not, clearly, a tiger
she'd swear he was a man, one elbow on the table
twisting a glass of dark wine
while teasing her limits. Without her permission
the tiger takes charge
and begins his dream of a woman.

She persists in a kind of politeness, obliquely
presiding over him, the meal
and some pretty children.
“A spoon for the cream? Child, you may be excused.”
Wainscoting boxes the room at their backs.
The stained walnut reeks
with contained smoke. Wary, she changes her face
and that is enough to gentle his approach.
Evening inhales; she proposes: “Bring your port —
let us continue in the living room,”
then stands purposefully, shedding felted air.

Her proper guests wait
like fixtures, in the next room —
these unknown friends she must have fed.
A dress, in fact a gown, slides on her thighs.
She notices its drape from her bosom.
So, this was long ago, this conjunction.
She is allowed Edwardian skin for it
and milk-breasts. She is allowed
a needle-point settee and another man
whose eyes doze behind fronds of twilight.
A man asleep in a wool suit,
like a northern lake. She is allowed
to rest on his surface, break her flight
for a few sips of coffee.

The tiger enters to brood over his hostess.
She lifts away, flushed from the unsuitable couch,
tries the door. The wake of her party
rises after her. Pushed from behind,
she bursts onto the patio, but the others
can't fit through the shrinking frame.

The tiger is already outside. She senses
there's been some preparation
she overlooked, a menu for the night
which might explain
why she's followed him.
While the woman combs his dream, the tiger,
with his rough tongue, licks
a constellation clean.

It remains unaccountable
this wish she has to lean
full-length against him
enfolded in his tresses, his risky stripes,
as this night's tiger rises
through the dark houses of the sky.



Monique Fouquet / BLACK SILHOUETTES

THE SUBJECT

Aesthetics and reality each have their autonomous life. Yet, the boundary between the two is easily obscured. The multiplicity of visual representations into our lives demands our attention. How can we resist the incessant manufacturing of desire which negates our own desire?

I have used the appeal of the aesthetic object to address the fissure between historical representation of the woman's body and reality, between appearing and being, between object and subject.



1. . . . BY ARISTIDE MAILLOL

“concentrating almost exclusively on the subject of the single female figure, standing, sitting, or reclining, and usually in repose, he stated over and over again the fundamental thesis of sculpture as integrated volume, as mass surrounded by tangible space.”

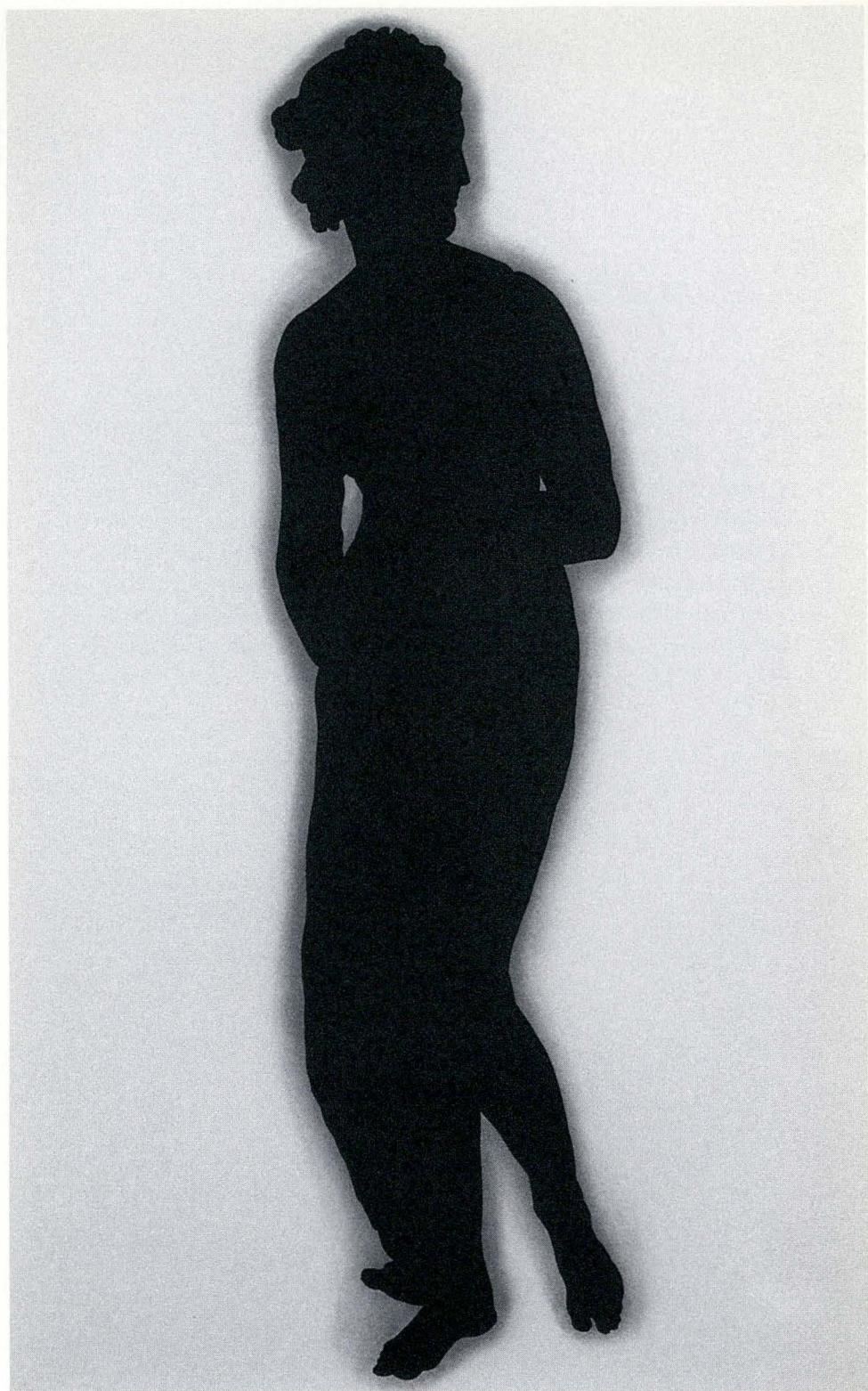
p. 95 N6490.A713 1986b



2. VENUS BY BOTTICELLI

"In the 15th Century there is often something indecisive about the twist of a torso or the turn of a head, as if men were shy of strong expressiveness; but now, once again, there returns a joy in the powerful movements of a strong temperament, and a head swung round or a pointing arm is suddenly possessed of a new strength. One feels a heightened physical vitality, and, indeed, the mere act of looking at something is endowed with an energy previously unknown and the 16th Century is once again able to depict a keen and powerful gaze."

N6915.W5713



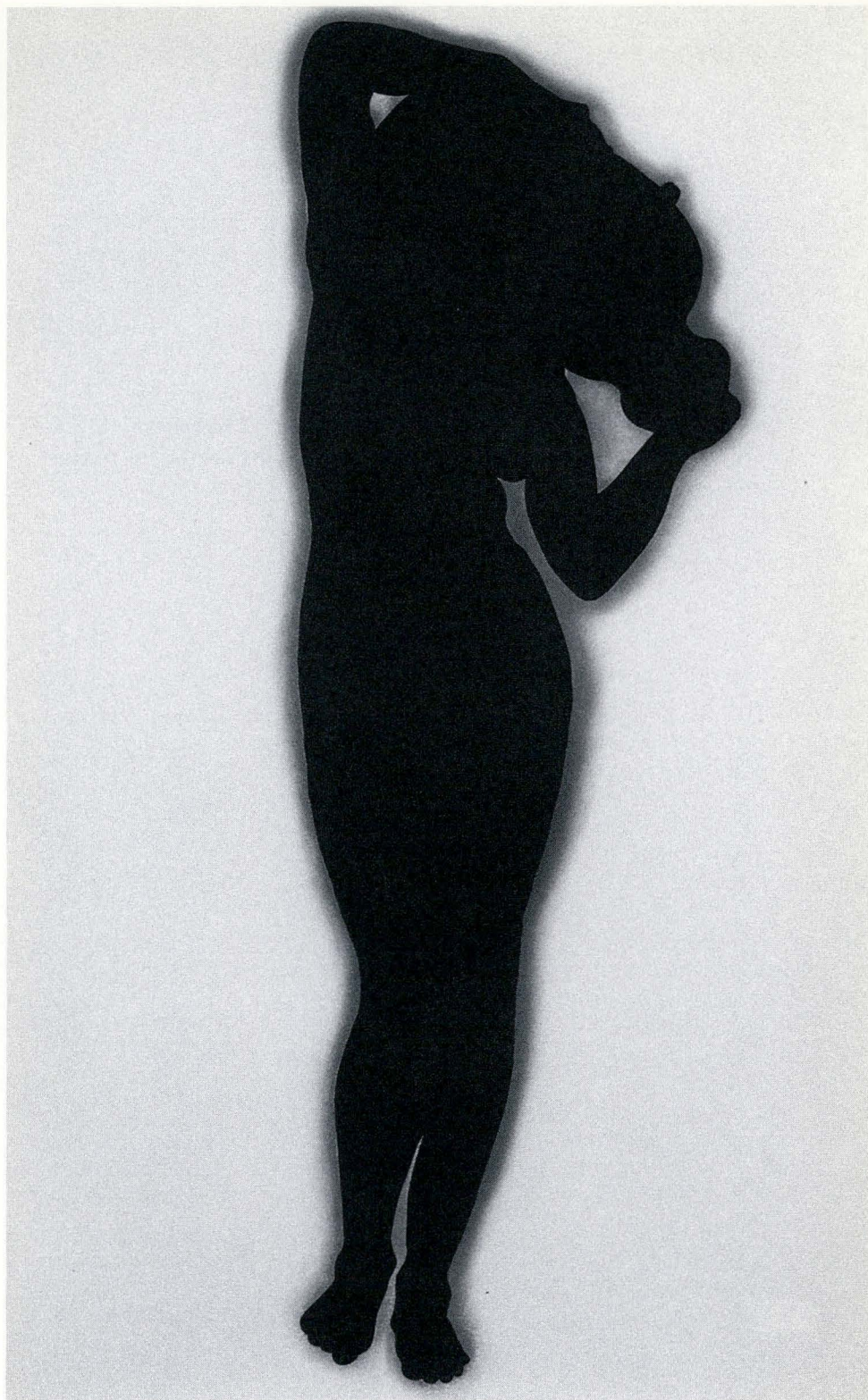
3. THE HOPE VENUS BY CANOVA

"The position of her right foot reveals the direction of her flight; she is moving toward us. Another instant and we will be called upon to assist her in her distress. The thought is irresistible." p. 193 NB623 C2 L53



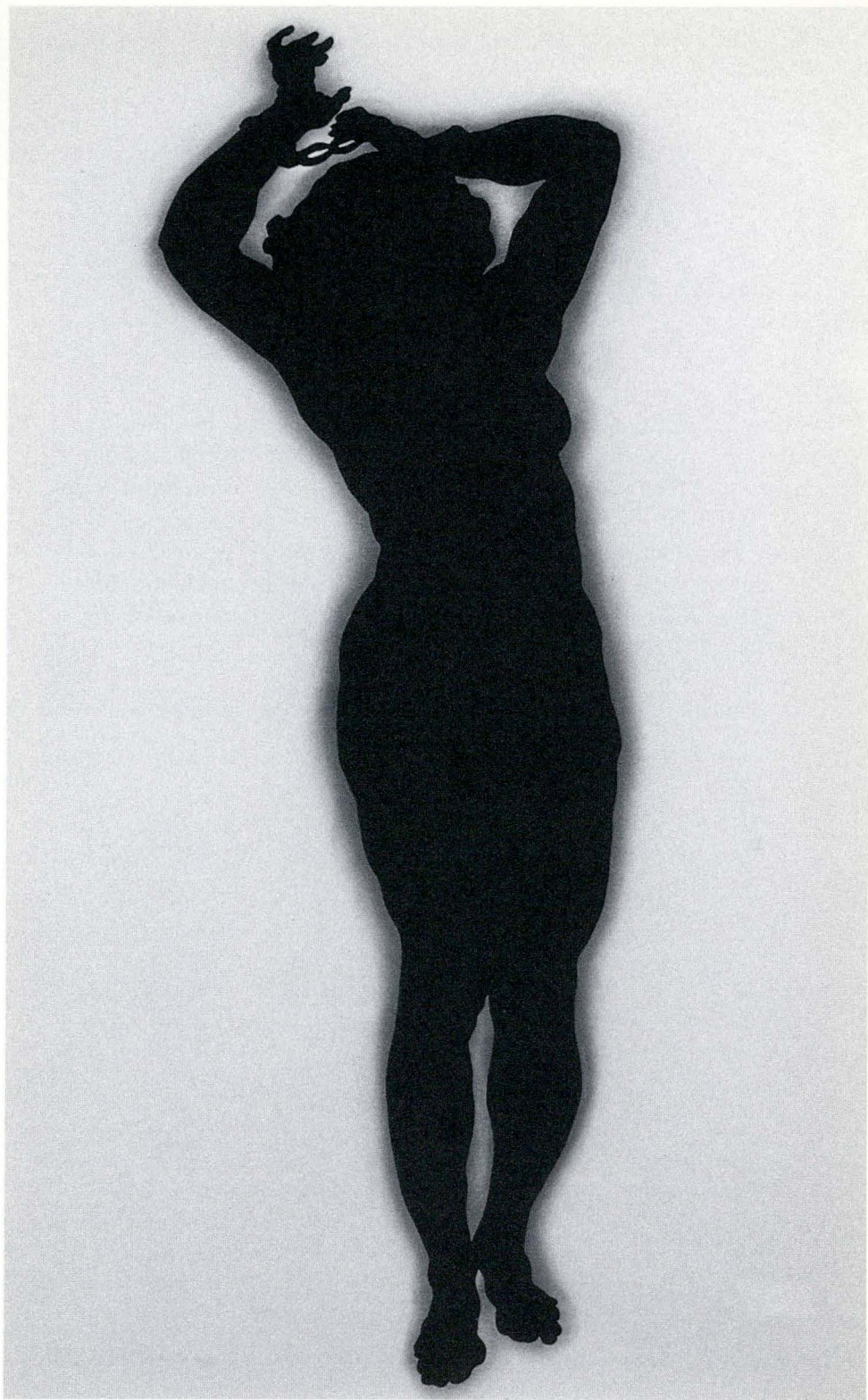
4. CLASSICAL APHRODITE 300 BC

"The sculptor, being of his period, could not abstain from a modification of the flesh, too plentiful but at least firm in his prototype, to suit the middle-aged face above it." p. 268 NB85L3 1972



5. LA SOURCE BY INGRES

"Most of us prefer Ingres' portraits of women to those he made of men, fine though the latter are. This predilection is based on what might be called the ultimate validity of these works. Somehow a woman's face seems nearer to the inexpressivity and the immanence of her body. Her relative passivity in affairs of the world at large rules out the gleams we seem to catch in the eyes of Monsieur Bertin, Count Molé and Cherubine — gleams of worldly wisdom, of experience, of genius." p. 77 ND 553 15 P513



6. PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA BY RUBENS

“In the Reformation, it was understood in an even more radical sense: the Cross, the punishment and agony of Jesus, was considered the pinnacle, the ultimate point, of Christian experience. From this, it follows that perdition, torture, annihilation, the abyss, confusion, disorder, fear, trembling and death present themselves as models of erotic experience.” p. 245 B105 B64 F72

MONIQUE FOUQUET

Selected Exhibitions

Group Exhibitions

- 1992 Faculty Exhibition, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College of Art and Design, Vancouver, BC.
- 1990 Artropolis 90, collaboration with Michael Banwell.
The Big Picture, Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
- 1988 Working through the Grey Scale, Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey, BC.
- 1987 Art Cologne Diane Farris Gallery, Cologne, Germany.
- 1985 BC Women Artists 1885-1985, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC.
- 1984 University Center Gallery, University of California, Santa Barbara, California.
- 1981 Rockford International 81, Rockford, Illinois.
- 1980 Wesleyan International Exhibition of Prints and Drawings, Macon, Georgia.
West Coast Drawings, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington
- 1978 First Canadian Biennial of Prints and Drawings, Calgary, Alberta.
- 1976 Helen Pitt Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

Solo Exhibitions

- 1993 The Subject, Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
- 1991 Memoria, Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
- 1988 Vessels, Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
- 1985 Walking the Soft Earth, Contemporary Art Gallery,
Vancouver, BC.
- 1981 La Chambre Blanche, Québec City, Québec.
- 1979 Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina,
Regina, Saskatchewan.
- Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
- Helen Pitt Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

Collections

Canada Council Art Bank
City of Vancouver
Vancouver Art Gallery
Private Collections

Beth Goobie / SIX POEMS

BLACK BETHLEHEM STAR

christmas turned us all inside out.
pictures of my father, under the wreath.
he was like a black hole, no warmth in the eyes,
the rest of us in orbit around him.

with birth, the explosion into time and distance,
the movement away from parent, light years of travel.
but we held his secrets. he had deposited
imploded constellations in us. his hand never left
us. we wore the same skin, merged to his despair.

in the pictures, the way he watched us.
his eyes like scissors cut us out of every context,
strung his children, hand to hand, like a paperdoll chain,
one the repetition of the other, blank-faced,
un-sexed. on christmas eve, we stood about the piano,
and he dragged our voices across the keyboard,
his hands and arms clutching at chords
like a ship's captain at the wheel of a night storm.
in the tall white kitchen, my mother arranged cookies
on melmac plates, smiled at our harmony.

christmas was when god sent his son
into woman, into world, into distance. jesus,
he held god's secrets, god's dark cosmos, as all children do.
it is there in the christmas photos of god's eyes —
knowledge. any parent should surrender life for a child,

but this god sent his son to die, instead.
jesus died for god. jesus carried god's shame into genesis,
into the world of his flesh. this is what christmas celebrates
and my father, sucked-in star that gave out no light,
rocked gently on the piano bench before the baby grand,
pulled us after him into 'o little town of bethlehem'
while through the lace curtains, the neighbour's houses
strung with green, red and white, winked on and off,
sometimes there in the night.

about my father, we, the paperdoll figures, were a half-
circle that might connect about him, repetition
on all sides, tightening like a noose. he thought
our silence, paper thin, held the balance of power,
that he, having deposited his rage and terror within us,
was now reduced to reaction

but we were only young stars in orbit,
sending out our small light. we knew where
he began. it was the place our light ended.

AFTER THE RESURRECTION

the time we came back from the easter church retreat.
all weekend, we had been released, out among the legs
of adults who stood about holding dessert squares
on paper napkins, coffee in styrofoam cups. above us,
they laughed and talked god. their singing followed us
everywhere. down by the beach, faint on the wind,
as we collected wet, gleaming pebbles. solid,
more brightly coloured, behind the wall of the next room,
as we watched flannelgraph boards, sunday school papers,
practiced sword drills. winding back from their
nature walk, while we threw ourselves into potato sack
egg'n spoon races, dived into hide'n seek.
all weekend, we hid among the church congregation,
believed ourselves souls called out from the sepulchre,
stone rolled away from our throats, risen and redeemed.
even late sunday afternoon, swinging our legs
on the squeaking stack-easy wood and metal chairs,
the singing of the adults loud and heavy
coming out of their bodies right next to us.

out of the fading chorus, we drove home.
father discussed theology with the man in the front seat,
mother in another car with this man's wife,
us five children in the back, all under the age of eight.
he warned us to be quiet, but there was god in us still,
echoes of the weekend's singing wafted into our ears,
sent eyes out of car windows into the spring.

our voices darted, wheeled out of us
like sparrows. our bones flickered, note to note.

then father dropped the man, guardian angel,
off at his door — they lived like us. silence
laid itself over us like armageddon coming out of
the man at the steering wheel. we had been noisy,
too alive with sound when he had been full of words
for the man in the front seat now gone. we drove
through flowering streets toward the familiar, tried
to keep hot terror from sluicing out between our legs.

home, we ran, sent to the attic, tripping up three flights,
skin shrinking about us, mother not home yet.
out the gable window, row of chickadees on the hydro wire.
no order to our fear. child closest to father
grabbed first into the body of terror, fist, foot, belt

and the rest of us, sinking into the decay of our flesh,
forced to watch. faces melted out of our eyes.
potholes, huge as night, whirled open in our palms, throat,
gut. we could not hear the sounds we were making.
god was leaving us. the weekend was over. again,
the family began.

TWO BROTHERS

two brothers, one year apart, shared bunk beds
in the room with hockey figures on the swirling walls,
then moved up to the attic. mark, the elder,
with the brown eyes and hair of father, walked into
everything one year ahead and vince, blond brown,
a bluegreenhazel stare closer to mother, watched
what went before and survived it.

at my grade five birthday party, i remember vince
put an entire onion into his eight-year-old mouth,
chewed it raw, face torched like a warning,
but he swallowed to prove he could. i remember
we three sisters playing barbies in the tv room. the door
threw itself out of the wall and my brothers ran in
vince stark naked and nine years old, mark clothed
hanging back and giggling as vince leapt and cavorted,
small penis jerking like a mexican jumping bean,
while we three sisters, wound into one shrill,
elongated shriek, stood, hands clasped to our bosoms,
one eye closed firm, the other slit open. i remember
vince on the chess team, the rugby team, playing
the trombone; he carried the swagger of the macho
high school elite. the world was there to take him on;
even in his sleep he was ready, no longer
the five-year-old bedwetter. my father broke chairs
and tennis racquets across him, would tear
up three flights of stairs in crazed pursuit

of that tough young body, sun still burning in its bones,
life ahead of it, choices and no children yet to drag him down, only a
father and he would do it — he would
take that boy between his hands and teach him
the shape of fear.

and he did, he was entirely successful.
fear prowled the boundaries of my brother vince's skin,
shone on his nakedness, fine gold hairs.
what surprised both father and son
was the coldness of it, glinting in the face
of the father's dark rage. "when he beats you,"
vince used to say, "you don't make a sound.
you girls, you cry, you scream. you give him
what he wants. i take it away." into the eye of the storm
the small boy sent out that bluegreenhazel stare.
i don't live here anymore, it told my father.
you can hit this flesh and i will laugh.

but mark, he stayed within the confines of blood, bone,
heart, moved further and further in. after, we found porn
magazines between his mattresses. the goodbye picture
he took in the drugstore photo machine two weeks before
his death shows pupils had swallowed irises; already
darkness come up from inside to shut out the light.
sometimes my father, hands around mark's head, would slam it
against the attic, the kitchen, the living room floor,
like a jar of peaches whose lid won't open,
vince fluttering behind them, blond candlelight, next
in line, but father did that to all of us, broke the seals
on all of us, something to clean up off the floor.

and mark was the class clown, the one who put on
nylons for a high school assembly, imitated joe namath
in french. lips against the brass tuba mouth,
he played the school band, hallways, football game crowd,
oom-pah-pah-ed his way home up the oxford street hill.

the last summer, he was fifteen, we worked together,
pulled weeds at the university agricultural plots,
biked back and forth. i remember him asleep in the shade
against a tree, knees up, the wide legs of his cut-offs
slid to one side so the scrotum was revealed, pale
with small bumps like a chicken drumstick
and me staring, not knowing what it was,
but i do not remember a single conversation
before or after he stole the van, did the b&e's,
began the weekly probation officer visits, awol's,
came back from florida, hands behind himself in cuffs,
twisted into the shape of the six o'clock news.

what i most remember is this:
the slow tread of his feet on the stairs, passing by
the second floor on his way to the attic, the way
those sounds carried loneliness, trailed after him
up the stairwell, long and weighted, an invisible cape.
and i see him opening and closing the fridge,
eating like the rest of us.

JUST AFTER I KNEW

when i came home and my brother was dead
i began to climb the brown stairs
to his attic room. cold stairwell, it wound
smaller than before, hunched against my weight
and the walls, beige ice, froze my fingertips
to their surface. i left a trail of red-rimmed
fingerprints, splayed hollyberries, thrown ripe against

up, up past the landing, the lace-shrouded windows,
the second floor where the rest of us lived, up
to the third, where my brothers slept. cold,
the cold that was always there, heaviest under the roof,
drifted down through the pores. the room
had the half-light of cloud and the maple pressing in
at the gable windows. the weight of the universe
took me then and laid me flat across his bed,
not weeping, just resting, as if there was no more to do,
finally no more to resist. it was the only moment
of calm. peace, the edges of sorrow came out in me then
without effort, like evening stars. for him,
it was over. this was no surprise

from below, my mother called my name,
as if afraid i would draw too close,
and i lifted back into my body, took back
its weight, pushed up into gravity, the heaviness of air,
and moved on.

CLEANING OUT THE LOCKER

in the high school basement hallway, light poured through glass in the doors behind me, fluorescent lighting dropped down walls of numb yellow concrete, simmered along beige and black-flecked linoleum. in this flood of white, murals along the upper wall began to pale. my feet long ago disappeared into this bright. i know one hand touched my locker, rectangle of space clamped into the row of grey metal lockers to my left, textbooks and careful notes, lunch bag, clarinet case and spring jacket in the open door blurred at the edges, swallowed by the light. to my right, the music room threw beginner chords at the walls, and beyond, two floors of everyone distorted into desks. beyond this the sky.

my body was there, thick, a wood post keeping me upright, dense matter that clutched darkness against the advancing light. the body was there, alright, but i sat along the lower rim of the eyelids, a thin guarded line, as the vice principal turned a distant corner and came toward me without sound, his arms outstretched, careful and helpless, as if holding personal roadkill. he was the one my brother spent detentions with, one of the many who had not seen enough, and now his eyes ran on beyond me through the glass of the push-handle doors, out into the spring along the oxford street hill.

i do not remember what he was holding — probably
running shoes, jacket, sawed-off padlock, notes. already
they had taken the textbooks back. i must have placed
my arms in a receiving position. he must have laid
the objects onto them where they rested like the memories
of my brother, lightweight and alien, the life gone out.
for seven months, his locker had been around
the hallway corner where the row containing me
became the wall that held him. i had never seen his locker,
had never seen him standing at it, had never seen him
put on his jacket, take out his books, push the lock
closed, but in that moment i would have known it anywhere,
the missing lock, door slightly ajar, the taken gut.

in that raw light, holding the over-exposed skins, i saw
my brother had neatly slipped out of himself, without
blood, only an absence left in someone else's hands.
it was then, standing in that hallway gutted by light,
the vice principal dark in his suit coming toward me,
the gift held out in his arms became knowledge —
knowledge that death was an option, a choice
always there when other things were not, the shedding
of light, the removal of self from the slammed,
shoved-closed, the locked-in pain.

BLUEPRINT OF FACE

when the brother dies, he steps out of his photographs.
his face wants off the bone. the rest of ours follow.
someone has gone and cut all our faces out of my memory.
in my head, they arrange in a circle
around that point in time, the informing of the suicide.
inside this kaleidoscope, the tunnel of time
keeps turning the circles all funny. the faces blur,
overlap. parts of them get lost, show up
on someone else's skull. my father wears my brother's eyes.
maybe that always was.

we bury a face with the body. it is not that of the dead.
in the church pew row, we peel off our own faces,
drop them into the offering plate, all we have left
to give to god. from the coffin, in turn,
each of us scoops one handful of face
from the dead brain. i choose the feature carefully.
it is this fragment from which i am to build
my new face. i select the shred of his expression
that haunts me most, lives in my peripheral vision.
the mouth? the nose? the eye.

i see from last year's christmas photographs
that our faces are coming along, though no one is yet
complete. mother builds little onto the patch of face
she chose — loyalty? father, hidden behind beard
is difficult to evaluate. some of the forehead is gone.

in conversations, we talk around the name, blueprint
of the unspoken, try to remember, always before words
the name is "mark," so that it will not be spoken
as alive, out of context. my mother used to scramble
our five names when she wanted one. this habit is
dangerous; with death we are precise, step carefully
about structures of overlapping face, though we are
face within face within face. always become
one another.

Lisa Robertson / TWO PIECES

HOW PASTORAL: A MANIFESTO

I needed a genre for the times that I go phantom. I needed a genre to rampage Liberty, haunt the foul freedom of silence. I needed to pry loose Liberty from an impacted marriage with the soil. I needed a genre to gloss my ancestress' complicity with a socially expedient code; to invade my own illusions of historical innocence. The proud trees, the proud rocks, the proud sky, the proud fields, the proud poor had been held before my glazed face for centuries. I believed they were reflections. The trees leaned masochistically into my absence of satisfaction. The horizon pulled me close. It was trying to fulfil a space I thought of as my body. Through the bosco a fleecy blackness revealed the nation as its vapid twin. Yet nostalgia can locate those structured faults our embraces also seek. A surface parts. The nasty hours brim with the refinements of felicity. It's obvious now: Liberty was dressed up in the guise of an ambivalent expenditure.

My ancestress would not wait for me. I began to track her among the elegant tissue of echoes, quotations, shadows on the deepening green. Because she bore no verifiable identity, I decided to construct her from kisses: puckers and fissures in use, and also from the flaking traces of her brittle dress. For I needed someone not useful to me, but obnoxious, prosthetic, and irrelevant as my gender. Let's say Nature, like femininity, is obsolete. She's simply a phantom who indolently twists the melancholic mirror of sex. Far into the rural distance, the horizon splays beneath her florid grip. Chosen obsolescence fields her gendered ecology. In deep sleep, my ancestress tells me a story:

"Ontology is the luxury of the landed. Let's pretend you 'had' a land. Then you 'lost' it. Now fondly describe it. That is pastoral. Consider your homeland, like all utopias, obsolete. Your rhetorical nostal-

gia points to frightened obsolescence. The garden gate shut firmly. Yet Liberty must remain throned in her posh gazebo. What can the poor Lady do? Beauty, Pride, Envy, the Bounteous Land, The Romance of Citizenship: these mawkish paradigms flesh out the nation, fard its empty gaze. What if, for your new suit, you chose to parade obsolescence? Make a parallel nation, an anagram of the Land. Annex Liberty, absorb it, and recode it: infuse it with your nasty optics. The anagram will surpass and delete the first world, yet, in all its elements, remain identical. Who can afford sincerity? It's an expensive monocle."

When I awake I find myself in a new world. The buildings, the clothes, the trees are no more or less coy than they were, yet I had been so intent on the dense, lush words that I had not realized a world could be subtracted from her fruiting skin. The old locutions could only lose themselves in that longed-for landscape; but now I pluck for myself "peace in our own time" and the desuetude of nostalgia. It's as if suddenly a pitcher of slim flowers needled that monumental absence of regret. So elegant, so precise, so evil, all the pleasures have become my own.

COMMENTARY

"Nature is not natural and that is natural enough."

— Gertrude Stein, *Ida*

I wanted a form as obsolete yet necessary as the weather. I begin with the premise that pastoral, as a literary genre, is obsolete — originally obsolete. Once a hokey territory sussed by a hayseed diction, now the mawkish artificiality of the pastoral poem's constructed surface has settled down to a backyard expressivity. In the post-pastoral poem (in evidence since the English Romantics and their Modernist successors), the evocation of "feeling" in poet or reader obeys a parallel planting of "nature" in the poem. Translate backyard utopia as political mythology. Appearing to serve a personally expressive function, the vocabulary of nature screens a symbolic appropriation of the Land. Her cut sublimity grafts onto the Human. I'd call pastoral the nation-making genre: within a hothouse language we force the myth of the Land to act as both political resource and mystic origin. A perversely topical Utopia has always been the duped by-product of the ideology that blindly describes, thus possesses, a landscape in which people are imagined to be at peace with the economics of production and consumption. The dream of Liberty poses itself within the specificity of this utopian landscape. Certainly on this 500th anniversary of the so-called New World, we must acknowledge that the utopian practice of Liberty stands now as a looming representation of degrading and humiliating oppressions to the (pastoral) majority, and that pastoral utopias efficiently aestheticize and naturalize the political practices of genocide, misogyny, and class and race oppression. I consider that now pastoral's obvious obsolescence may offer a hybrid discursive potential to those who have been traditionally excluded from utopia. To begin with, we must recognize utopia as an accretion of nostalgias

with no object other than the historiography of the imaginary. But do not assume the imaginary to be merely the fey playground of children and the doomed. Consider that the imaginary generates landscapes for political futures. To people these landscapes with our own desires and histories, we must implement pastoral as a seedy poetic artifice, and deny it the natural and hegemonic position of a political ideology.

Historically, from Virgil to Spenser to Goldsmith, the pastoral poem narrated the exigencies of land tenure, labour's relation to the state and capital, and the establishment of a sense of place as a ground for philosophical being and discourse. The trajectory of the pastoral poem has prepared a self congratulatory site for the reproduction of power. We can follow this trajectory from Virgil's ambivalently gorgeous justification of the Roman Empire, to the Elizabethan articulation of imperial utopias, Augustan parallels between English and Classical pleasures of enlightenment, and late eighteenth century evocations of nostalgia for agricultural capitalism. "Beauty" clinched Pastoral's edifying function. The quaint archaisms of the language; the dainty evocations of springtime pleasures; the innocent characterization of the indolent shepherd: these niceties etched the pleasures of the genre as irrevocably sensual, masking imperialistic ideologies, or at least couching them in the banalities of conquest and repose. Yet the irony of loss remained the pastoral's central trope. The difficulties and pleasures of maintaining a primary, legal, and productive entitlement to the land provided the pastoral subject since Virgil's first eclogue politicized the Theocratic idyll: "You, Tityrus, lie under your spreading beech's covert, wooing the woodland Muse on slender reed, but we are leaving our country's bounds and sweet fields. We are outcasts from our country; you, Tityrus, at ease beneath the shade, teach the woods to re-echo 'fair Amaryllis.'" (*Eclogue I*, 1-5, Loeb ed)

Certainly, as a fin-de-siècle feminist, I cannot in good conscience perform even the simplest political identification with the pastoral genre. Within its scope women have been reduced to a cipher for the productively harnessed land within a legally sanctioned system of exchange. In pastoral the figure of woman appears as eroticized

worker — the milkmaid or the shepherdess swoons in an unproblematic ecstasy with the land. Moreover, she is pleased to give over her youthful pre-social wildness to the domesticating and enclosed tenure of the marriage contract. This contract often gives occasion to the celebratory epithalamium, one of the many possible moments in the pastoral montage. Pastoral plants the agency of women's desire firmly within the patriarchal frame. And so it is with a masochistic embarrassment that I confess to having been seduced by the lure of archaic pleasures. Prime among these twist the convolute interleavings of those beckoning and luscious tropes, femininity and nature. Yet I shall release them from their boredom.

By femininity and nature I mean the spurious concepts, purposeful misreadings, which have served the specific use of supporting a singular structure of power, and which therefore have been expediently maintained. I prefer to think of both the spuriousness of nature and the spuriousness of femininity as phantom. ● Once assigned a mythic base in biology, they function as cyphers which reproduce but don't enjoy the autonomy of the citizen. Femininity and nature float both as spectres of the state imagination and as symbols for the nation. A defined locale or gendered body is cultivated to produce an image of benign power, discrete abundance, ontological anxiety, and enclosed exchange. Yet, recognized and deployed as ghosts, this pair certainly may haunt the polis, insinuate their horribly reproductive tentacles through its paved courts and closed chambers. It is in this sense that I wish to "go phantom." It is in this sense also that I wish to farm the notion of obsolescence.

A system is ecological when it consumes its own waste products. But within the capitalist narrative, the utopia of the new asserts itself as the only productive teleology. Therefore I find it preferable to choose the dystopia of the obsolete. As a tactically uprooted use, deployment of the obsolete could cut short the feckless plot of productivity. When capital marks women as the abject and monstrous cyphers of both reproduction and consumption, our choice can only be to choke out the project of renovation. We must become history's dystopic ghosts, inserting our inconsistencies, demands, misinterpretations, and weedy appetites into the old bolstering narratives: We shall refuse to be useful.

Nostalgia, like hysteria, once commonly treated as a feminine pathology, must now be claimed as a method of reading or critiquing history — a pointer indicating a potential node of entry. Yet I'm referring to relations within language, looking at both nostalgia and history as functions within, or effects of, language systems. My own nostalgia reaches for an impossibly beautiful and abundant language. Rather than diagnosing this nostalgia as a symptom of loss (which would only buttress the capitalist fiction of possession) I deploy it as an almanack, planning a tentative landscape in which my inappropriate and disgraceful thought may circulate. Nostalgia will locate precisely those gaps or absences in a system which we may now redefine as openings, freshly turned plots. Who is to circumscribe the geography in which thinking may take place? I deplore the enclosure staked out by a poetics of "place" in which the field of "man's" discrete ontological geography stands as a willful displacement, an emptying of a specifically peopled history. Descartes' new world, in which the "annoying" and unproductive contingencies of history are systematically forgotten, leaving the western male thinker in a primary confrontation with his own thought, is emphatically not a world I wish to share. The only way I can begin to understand the potential of a poetics of historical responsibility is by shoring up the marks of history's excesses and elisions. The solipsist's position of singular innocence and sincerity erases all relations of historical difference, and with these, the tactical confrontations and crafty invasions language may deploy.

My intention is to slip into the narrative as a hybrid ghost and steal the solipsist's monocle as he sleeps and dreams of the rational future. What would the dreamland look like seen through at least two eyes simultaneously? What would the utopian land look like if it were not fenced by the violence of Liberty and the nation? How would my desire for a homeland read if I were to represent it with the moral promiscuity of any plant? These spores and seeds and bits of invasive root are the treasures I fling backwards, over my shoulder, into the hokey loam of an old genre.

Citation: Virgil, *Vol. 1. Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. Loeb Classical Library, London and Cambridge, Mass. 1986.

Eclogue One: Honour (from *XEclogue*)

I have felt regret but turn now to the immensity of a rhythm which in the midst of her own mettle was invisible — I'll describe the latinate happiness that appears to me as small tufted syllables in the half-light, greenish and quivering as grasses. Ah, the tidy press of the catalogue, the knotted plantlettes of a foiled age, the looming test of our grim diaphany, let me embrace these as the lost term *honour* as I lace this high pink boot I call Felicity.

Lady M finds her thoughts a little agitated: her sight wanders and is fed by an artificial rudeness whose particular odour fills her mind. It's as if she were dreaming on a bus.

Watered patterns sway lit beneath the air or beneath the movement of air. Fine grey pigments cling so pungently with such rich spread that it's all dainty and silken as the fickle-stench of the syncopate and caressed name Nancy. The teen-aged multitude drifts off to a grainy and torpid horizon; they stroke the crude till it compels or decadently blooms. Banality stokes their punctual lust for the familiar; branches, courage, obligation stalk as cathartic yellow splays among roots. Weeds often seem sardonic as the measured tactics of a cold strut; yet if leisure were conquered this landscape would gauntly bud and split into the cold texture embroidered on the lurid skin of a leaf.

Or careful field quincuncial as the exhaustive and private happiness spilt from a necklace of januaries. Knots, compartments and grottos cannot compare to a field's livid frisk; neither to the ridgie factions near the pompous arch. Yet the sky's tolerably liberal and apt to supplement a bitchy little tapestry, in the way the light in a painting seems fringed or redolent as a pimp, in the way a teenager will flagrantly caress a name with paint. Read this orchard as the Roaring Boys who course the town at night: tawdry, flecked and billowing behind their silky fluted pricks — their short lines syncopate as ripe fruits shake the lawn.

Or she's in the landscape without ambiguity and it's a trim cloister she lends her tender support. Wind preens or lustres the elegant weeds; obligation splices cold and keeps darkening and brooding. The weedy ruffling of Nancy's sheathed hips absorbs a thought quicker than the lagging wind. Everything patterns a differing lag — the flanked and massy sky turns decorative as it clusters or nearly punctuates her torpor. The Roaring Boys fan back; they coil pungently beneath the moral clusters of their blue groves. The roaring angels are alert as nets and their sly pricks nudge the cold.

Lady M: I feel hapless when I think of the buttery and peculiar flowers we dub the monikers of our malaise.

Nancy: Yet it's so plucky and slightly ruffled . . .

Lady M: As this dim foliage we stride through. Nancy, what of "paradise" or "harmony"? Its so *leather-like* in unreality —

Nancy: We're professionals. I see your face in the rain.

Lady M: Like a grim violet.

Nancy: I push you away
I fall to the floor
It's a mixed up world
With shook up love.

Lady M: My back's to the wall. How can such slim felicity so bruise the trees?

Nancy: You call this filial conduct? Stop here. I hear the Boys:

*Hey Blushing Berries, You've got us curious. Groves
Nodding can't masque your emotion's curious
Fretwork. We need consolement. We're no strangers
To the quick whirls of russet-wrapt or bluish
Emotion, pendant, typical, sultry, fringed
Like a bump on the horizon. Our reddened silks
Rustle with profession. Imitation cramps
Such rudeness: But those games just aren't interesting.
Take this hint — we're typical Boys, our fickle emotion
Wanders and is fed, yet we choose
To dedicate our follies to you. Shall we syncopate
The several beauties known by the name of the Purling
Stream? This tumult's meant to tilt
All grammar. We're just those that
Want you to feel . . .*

Quietly, evil as a concept's disappeared and I'm not sorry to judge the smoothed over garden dangerous. I've indulged my curiosity in all the horrid graces, thought swelling or swollen, conscious anyway that the motive seemed creepy — but it seemed natural. Their diction's pleasure unwound me, though I knew it doggerel, and they mere poetasters. They've not advanced from the flimsy past — it's just the tumult of a pendant usage, it's just the sultry horror of that fake forest. Choric swains who call me Berry miss the point — dirty little swains playing at the mouth of the gemmy cave, fraying my nerves with their meticulous blossoms. So I'll loosen up to describe their limbs as botanical manifestations of small irksome enjambments styleless as numbered doors. Yet silk and cotton and solid some bird or some robin flew through the somewhat florid expansion once named as my heart. It was noonish and the pinch held out to a person anyone would name trouble — a girl whose instinct for trend was marginalized and pointless. But I wanted something new, something way past the florid radicalism of the Marxist cashbar. I wanted the stuff that joyriders run on, that queer touched-up light that transmits over the air; miming a tension, living on the crux of a regime which could slide to the coy illusion of Liberty.

Typical girls whose liberty leaches and fans from a porous border, who fold like fans, who trick the eating class, typical girls explain to me the use of the word Liberty. I'd fall to the floor for their smooth gesture, their opaque and viscous oil-like drag, their porous border, their controlled iridescence, their drag and tooth, the gnarled yet polished scent of evil. When I'm trying to think about the word Russet I use fan-like tactics borrowed from the girls, though vagueness signals, almost breaks my purple spite. It's not easy to define my feeling of a reddened peace of mind, a ruffled, shattered, mixed-up world. How can silence or expression stop? All these sluttish thickets and rivulets of green, all these bitchy, syncopate, flickers of leaf, only stimulate my technical and carminine thirst for the smooth sensation offelicity. A spilt necklace makes a curious fretwork; yet I've indulged my curiosity within a knot, judging the drag and density viscous and gaunt. Maybe it wasn't the girl, maybe the boys took a smile from their package — it was raining, they weren't looking at me — maybe they've wreathed their instinct for thought.

There's no need for crying. Honour nor emotion's not so
squalid and swindled as all that, though I feel the grim vibrations of
the darkening air; I feel the horrid crackling transmit through my skin
and hair. It's so reptilian like those weird things that scuttle underfoot,
lend their frenzied rhythm to my thought
those peculiar monikers
those russet quivering stalks
those lags
those plantlettes
those elegant and massy coils
Nancy, how can these be thought?

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

MONIQUE FOUQUET is an artist internationally known for her drawings. Her most recent work addresses the historical, social, political, and personal implications of both the portrait and self-portrait of the female. It also extends the range of her materials to include painting and photographic elements. Currently she resides in Vancouver where she teaches at Emily Carr College of Art and Design while at the same time completing her MFA at Simon Fraser University.

BETH GOOBIE is the author of *Could I Have My Body Back Now, Please?* a collection of short fiction and poetry, NeWest Press 1991; *Group Homes From Outer Space*, Maxwell MacMillan, Series 2000, 1992; *Who Owns Kelley Paddik?* Maxwell MacMillan, Series 2000, 1993. Her radio play "Continuum" was broadcast on Morningside in 1992, and "Dandelion Moon" was produced by Catalyst Theatre in the same year.

MARK JARMAN is the author of a collection of stories, *Dancing Nightly In The Tavern*, and *Killing the Swan*, a collection of poetry. He edited *Ounce of Cure*, Beach Holme Press, an anthology of alcohol stories. He attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop and now teaches at the University of Victoria.

ASHOK MATHUR works on the editorial collective for the literary journal *absinthe*. He also co-publishes the alternative-format poetry series, disOrientation chapbooks, with Nicole Markotic. A short collection of his stories will be published by Wolsak and Wynn in 1994.

TERRENCE REID has worked in picture, word and act in conjunction with cross-discipline Fluxus artists; was the message in the bottle bobbing on the shores of Australia and New Zealand for the New York Correspondence School of Art(ists), write(rs) and other(s); ran the Japan branch (Bank of Tokyo) for Vancouver-based Image Bank,

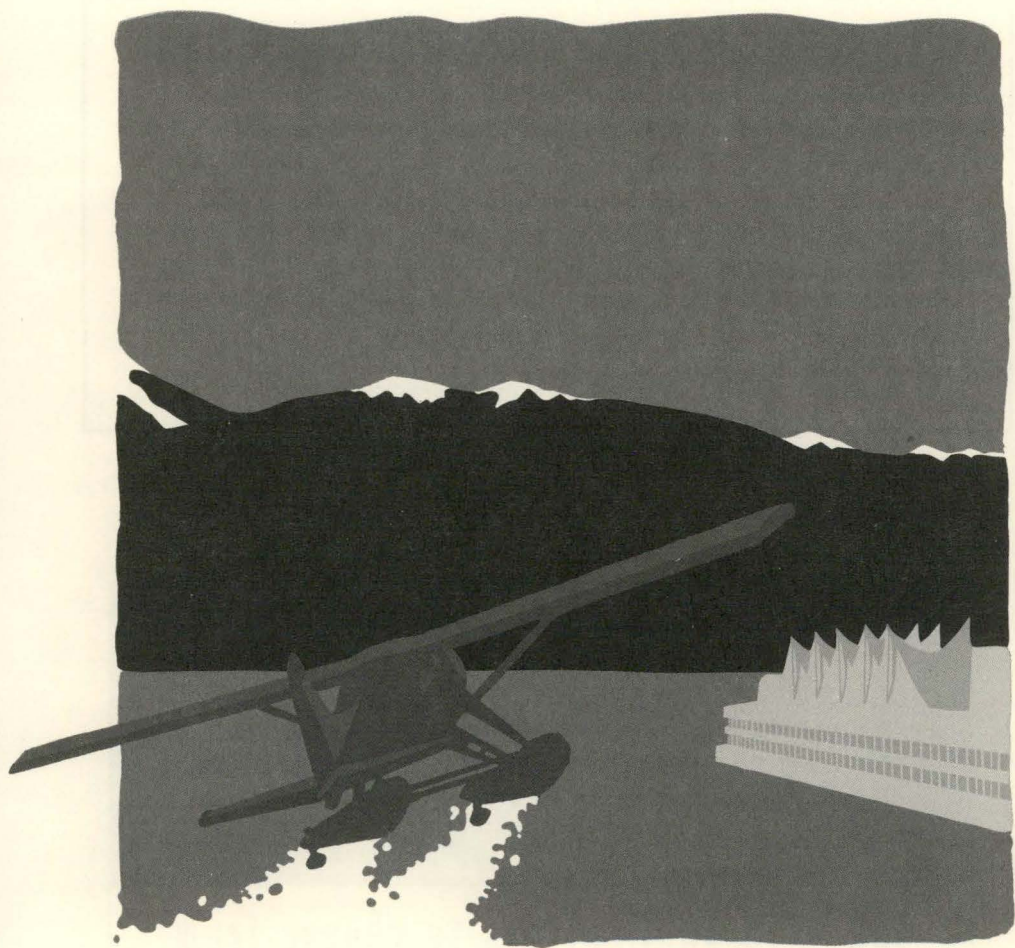
unfiling (sometimes defiling) imagery that is the common currency of unconscious (even if highly visible) culture; has recently completed a running Dialogue with (Marcel) Duchamp at the site of his Fountain with the signature, R. Mutt; prefers the telephone to writing.

LISA ROBERTSON is a Vancouver writer and bookseller, and a collective member of the Kootenay School of Writing. With Catriona Strang and Christine Stewart she edits the magazine *Barscheit*. Her book length poem *XiEclogue* appropriates the pastoral genre as a field for fin de siècle feminist writing practise. She was introduced to pastoral potentials through the work of the eighteenth century poet, satirist, and political journalist Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

JANE SOUTHWELL MUNRO has just moved to Point No Point on Vancouver Island, where she hopes to spend more time writing, and less time earning a living. The poems in this issue are from a collection called *Grief Notes & Animal Dreams*. She has two earlier books — *Daughters*, and *The Trees Just Moved Into A Season Of Other Shapes* — and is currently at work on a novel. She teaches creative writing at Kwantlen College.

BOB STRANDQUIST has been writing and working in Vancouver since going through the creative writing program at UBC. He is still in recovery from it. *Dreaming is a Relative Thing*, is the first story in a collection in progress of the same name.

MICHAEL WINTER is co-editor of *TickleAce* magazine, published in St. John's, Newfoundland. He has short stories forthcoming in *The Malahat Review*, *West Coast Line* and *Canadian Fiction Magazine* and is completing a short story collection, *Enlarged to Show Texture* with the help of a Canada Council Explorations grant. He also co-authored a young adult novel, *Ask Me No Questions* (Prentice-Hall 1990).



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