

# THE CAPILANO REVIEW

*25 Years*





# GOOD NEWS

## For Writers!

The image displays three covers of the magazine *Quill & Quire*, which focuses on the Canadian book publishing industry. The top-left cover (May 1996) features a black and white portrait of a man and the headline "POLAROID FROM THE HEAD". The top-right cover (September 1996) features a photo of a person on a ledge and the headline "COACH HOUSE SHUTS DOORS". The bottom cover (April 1996) features a photo of a woman in a patterned shawl and the headline "CITIZEN 'I'". A red starburst graphic on the right side of the bottom cover contains the text "SEE SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER INSIDE!".

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**POLAROID FROM THE HEAD**  
He hasn't answered, he won't  
even let Doug Campbell's call  
working human connection  
By Peter Blais

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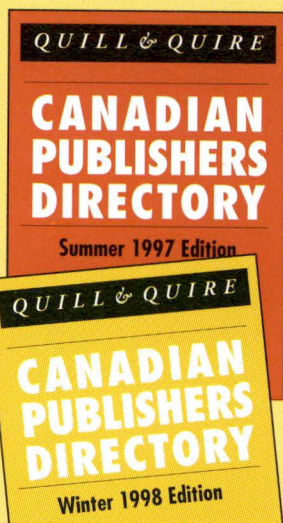
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Her tongue is still resting soft in her mouth.  
She is very aware of her tongue, now that  
she is not using it. It feels oddly new, almost  
alien, a thing she must get to know.

— K.D. Miller



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# THE CAPILANO REVIEW

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## FRONT & BACK COVERS

Mark Grady

H.M.S. Rodney 48" x 28"

digitally-based photograph 1997



1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the English language. It is noted that the English language has a long and rich history, and that the study of its history is essential for a full understanding of the language.

2. The second part of the paper discusses the development of the English language from its roots in Old English to its present form. It is noted that the English language has evolved over time, and that the study of its history is essential for a full understanding of the language.

3. The third part of the paper discusses the influence of other languages on the English language. It is noted that the English language has been influenced by many other languages, and that the study of its history is essential for a full understanding of the language.

4. The fourth part of the paper discusses the role of the English language in the world. It is noted that the English language is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, and that the study of its history is essential for a full understanding of the language.

5. The fifth part of the paper discusses the future of the English language. It is noted that the English language is likely to continue to evolve, and that the study of its history is essential for a full understanding of the language.

6. The sixth part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the English language. It is noted that the study of the history of the English language is essential for a full understanding of the language, and that it is a field of study that is constantly evolving.



Lee Ann Brown / PRESENT BEAU  
ROBIN BLASER

Able laser seer in rose  
An eros orb or ball  
Rare, rare lobelia rails  
A noble nib  
Robed and born

---

An incorrect version of "Present Beau Robin Blaser" first appeared in *TCR* 2:17/18. *The Capilano Review* is pleased now to republish the poem in its original complete form.



## Andrew Vaisius / TWO POEMS

### LANDLORD

If I think of it now I think of **blockage** a purple field of Canada  
Thistle and at the top of the rise, twenty fava plants in a row I  
Kept weeded in spite. For six months my body drained onto his  
Land: piss, sweat, shit. I bathed in a lake I came to regard as

His own. Dizzied by pulling weeds under the blaze of summer,  
And crazy with the angle of the kitchen floor in the tenant  
Shack, I could hardly spit straight. Everywhere slant. The night  
Lake's surface the only level for miles, and I longed to drift away

Over it while I could still count fingers on my hands numbing  
Up when the stars and northern lights sparkled over the rows  
I hoed in the sloping garden. He presented the children with a  
Strip of thistleground to seed, and damned if they didn't produce

A pea, a carrot, a lettuce, and left another in the ground for thanks.  
In his patch on the path a dwarf forest grew, and I refashioned  
Fairy tales of wolves, witches and bears when I pinballed my way  
Through its pink light and drooping seed heads. I hated his

Asparagus pushing up in a wreckage of perennials and abuse. My  
Family got so few, and the few we ate he salted with begrudgement.  
Every sheet of toilet paper in the biffy he counted. Every time I  
Blew my nose he summed it on an abacus in the shadow of the



Blue tractor with the blown hydraulics. I'd curse his footprints,  
But Colorado potato beetles overheard and reported. I hauled  
Water from the lake, silty and shallow enough to render dipped  
Pails useless unless I hoofed seventy-five steps more along the

Shoreline and up the hillpath overgrown with stinging nettle and  
Wild rose thorn. I learned not to waste water, so bottles appeared,  
Half-filled, on counters, tables and sills. I boiled tea with ten  
Sticks on a woodstove in morning darkness. These were attitudes

More than skills without tools within hand's reach. Bailing twine  
And binder wire pleaded his equipment together by knot and kink  
For an afternoon, a month, a year, until they too snapped or  
Slipped into the soil and were reclaimed. Rust crawled over shovel-

Blade and cultivator wheel, the sizer on the seeder, and gooseneck  
Of the broken-handled hoe, rust calling back to powder, to nutrient,  
To plant xylem . . . **and the green grass grew all around all around,**  
**The green grass grew all around . . . .** Mornings I'd pummel downhill

And evenings ache up. Between the major passages of the day my  
Throat parched and knees buckled as my back zipped with spine-  
Fire like an Otis run amok. Truth eludes grasp when thistle pins  
Fester under the skin singing castrato at every bump, each brush,

Even a breeze across their teensy broken nibs feeling long enough  
To hang my hat on. I'd dig them out with a needle till my thumbs  
Resembled cratered moonscape. Burning in white sunlight I plot  
To murder him with my stirrup hoe, strike the curmudgeon down



And bury him beneath a persistent patch of sow thistle just for the  
Pleasure of watching it wither. He sustained life dourly, gracelessly,  
With split-open gumboots he wore without socks, even in winter.  
Stories seep out of the ground like ooze from a plugged septic tank:

The Swiss couple coming to learn English but held static on the  
Farm until his new house was raised on their backs; or the seeds  
He sells to his own kin at full price; his sister's puppy he slew  
With the stroke of his hoe for tramping in his garden. Once he

Borrowed his brother-in-law's pick-up for a trip into town, and left  
The tank empty in gratitude. No excuse snaky enough not to use  
For not spending a penny. I suspect I am a story too, for his  
Relations to recount when the fields locked in winter crystal can't

Be broken into by a master thief with a pickaxe and sledge, and  
Summer becomes myth, memories, vegetables, pendant raspberries  
Ready to drop with a slight shake and a wide breeze off the lake  
Full of never again.

## PEACE

Before the bloom after father died the room darkened and I became  
Never more a son. Leaving a cracked carburetor, a baitbox of  
Nightcrawlers gone stinky, a waxed rosebush brittle and dry in a  
Corner of the garage, he'd talk no more. We seldom talked in the

Years before he died. Like cough drops on my tongue I sucked the  
Words and kept dumb when he called long distance. We both were,  
Then, too far from our birthplace Chicago to smell the summer  
Alewives rotting along the shore in waves, or to stretch for the extra

Points booted into the cheap seats at a few dozen fans of the woeful  
Cardinals, or to mention **anything** about Hizzoner Richard J. Daley.  
The flea market along Maxwell Street with its thrown down dares of  
Hubcaps, alternators, golf clubs, broken faucets, pulleys — all lorded

Over by squinty-eyed squires with three-toothed smiles and ladies-in-  
Waiting tugging at coarse matted hair crowing in wild pitch replies to  
Price, which divided us more surely than the low wall of junk at our  
Shoetips — made me ache for elsewhere. Sun reflected off chrome in

A multiplicity of jagged spears. The seller's scorn spit out like a  
Tobacco bit from the end of a cigar; mine born of fear. If my father  
Ever haggled enough to buy some grease-gummed whatnot I cannot  
Remember. I wanted home, a clean solitude with no come-ons or



Demands on preteen morality. He'd drive me to the Cicero street  
Fair to hear sausages split and drip over open fires, to see the pile  
Driving arms of his buddy Nick, baring the barbs of an anchor  
Garlanded with roses under his cuffed white sleeve — ash dangling

Off the butt glued to his bottom lip by feet staggering humidity and  
Beer — serving them up with a sexual savoirre faire to caramel  
Coloured girls in untucked snowstorms and rolled bobby socks, but  
We'd never talk about it. Never talked about it. My father led me

Away from home, attic dust on war-censored love letters and the thin  
Back porch he erected to sleep alone in three seasons of the year.  
He took me past the garage, the stripped-down cars, power saws and  
Machine order, took me by bus in midwinter to the smoky chaos of

The second balcony in the Chicago Stadium where we teetered on  
Slatted seats miles above portioned ice to scream bloody murder,  
Roar abuse, slap ephemeral victory's back, or glaze over in defeat.  
Innocently he led me away so I could not speak in peace.

Margaret Gunning / THREE POEMS

POEM ON MY FORTIETH (FOR MY SECONDBORN)

And bliss flicked  
through, too, (*quick*)  
like the flip of an  
eyelid,  
    /just  
when did it pass over,  
an infant surging to  
    burstingly           woman?  
a /           beautiful  
when lost it I,           gone  
                    these/  
days, these days, when  
            violet  
did the / plum become a  
    dead —  
(small/sweet)  
driedthing

She went by, my dayspring, my  
firehorse of a girl, life fiercing in  
    glace-blue  
her/   eyes:  
    fleetingly           this Astarte,  
too/danced, Fred Astaired/           toddle  
turned to whirl as (slowly  
my age  
pulled ripe skin down  
like the rind of old  
fruit).



Love fresh and juiceful  
*when?/*

passed into a darker  
hymn, quiescence.  
The juice of jigs, all  
hard  
that/ sex, gone by  
too. Ova will  
soon  
dry/to peach pits  
dessicated as hair.

mainspring/  
(She, my spring, my/  
offspring, spurts still

with  
that warm  
juice,/sucked hard out  
howling  
of my / heart)

## BITE THE PLUM

*Naked is as naked*  
*does:* as clear as  
Your eyes are,

your clothing is  
that much  
/clearer,

dearer still the scent  
all man,  
of you,/inestimable.  
I should never  
Take you out of that box,  
Never sample those  
dark  
/chocolates,  
too  
for/dear you are,  
the Arabian horse  
of my childhood  
(standing still only to be  
petted).

Notice me! I am more  
than a  
Brain on a stick, but  
an (all-breathing  
(Non-fiction /woman. To break



this cellophane  
(that heatshrinks your  
legend),  
would it be a rupture,  
an insertion, an  
arrogance of the ovaries,  
Or a sweet inevitable,  
angel driven (*deep*)  
my / into  
the moist cake of your heart

as  
You are / removed as  
an engraving of a dybbuk,  
I can stroke your image  
only, Never get your  
smell/or feel your hair  
Never grab it —  
up in  
Let it dry/to a soft  
Black wrinkled fruit —

The juice that never  
had a chance to  
Run down my  
chin

will gleam in those  
*glacial blue*  
*eyes:*  
Will spark on your  
skin —

## SEEING GOD (DOWNTOWN POCO, APRIL 1996)

*I met jehovah the other  
day he was standing  
by the Beanz Café*

he waved his arms  
and swung his bristled head  
and in a gutter  
voice he boomed the doom  
of the millennium  
Sent old women scuttling  
Sent old men to shame

(does god smell like  
that I wonder does he  
do it in his pants)

He shoved his face  
into the lean skirts and  
sere skin of two Jehovah's  
Witnesses on Shaughnessy  
("I'm Jehovah," he  
announced; "You  
are, are you," they said,  
shaking his hand)

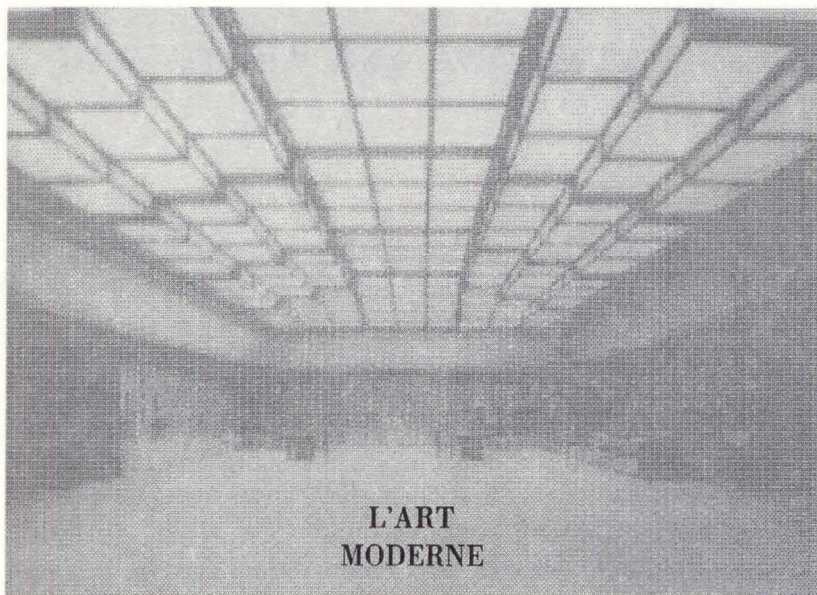


this  
if/god is/cracked  
would that explain the  
human race would  
that explain  
jehovah's face  
(ten thousand years  
of suffering  
in the blood-ruptured  
eyes)

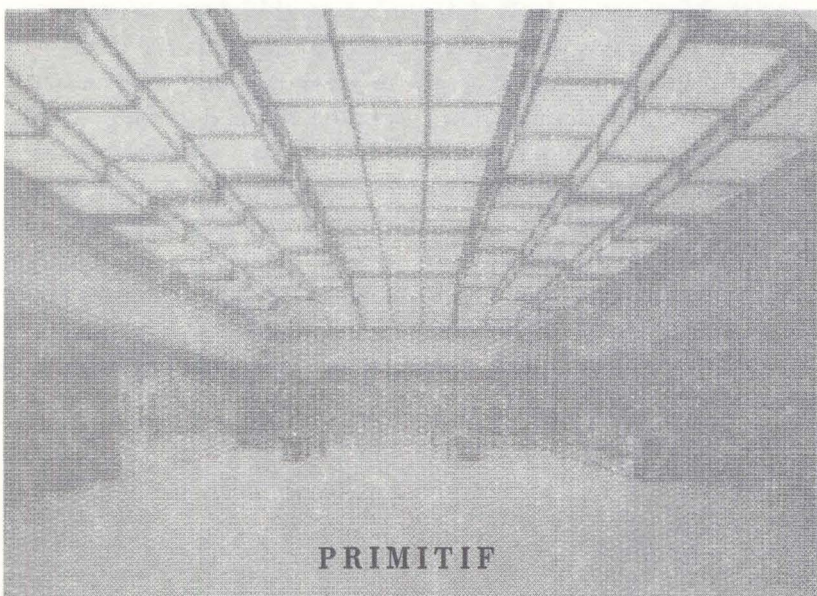
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L'ART  
MODERNE



PRIMITIF



## Mark Grady / **ADA**: DIGITAL HISTORIES

### ANN ROSENBERG / **ADA, ADA**. WHO OR WHAT IS SHE?

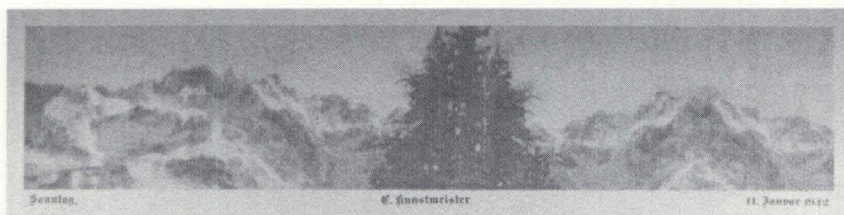
According to Mark Grady, these letters signify three states integral to his current practice. **ADA** (Analogue/Digital/Analogue) is more than a teasing sobriquet for what he does.

Since 1991, when he produced his first suite of computer-generated works for Gallery t.o.o., Grady has seldom painted or used any labour-intensive, hands-on means to create the images incorporated into his art. Increasingly, he has espoused the most important tool of this era as the principal medium through which his chosen visual sources are channelled and transformed.

L'ART MODERNE PRIMITIF (1992) in **ADA**: DIGITAL HISTORIES is based on an example of 20th Century design. The electrical power station by W. Klingenberg and W. Issel was reproduced in Maurice Casteel's L'Art Moderne Primitif (Paris, 1930). Grady took this book plate analogue of a building that once existed and transubstantiated it into more than one **digital** document which had different details than those in the illustration from which it derived. When output on archival paper as prints in this diptych, each became a new **analogue** that could be considered as an "original," a piece of Grady's own art history.

As the result of computer manipulation, this pair of images now appears to be sketches, "drawings" that the architects might have presented to their client before the electrical substation came into being.

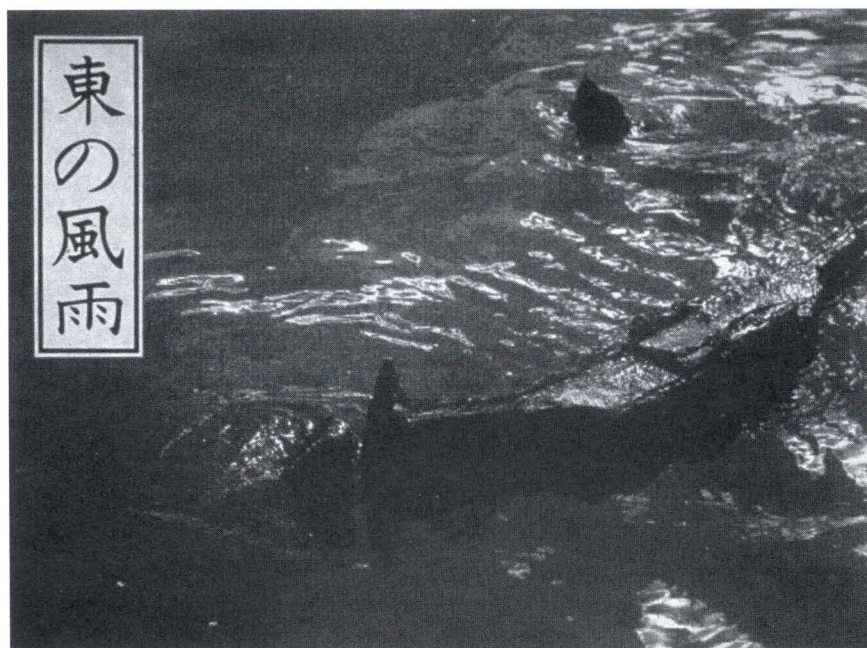
Grady's 1992 SYNTHETIC LANDSCAPE: *C Kunstmeister* and SYNTHETIC LANDSCAPE: *D. Stückmeister* are also digitally engendered limited edition prints which resemble drawings. The five panoramas in this series are extrapolated from photographs of obscure German landscape sites published in *The Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1941-2. These have been cropped, stretched, added to, and subtracted from through electronic means. In final form, they are convincing falsifications of hand-rendered natural motifs signed with fictitious artists' names. *Meisterwerks* by *Meisters* worthy of the Führer's approval.





A different, no less powerful leader from the same historical period issued the poetic “East, Wind, Rain” code that was the Japanese pilots’ signal to bomb Pearl Harbour in WWII. In PEARL HARBOUR WEATHER REPORT: EAST (1993), the “command” is recorded in the computer-constructed Japanese colophon that floats over the stormy ocean like a scroll unfurled. The seascape is a medium-resolution, pixilated “copy” of one of the photos Grady shot during a boat tour organized by the Pearl Harbour Museum in 1992 as he overlooked the spot where the US battleship U.S.S. Arizona languishes in its watery grave.

Again, the viewer is encouraged to wonder about the sources of reference in, and the authorship of, an image that seems to have been created by an oriental sensibility.



GREAT SCHISM (1995) is one of several more recent works that include photographs in b/w or colour in the final piece. The upper portion of this diptych is a large mural based on a reproduction Grady discovered in Tony Letessier's Berlin Then and Now (London, 1992). Because this illustration required no computer "assistance," it is the only image in DIGITAL HISTORIES that bypassed the **D** in the **ADA** process. Jean-Jacques Henner's Dead Christ in the panel below, in contrast, is a colour photograph created from a Photoshop "touch up" of the colour plate in Robert Rosenblum's Paintings in the Musée D'Orsay (Paris, 1989). The tattoo on Christ's arm is a computer-produced "false signature" that transforms the entombed saviour into a victim of the Holocaust. Although it is a tiny addition, its impact on the meaning of GREAT SCHISM is monumental.







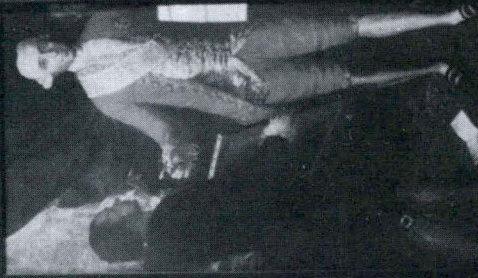
In *PROUD MONSTER: FIERO MONSTRUO* (1995) the left panel of the diptych apparently contains a large b/w photograph of a group of S.S. Panzer officers conferring about military strategy. It is substantially based on a photograph obtained from the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz that gave Grady a more perfect document to “rework” than the first reference to the group he encountered in Eric Lefèvre’s Panzers in Normandy – Then and Now (London, 1983).



As the process sequence demonstrates, the face of Mark Grady's carefully staged self-portrait "invaded" the WWII document and became the seamless, totally believable substitute for S.S. Standartenführer Kurt Meyer's visage.

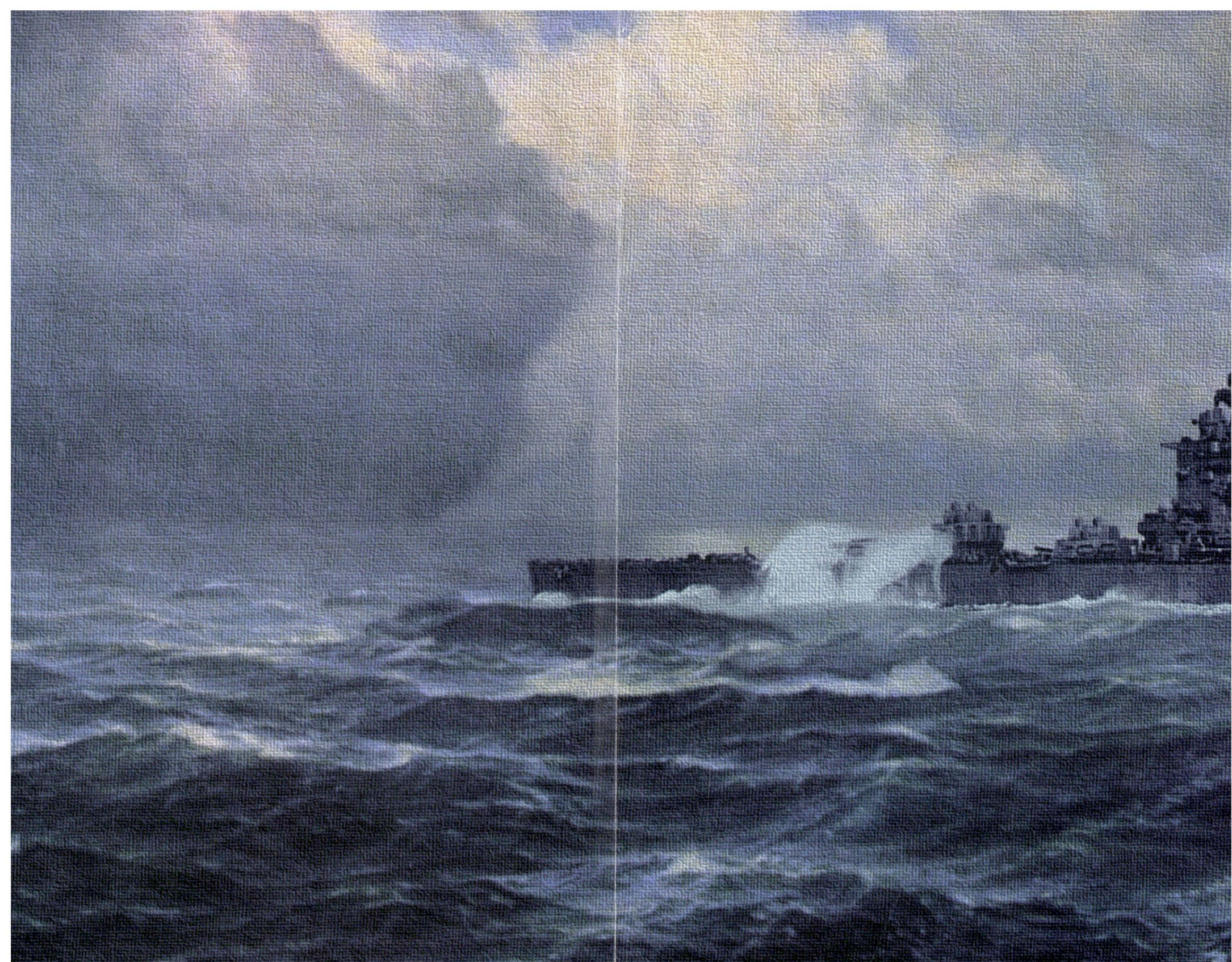






W. J. ...





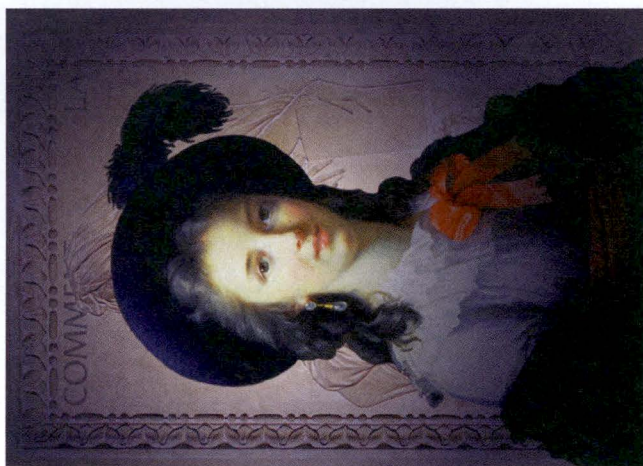
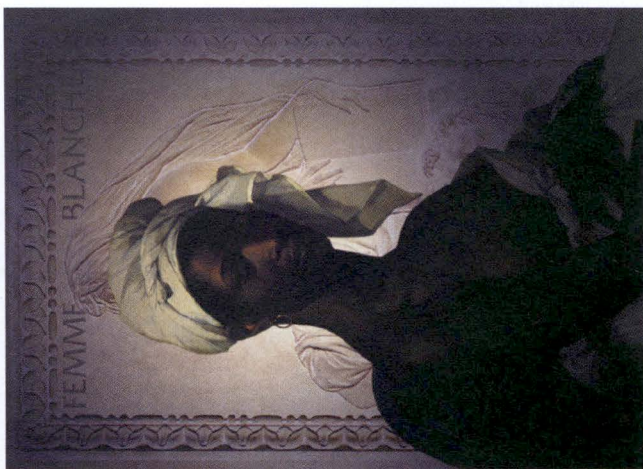
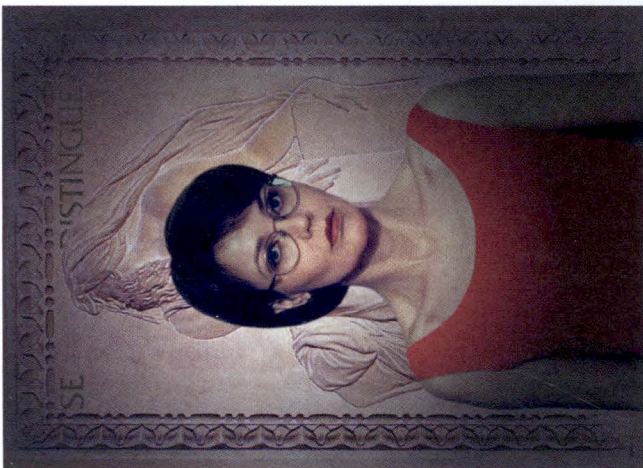


The right hand panel of PROUD MONSTER is a computer “reading” of a colour plate contained in Alfonso Sanchez’s Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment that has transformed the artist’s studio into a claustrophobic, grey cell. In this chamber, Goya appears to be the willing servant of Conde de Floridablanca, his aristocratic client. His physical attitude and conduct parallels the subservient (yet proud) obsequiousness Grady assumed when he stepped back into history to become Kurt Meyer.

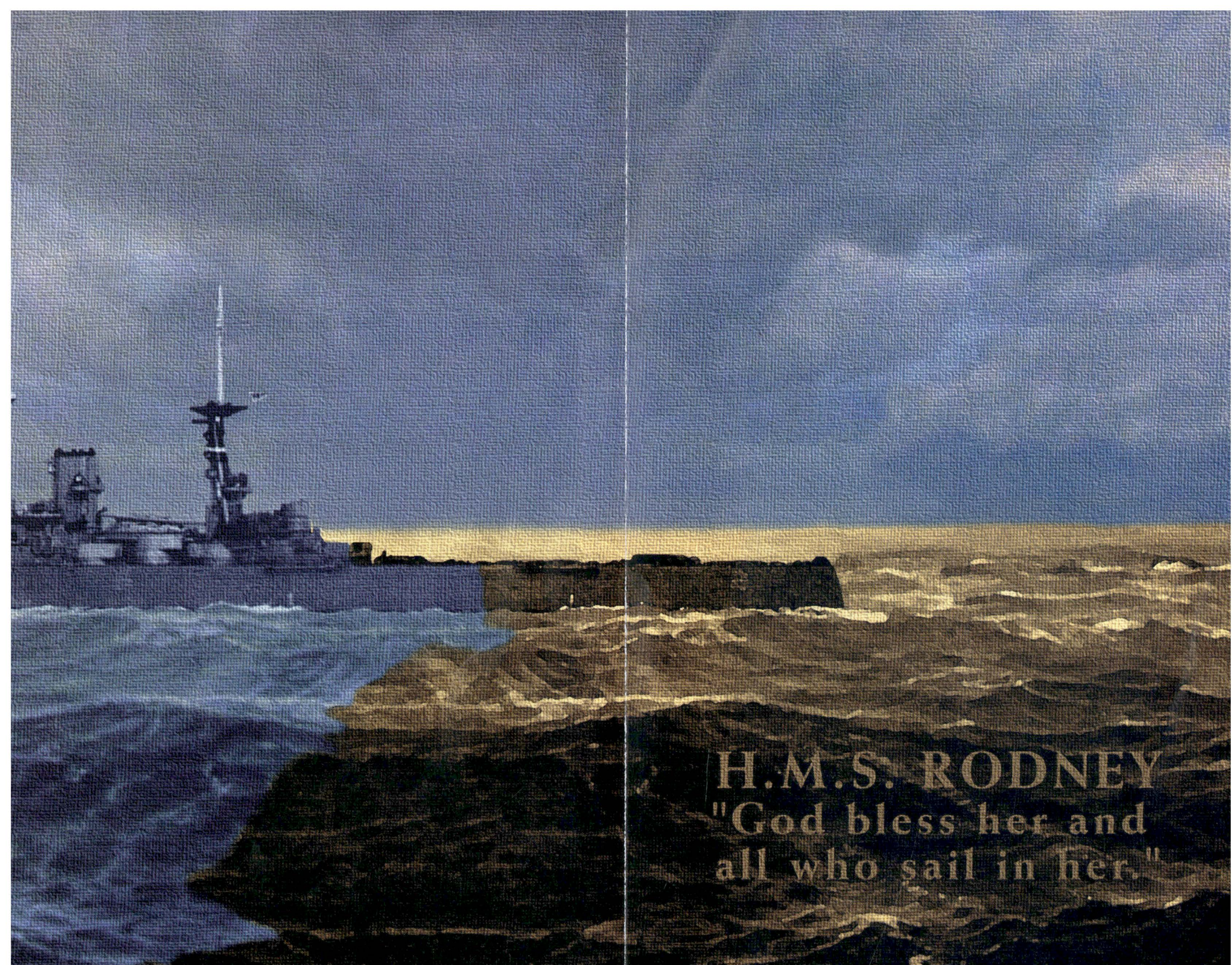
“Fiero Monstruo,” the Spanish words that are part of PROUD MONSTER’s title, are engraved, in reverse, on two aluminum plaques situated on the frame. These computer-generated words acknowledge that Goya is responsible for the name of the piece. These same words should have been engraved, mirror-fashion, into the metal plate for his *Disasters of War* etching no. 81, but were not. Grady’s title “attachments” redresses Goya’s omission. This small detail is in its own way as significant as the tattoo on Christ’s arm.



Fiero  
Monstruo

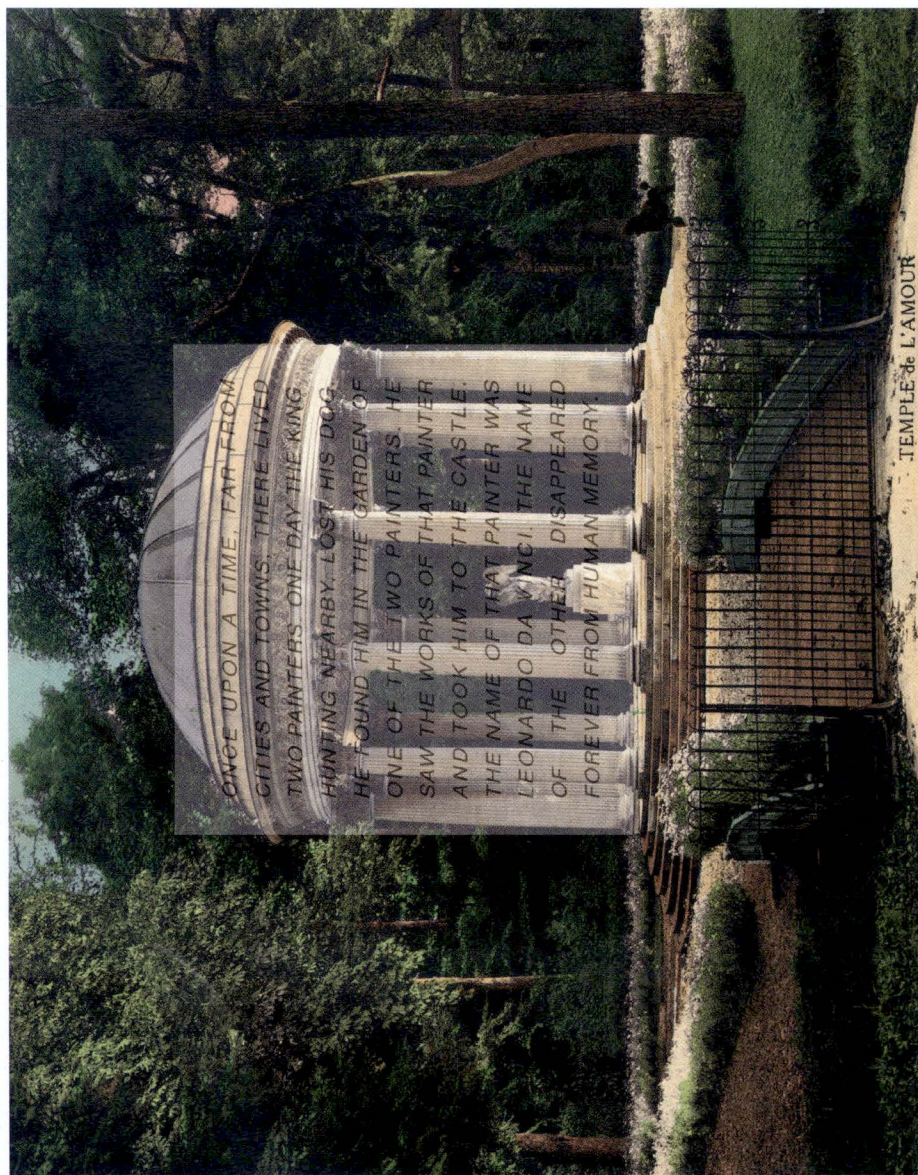






H.M.S. RODNEY  
"God bless her and  
all who sail in her."



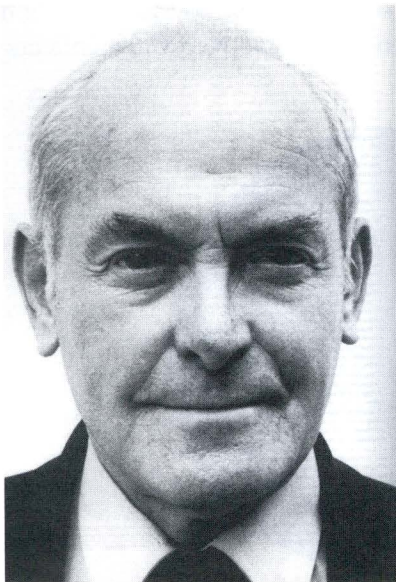


TEMPLE de L'AMOUR

Although it has a light-hearted aura, REVERIE #1: LE TEMPLE DE L'AMOUR (1995) is in keeping with the other works so far described. While it looks as pretty as a Rococo daydream, its subject is not frivolous. This work, no less than PROUD MONSTER and SCHISM, is about the figures and structures of power and the concepts of fame and deception.

The Temple of Love at Versailles is a garden "ornament" that never was a place for worship, but it was a sanctuary for romantic trysts. It is a well-known example of French Renaissance Classicism that poses an interesting parallel and contrast to the elegant substitution in L'ART MODERNE PRIMITIF which has no life in the public consciousness. The *übermensch* conjured by the image is Louis XIV, who transformed a mire into this magnificent site.

When viewing Grady's piece we remember Leonardo too, because this famous artist is referred to in the inscription that has been programmed to float over the surface of the photographic image like a veil. The quotation, which is a unifying motif in all the REVERIES, is taken from a Conceptual art piece by Braco Dimitrijevic, published in the Fall issue of C Magazine (1989).



ONCE UPON A TIME, FAR FROM  
CITIES AND TOWNS, THERE LIVED  
TWO PAINTERS. ONE DAY THE KING,  
HUNTING NEARBY, LOST HIS DOG.  
HE FOUND HIM IN THE GARDEN OF  
ONE OF THE TWO PAINTERS. HE  
SAW THE WORKS OF THAT PAINTER  
AND TOOK HIM TO THE CASTLE.  
THE NAME OF THAT PAINTER WAS  
LEONARDO DA VINCI. THE NAME  
OF THE OTHER DISAPPEARED  
FOREVER FROM HUMAN MEMORY.



Each of the landscapes in the REVERIES is based on a hand-tinted postcard of a garden confection at Versailles taken by an unknown photographer. Dimitrijevic's text and the "picture postcard" images occupy the netherworld between truth and fiction.



To make the sense of time-warp more complete and to present an amusing challenge to the viewer, Grady has digitally transported into the three images of Versailles a different, suitably-scaled French poodle based on illustrations in Bruce Fogle's The Encyclopedia of the Dog. This "gesture" serves as a subtle allusion to the meaning of the poodle in the art produced by the Canadian Neo-Dada collective, General Idea.



H.M.S. RODNEY (1997) like many other works in **ADA** connects readily with other WWII - inspired artworks and to the portraits Grady has made this year.

The war vessel that triggered the construction of this image first caught Grady's attention in Robert Ballard's The Discovery of the Bismark, a book published in 1990. What piqued his special interest in the battleship was the fact that the H.M.S. Rodney's name is also the first name of Rodney Graham, an artist Grady considers to be "a Capital Ship" of the Canadian art world.

A picture of the ship obtained from the Imperial War Museum of London provided a better resource from which to work, although much of the "original" has vanished in the course of digitally-induced "improvements."

Unsatisfied with the bland weather and cloudless sky of the archival photograph, Grady created a more dramatic environment for the vessel. Crashing waves and glowering heavens were imported digitally into the H.M.S. Rodney's surroundings from a Turner-esque seascape by Johannes Holst reproduced in Michael Leek's Art of Nautical Illustration (New Jersey, 1991). But the sailing ship in the centre of the painting *Four Masted Bark* was consigned to the cybernetic equivalent of Davy Jones' locker.



Portions of the painting's rolling breakers and stormy skies were "colourized" and others were "rendered" in grisaille. Finally, Photoshop allowed Grady to underlay the whole image with a texture that gives it the semblance of an oil on canvas. Like Graham's career it is a "work in progress."

In WHAT IS IT ABOUT WHITE WOMEN #1 - #3, Grady “stages” his commentary on the representation of female artists in art history in a room that appears to be part of a high-status European gallery.

In each panel of the triptych, a woman poses in front of a marble, bas-relief backdrop as though “standing” for a portrait-painter or a photographer. The first woman in the trio is Elizabeth Vigée-LeBrun — a well-known artist from the Louis XVI period — who has stepped out of her own 1791 oil painting to become part of this physically impossible but intellectually plausible situation. To the right, a self-possessed unknown black woman from a slightly later French painting by a lesser known female artist (Marie-Guillemine Benoist) claims a place in history by being included in this virtual site. In the third panel, Danna White, (an “undiscovered” artist who happens to be Mark Grady’s wife) takes her place in Grady’s aesthetic pantheon.

The backdrop for the women is a relief of St. Mark — a 1544 sculpture by Jean Goujon, owned by the Louvre — published in Andres Chastel’s French Art, The Renaissance (Paris, 1995). Into this thrice-repeated slab of stone Grady has cybernetically chiseled a sequence of words that constitutes his own French epigram, the equivalent to the “Et in Arcadia Ego” that Nicholas Poussin “carved” into a rock in his 17th Century enigmatic paeon to lost culture.

# COMMUNIST LA FEMME BLANCHE SE DISTINGUE?

WHAT IS IT ABOUT WHITE WOMEN is bound to make viewers (especially female ones) think about Feminism and the Patriarchy.



LE FLÂNEUR #1 - #3 is another triptych that conflates and distorts “real time” while it raises the profile of certain artists, in this case Todd Davis, Randall Anderson and Mark Grady.

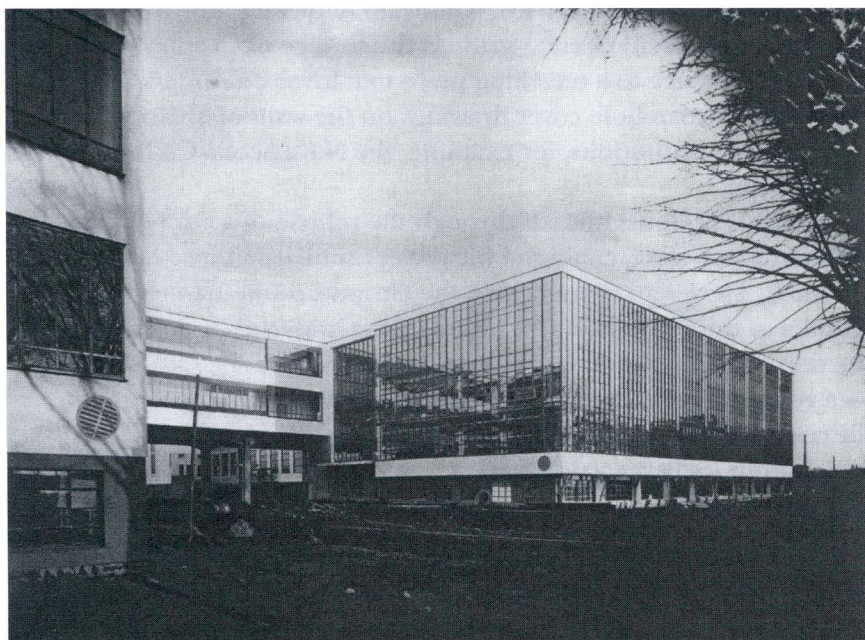
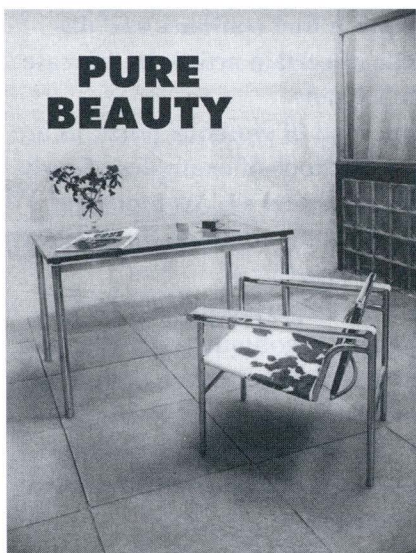
The visuals that form the basis of the triad of symbolic portraits are taken directly from three different reproductions of examples of early 20th Century design found in the pages of Casteel’s L’Art Moderne Primitif. These Modern environments are used to emblemize the Post Modern sensibilities of these Vancouver artists.

In this series Todd Davis is portrayed as a Spartan interior by Le Corbusier — that, like his current living space, contains a glass-topped table, smoking paraphernalia, reading materials and a vase of flowers. The words “PURE BEAUTY” that hover in this pristine environment are the content (and title) of a large scale concrete poem that Davis placed on the glass of a window in Vancouver’s Cathedral Place during the 1992 STANDARD STOPPAGES Exhibition.

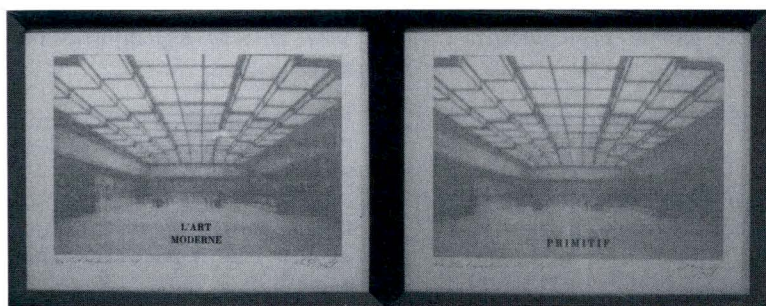
If words are Davis’s customary medium, Anderson is perhaps best known for his performance art. Grady, in depicting him, has applied two slightly different circular grids to the surface of Gropius’ Bauhaus. This is a reference to a travelling piece that involved Anderson’s placement of man-hole cover drawings on the walls of analogous Canadian art institutions, for example, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Grady represents himself through the vehicle of a Gropius interior that contains a desk, chair and file drawer similar to those he has in his study. The 1920s typewriter in the Gropius room is an early century parallel of the 1990s Mac and printer that Grady uses in his art production. On the wall of the room is a presentation of Grady’s aesthetic — a revised version of a previously produced analogue that, in a different context, was a limited edition print that seemed to be the sketch for a 1920s electrical station.

**PURE  
BEAUTY**







With this final image the reader is taken back to the start of the ellipse, **ADA** (Analogue/Digital/Analogue). But the process that makes the dialectic possible in **DIGITAL HISTORIES** is never in a state of closure.

## IMAGE LIST

**L'ART MODERNE PRIMITIF**, 1992  
(Diptych) each image 12" x 15" digital  
limited edition print

**SYNTHETIC LANDSCAPE #3: C.**  
Küntzmeister, 1992 12" x 30" digital  
limited edition print

**SYNTHETIC LANDSCAPE #4: D.**  
Stückmeister, 1992 12" x 30" digital  
limited edition print

**PEARL HARBOUR WEATHER REPORT: EAST**, 1993 16" x 30" digital  
limited edition print

**GREAT SCHISM** detail of lower image

**GREAT SCHISM**, 1996 (Diptych) 60" x 60" digitally-based photographs

**ARCHIVE PHOTO** Bundesarchiv,  
Koblenz, Germany

**PROUD MONSTER: FIERO MONSTRUO** 4 process images

**PROUD MONSTER: FIERO MONSTRUO**, 1996 (Diptych) 40" x 60"  
digitally-based photographs

**PROUD MONSTER: FIERO MONSTRUO** detail of right image,  
detail of title inscription

**H.M.S. RODNEY** 48" x 28" digitally-  
based photograph 1997

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT WHITE WOMEN?**  
1997 (Triptych) each 30" x 22" digitally-  
based photographs

**REVERIE #2: TEMPLE DE L'AMOUR**  
1996 40" x 57" digitally-based photo-  
graph

**PROJECT FOR C MAGAZINE** 1989  
detail by Braco Dimitrijevic

ORIGINAL HANDTINTED PHOTO-  
GRAVURE publisher and photogra-  
pher unknown

REVERIE #2: TEMPLE DE L'AMOUR  
detail

H.M.S. RODNEY 48" x 28" digitally-  
based photograph 1997

LE FLÂNEUR #1: T.A. DAVIS 1997,  
38" x 30" digitally-based photograph

LE FLÂNEUR #3: M.T. GRADY 1997,  
38" x 30" digitally-based photograph

LE FLÂNEUR #2: R. W. ANDERSON  
1997, 38" x 30" digitally-based photo-  
graph

L'ART MODERNE PRIMITIF, 1992  
(Diptych) each image 12" x 15" digital  
limited edition print

WHERE'S PABLO?, 1997 (Diptych)  
each 30" x 24" digitally-based photo-  
graphs

**NOTE:** Where *is* Pablo?

Good question. This diptych was not illustrated in the article for reasons of space and legibility. Like other pieces cited in the list above, it will be shown in Mark Grady's solo exhibition called **ADA: DIGITAL HISTORIES** at:

The Monte Clark Gallery  
1727 West Third Avenue  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6J 1K7

May 1-31, 1997

Although it helps to know that *le flâneur* translates roughly into *loafer*, with the implication that the person loafing about is a cultivated haunter of sidewalk cafés, the contemporary Canadian art source (and context) for the title of Les Flâneurs 1-3 may be discovered in Vancouver Anthologies, edited by Stan Douglas (Vancouver, 1991), a book of essays that discusses art in Vancouver.

This illustrated document, which you, careful reader, have pursued to the finish is not the work itself, and its words can only form an inadequate summary of all the historical, art historical, technical, temporal and topical references of the individual works.

If you really do know who or what **ADA** is, drop a cryptographic observation into *TCR's* new website at <http://www.capcollege.bc.ca>.

A.R.



## MARK GRADY

### ONE PERSON SHOWS

May 1997	ADA, (Digital Histories), Monte Clark Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Aug. 1994	The New Pointilism, Project Gallery, Vancouver, BC
July 1990	The Small Museum, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Jan. 1989	Two Portraits, Gallery T.O.O., Vancouver, BC
Nov. 1986	One Gold Piece, Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Apr. 1985	The Pantheon Series, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, G.B.
Nov. 1984	The Pantheon Series, studio show, Vancouver, BC
Nov. 1983	Preliminary Drawings, OR Gallery, Vancouver, BC

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Sep. 1996	Temps Perdu, Monte Clark Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Feb. 1996	Sketchbook Project, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Mar. 1995	Fascism and the Spectacular State, various venues, Vancouver, BC
Oct. 1993	Artropolis, Vancouver, BC
Feb. 1993	Seattle Art Fair, Seattle, Wash.
Dec. 1992	L.A. Art Fair, Los Angeles, Calif.
Jun. 1992	Inaugural Exhibition, Prior Editions, Vancouver, BC
Feb. 1992	Standard Stoppages, Cathedral Place, Vancouver, BC
Feb. 1991	5 Year Anniversary Show, Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Jan. 1991	Art in BC, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
May 1989	Portfolio T.O.O., Gallery T.O.O., Vancouver, BC
Jun. 1988	Inaugural Show, Gallery T.O.O., Vancouver, BC
Jan. 1988	Dialogue, OR Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Oct. 1987	Lost, Unbuilt Vancouver, Urbanarium, Vancouver, BC
May 1986	A View Through Windows, various locations, Vancouver, BC
Jan. 1986	Art About Issues, Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey, BC
Nov. 1983	North of the Border, Gallery 911, Seattle, Wash.
Oct. 1983	The October Show, 1078 Hamilton St., Vancouver, BC
Feb. 1983	Drawn From, Main Exit, Vancouver, BC

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The following text is the result of a proposed interview with Robin Blaser for the *estschrift* dedicated to him (*TCR* 2:17/18). Originally, Sharon Thesen, Lisa Robertson, Jenny Penberthy, Stan Persky, and Colin Browne agreed to submit questions that were forwarded to Robin. He agreed to reply to them in writing, but in the process Robin found himself working at such pleasurable length that it was decided to publish his replies on a regular basis as an ongoing correspondence. In *TCR* 2:17/18, he responded to Lisa Robertson. In the pages that follow, Robin writes to Colin Browne.



## Robin Blaser / A CORRESPONDENCE

To Colin:

6 February, 1997 — just now I'm listening to elephant language on CBC, and, in the midst of it, that delightful Shelagh Rogers has quoted Wittgenstein: "To imagine a language is to imagine a life." Not a bad beginning to this good morning. Outside the kitchen window, a parliament of varied thrushes, red crossbills, sparrows, and robins converse musically about feathers and food. So, perching on a what-knot —

You ask me three questions, which are very close to your own meditations. For this occasion, I'll come at only the 1st of them. The 2nd asks me about my coming to Canada and would require remarks on my part in the community of poets in San Francisco, on my invitation to come here, and on my reading of the early Northrop Frye, predating the stereotypes he calls archetypes, and of George Whalley's brilliant *Poetic Process* before I came here — that I might lay out a map of the new country I came to. The 3rd asks me about Laura Riding, whose path I first crossed in 1948, a stunning poet who renounced poetry, a contrary modernist of enormous power and intelligence — whose startling books *Anarchism is not enough* (1928), *Progress of Stories* (1935), and *Collected Poems* (1938) I'd want to talk about — whose relationship with Robert Graves is now very much better understood with the help of Deborah Baker's excellent biography, *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (Grove Press, 1993) — how to say that she is one of those poets who broke on the Truth? There's too much here for one conversation. Please give me a rain-check on 2 and 3.

From Colin Browne:

1. Robin, you always studied language as a social act, never pretending that it can be isolated as a purely linguistic act. You have written and spoken often about the Sacred. Has your relationship to the Sacred altered in your time, and how would

you speak today about the relationship between poetry and the Sacred? You and I have both been reading René Girard. How do you see the relationship between poetry, language and sacrifice?

I have a feeling sometimes that language reaches for a word to identify a thing only as that thing begins to slip away — and that this may be the central function of language. Perhaps a poem is a brake, a machine that suspends memory, an articulation of what is disappearing, above the debris of all that has already disappeared. Perhaps, in the shadow of the accusation that language is silent, language will remain as evidence — which we hoard against the day of judgement, which we'll brandish in the face of the whirlwind. It's my conviction that we do not perceive something until it's vanishing, which is also the moment that it takes on value — for the first time. This is a complex confliction recognition.

Question 1: This is a very contemporary question — who's talking to whom? In my effort to reply to a previous question from Lisa Robertson (*Capilano Review*, Winter/Spring, 1996), I drew forward the conversation of The Sphinx and The Chimera in Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Antony* and the delirious passage of St Antony's longing "to be matter — to know what it thinks." I did not mention the progress of monsters — "cloudy convolutions and curves" in which "he makes out what appear to be human bodies" — and should have. I do think of this extraordinary book of 1874 as fitting the twentieth century — as a shoe might, if a century could walk out on itself. Sphinx and Chimera are so familiar.

You ask me about language as a "social act, never pretending that it can be isolated as a purely linguistic act." Two problems draw my attention here. First, the word *social* has spread out in meaning to a degree that we may not recognize that what we want to talk about is relationship, one to one and to another and another. The word *social* comes into English by way of Latin *socius* — sharing, joining in, partaking, united, associated, kindred, allied, fellow — whereby it designates pieces of something real enough — and from *socialis* — of or belonging to companionship. In our sense of the social and society, the



intimacy is gone. The social order, the State, the Nation, the System that restricts the individual and only promises community life have taken over. In this enlargement of what it means to act in the social we come upon those acts of many of us that we call democracy and politics, and we have valued such possibility. The helplessness of democracy and politics on the twentieth-century record is depressing. Under Communism, democracy and politics became impostures, unrecognized because they were fortune-tellers of the future. (Marxist theorists have a great deal to explain about what happened to the last great thought of social justice when it was put into practice.) In Nazism/Fascism, we have seen a corruption so deep that millions were murdered, or, rather sacrificed to the promise of the purity of a thousand years. Now, Capitalism runs amuck — ultimately a homicidal mania — corrupting politics and endangering democracy. We should undertake a study of the proper limits of government.

The word *government* comes to us out of Latin, where it had already come to mean rule, but it derives from a Greek word meaning to steer, to pilot. In my own view, derived from long study of the work of Hannah Arendt, the pursuit of government is to steer the problems of large numbers of people — food, shelter, clothing, and health. (This was something to be proud of as Canada approached this with policies of redistributing wealth across the Confederation.) These essentials of the natural body solved democratically, the point is to release an entire population into the freedoms of education, art, sports, and entertainment, according to the energy and mental talent of each one. The freedoms of language encircle these like covered wagons. Language in context is an activity in the inner and outer hearts. Reality is never simply or wholly common by language. I know little about the societal, having always been an outsider. I do have experience with community — and especially enjoy one of resistance — most recently with The Recovery of the Public World Conference here in Vancouver, 1-4 June, 1995. The resistance was impending in the poetry and in the poetic practices. We were all ordinary poets, philosophers, and readers at the work of resistance.

Just here, let me open up the word *ordinary* — that is to say, what is going on in the ordinary:

To the ordinary man [and woman].

To a common hero, an ubiquitous character, waling in countless thousands on the streets. In invoking here at the outset of my narratives the absent figure who provides both their beginning and their necessity, I inquire into the desire whose impossible object he represents. What are we asking this oracle whose voice is almost indistinguishable from the rumble of history to license us, to authorize us to say, when we dedicate to him the writing that one formerly offered in praise of the gods or the inspiring muses?

This anonymous hero is very ancient. He is the murmuring voice of societies. In all ages, he comes before texts. He does not expect representations. He squats now at the centre of our scientific stages. The floodlights have moved away from the actors who possess proper names and social blazons, turning first toward the secondary characters, then settling on the mass of the audience . . . . We witness the advent of the number. It comes along with democracy, the large city, administrations, cybernetics. It is a flexible and continuous mass, woven tight like a fabric and neither rips nor darns patches, a multitude of quantified heroes who lose names and faces as they become the ciphered river of the streets, a mobile language of computations and rationalities that belong to no one.

Michel de Certeau  
*The Practice of Everyday Life*

Allow me to insert an anecdote:

I'd just given a talk on what I thought were the irreparables of our time — WOW! — and was standing outside on the grass smoking a cigarette —

when a young man came up, self-induced plainness shining all over him — he said, "I had trouble following you," and he went on about someone telling him he was just too ordinary, and what, he seemed to ask, could he do about that —

I said, "Tell me, have you ever in your whole life felt ordinary



— even once?”

after a long pause, searching every sparkle of his honesty, he said very quietly, “No” —

“Well,” I said, “you’ve turned it inside out, exactly — since the ordinary is always and only a rumour about somebody else” —

“And,” I added, “why not tell whomever-it-may-concern to put the ordinary where the sun don’t shine — everybody’s got a place like that” —

We must study the necessary limitations of government, especially those reflected in the labyrinthine manipulations of what is called the social. And we must insist upon those limitations. Then, perhaps, we could form governments that release us into those freedoms that are the play and creation of reality. Another anecdote: of my youthful search for a social body — that is, apart from voting and thinking about the electrocutions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Jack Spicer and I had come upon a Trotskyite study group, which numbered 17 after we started to attend it. We arrived reading Marx and Trotsky, of course. At our second meeting, we were to offer motions of social consequence. One young man stood and said, “I move that we ban supernaturalist religions.” This struck me as enormously funny — 17 of us would make the ancient of days disappear. Spicer and I had talked about the curiosity of atheism that whatever it banned it never got near the contents of the word *god*. With Spicer’s encouragement, I asked permission to speak to the motion, stood up, and said, “I’m Papal Nunzio for the Bay Area . . .” I got no further with my joke or my point. I was thrown out and, indeed, they moved their place of meeting. Some months later, I ran into the leader of the group on campus. He stopped to say, ever so quietly, “Comes the Revolution, you’re going to hang from a lamppost.”

Obviously, poetry is not simply a matter of biography.

**And democracy, which is recent, unAthenian, unPerklean, incomplete, and by nature unstable and creative — fare-thee-well in the face of the vain boasting of totalities —**

From my commonplace:

If we reject the distinction elite/people . . . Only active politi-

cal experience can teach us what it could be — if we know how to read that experience. It is not out of place to call this to mind at a time when pressing questions about political and cultural action are being raised . . . . Sustained by the corpse whose trace it carries, aimed at the inexistence it promises but never delivers, speech remains the riddle of the Sphinx. It maintains, between the actions it symbolizes, the problematical space of an inquiry.

•

. . . the last ruse of knowledge is to reserve for itself the role of political prophecy.

Michel de Certeau  
*Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*

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The second problem that your question poses for me, Colin, is in your phrase “a pure linguistic act.” Yes, a linguist is one skilled in languages, and linguistics is the splendid, twentieth-century science of language. But, here, we ought to be cautious. Wlad Godzich points out in his reading of Michel de Certeau’s invaluable book *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* that language as an “object of knowledge is a construct of philosophers and linguists” — that literature is a “mode of language use,” in this sense “a discourse,” and that “discourse constitutes forms of actual social interaction and practice.” Thus it is with full consciousness in our Language poets.

Then, you move to question me about the Sacred. Now, that’s a swift hook. I’ll change the metaphor. The pile-up of elements in your first paragraph suggests a symphonic structure of many dissonances difficult to resolve. But, continuing the musical metaphor, I’ll try by hook or by crook — never, of course, to reach the grace notes thereof. Dissonance is our condition. The *sacre-sacer*, “devoted or consecrated to a divinity or to the holy.” The *sacred-sacer*, “devoted to a divinity for destruction, forfeited.” The *sacred-sacer*, accursed, criminal, wicked.” The feel of the *Mysterium Magnum* composes \_\_\_\_\_, fill in your



own blanks. Perhaps, something like an invisible carpet out of which one is unwoven to float in the womb — over which one walks later without a patterned beauty — into which one is rewoven, invisible again.

Yes, my *relation* to the sacred has altered during my years in the forests of language. I lowercase the word in order to throw not the sacred but its hierarchism out with the bathwater. I come from a Magic Valley of southern Idaho, the Portneuf and Snake Rivers, Craters of the Moon, sagebrushes, and the Roman Catholic Church. I am post-Catholic, moment by moment polytheist, and exodic. I think the three great religions of Abraham are dying into the violence from which they derive. We are, as another poet has said, living through something like the 2nd century A.D. — when a great religious mind was dying into another that had not yet found itself as imperium, as moral or philosophical principle (Read Hume). Christianity has been in a condition of humiliation since the sixteenth century, as Michel de Certeau maps it in *The Mystic Fable*. We wind up in phantasmagoria, which has its charms and *angeli*. Great voices of such freedom are St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.

One may well be dismayed at the way in which Christianity forgives itself in the name of eternity. The brilliant, 1986 film *The Mission* is an indictment — be sure to sit through the credits when the Cardinal suddenly fills the screen, smiling at you over his achievements in “Latin America.” I’ve listened to the fundamentalists and evangelicals prophesy from TV pulpits — inattentive to or ignorant of the Hebrew and Greek of the Old and New Testaments — unheeding of the dire difficulties of translation — because language is in eternity. We should be so lucky. Of course, the proposition that God speaks to them overwhelms the necessity of honesty in the act of language. I listen to the righteousness, curses, regressions that surround the blessings thereof — exclusions, manipulations of political power, the definitions of human nature — and think, in their own terms, of blasphemy.

René Girard first came to my attention by way of the proposition in the title of his book *Violence and the Sacred*. “Violence and the Sacred are inseparable.” (19)

The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man’s

effort to master them. Tempests, forest fires and plagues, among other phenomena, may be classified as sacred. Far outranking these, however, though in a far less obvious manner, stands human violence — violence seen as something exterior to man and henceforth as a part of all the other outside forces that threaten mankind. Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred. (31)

One needs to track this proposition through the detailed exposition of Christianity as the “most sacrificial of religions” in Girard’s *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the world* (1987), its title taken from *Matthew* 13: 35. The most sacrificial, but Orthodoxies do offer sacrifices out of their own impulses — each bundle (*fascio*) has its *motu proprio*. For example, the “secular” sacrificial rages of Stalin’s Russia and of Nazi Germany, both Christian countries in which the famous effort of religion to “subdue violence” indicates a tendency of the impulse proper to it to subside. Indeed, it is time to interrogate the sacred and its institutions — where they leave ethos to pin a tail on our animality.

You ask about the relation of poetry *and* language *and* sacrifice. So much of poetry is an interrogation and a discovery of language that hold the heart. But, first, let me take up the word *sacrifice* before it overwhelms the other two. We’ve all heard it said that so-and-so gave up everything for his/her art. A little dramatic, don’t you think? And probably untrue. The Orphic poets give up a very great deal to the interrogation of the relation of language and death. Artaud and Spicer give up a great deal in their interrogations and disclosures of language. I would not like to say that they saw themselves as sacrificed. They did on the record of their poems see themselves often as violated, but it is quite another matter to notice their love of the “event of language.” The word *sacrifice* is really two words: *sacer* and *ficare* — to make sacred. I think I have said enough about the pungent smoke offered to the gods, however enmyrrhed. The word *gift* seems to me a better choice — to give something to art, like knowing something about it. Another might be *desire* — a desire for a language so accurate, so homey, so beautiful/ugly to say how the world is that one might offer one’s mind and heart to the occasion of it. Poetry is not sacred; it interrogates the sacred. It may be visionary with the deepest



insight into present conditions and into the words that are freedoms from them. The poet as such is not a priest. (Read beloved H.D. as taking the gods back — and from Ezra Pound to boot.) The poet is often only a preposition of relations among things, working with the dangers of words and syntax. Poets are also voices that resist the separation of the ethical and the aesthetic and refuse the separation of the ethical from the epistemological.

Colin, your meditation in the next paragraph on “a feeling sometimes that language reaches for a word to identify a thing only as that thing begins to slip away” should not be analyzed by me. It is yours and profoundly so. I do wonder if you mean that “language reaches” or that your experience of language reaches. Certainly, language is “older and other” than we are (Foucault and Chomsky), certainly always never simply mine or yours. I remember reading years ago Weston La Barre’s fine tantrum on Plato’s discovery of the absolute in that he did not understand language. Within the structure of language from subject to predicate, we do have, however, great responsibility not just for the name but also for the verb that got us to the word for the thing, concrete or abstract. Overuse of the word *is* (being) is a hobgoblin of thought and poetry. I think you are meditating on the relation of language to death or nothingness — an aspect of the experience of language even when the poem, say, is celebrating life. Let me draw your attention to a book by Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*. Here you will find a brilliant discussion of our historical relation to language and of our present stake in it — a map of the “confrontation of poetry and philosophy” in that “both seek to grasp that original, inaccessible place of the word.” Historically: “The *inventio* of classical rhetoric presupposed the event of language as already completed.” This is one way that the mind comes to its instrument — language as already completed, allowing rhetorical invention within it. But, Agamben, again:

The first seeds of change in this conception of *inventio*, sowed during that radical transformation of language that was Christianity, are already evident in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* . . . Here man is not always already in the place of language, but he must come into it; he can only do this through *appetitus*, some amorous desire, from which the word can be born if it is

united with knowledge. The experience of the event of language is, thus, above all an amorous experience. (67-68)

Now, this change is still with us, even in the face of the confused sense of the religious tradition that the Bible and God's speech to us within the life of language belong to "language as already completed" — stupifying in those ranges called the sacred. And stupidifying of the anguish and desire to which fundamentalism speaks — and of the social consequences.

I think back to the troubadours and Dante, when modern poetic practice began in this amorous experience of the event of language. Giorgio Agamben takes us to the Provençal poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries:

For the troubadour, it is not a question of psychological or biographical events that we successively expressed in words, but, rather, of the attempt to live the topos itself, the event of language as a fundamental amorous and poetic experience. (68)

These days, Colin, there are such unfoundings of our human course underfoot in the social, the economic, the political, and the religious that we stumble on the debris. *Gossip* is two words — *God + sibb*, related to God. Nevertheless, there's the event of language. Its companionship is the work of the voice, which needs the companionship of those who "seek to grasp that original, inaccessible place of the word." In this I find Giorgio Agamben most helpful:

*A completed foundation of humanity in itself should . . . signify the definitive elimination of the sacrificial mythogeme and of the idea of nature and culture, of the unspeakable and the speakable, which are grounded in it. In fact, even the sacralization of life derives from sacrifice: from this point of view it simply abandons the naked natural life to its own violence and its own unspeakableness, in order to ground in them every cultural rule and all language. The ethos, humanity's own, is not something unspeakable or sacer that must remain unsaid in all praxis and human speech. Neither is it nothingness, whose nullity serves as the basis for the arbitrariness and violence of social action. Rather, it is social praxis itself, human speech itself, which have become transparent to themselves. (106)*



So language is our voice, our language. As you now speak, that is ethics. (108) The *razo* (reason) of poetry.

Reading Agamben, I come upon this poem by Giasomo Leopardi:

*L'infinito*

This lonely knoll was ever dear to me,  
and this hedgerow that hides from view  
so large a part of the remote horizon.  
But as I sit and gaze my thought conceives  
interminable spaces lying beyond that  
and supernatural silences  
and profoundest calm, until my heart  
almost becomes dismayed. And I hear  
the wind come rustling through these leaves,  
I find myself comparing to this voice  
that infinite silence: and I recall eternity  
and all the ages that are dead  
and the living presence and its sounds. And so  
in this immensity my thought is drowned:  
and in this sea is foundering sweet to me.

Perhaps this speaks to you.

It is reported on CBC this morning, 13 February, 1997, that the world is weirder than it was by 2.09% Ah! the gossip of things.

*Robert Blase*

## K.D. Miller / MISSING PERSON

*Elvira is walking to the sea. She keeps her eyes on the gray horizon. She smells a cold, alien smell and hears a sound like the slow clashing of cymbals.*

*The dust of the road becomes sand under her feet, dotted with crunching bits of shell. The sand smooths and darkens near the water. At the frothing edge of the sea it is almost black.*

*Elvira stands looking at the moving waves. Her feet are hot and hurting. She stoops and unlaces her shoes. One of the laces has broken twice, and has been knotted twice. She eases the shoes off, careful of the raw spots on the backs of her heels. Then she lifts the hem of her skirt, unfastens her shredded stockings and rolls them down.*

*The breeze is cool to her bare feet. The dark sand has the texture of brown sugar. Her footprints are tiny lakes that fill up from below.*

*At the foaming edge, she stops. She looks around. There is a house in the near distance, but no one watching at any of the windows. She bends, scoops up water in her calloused palm and touches the tip of her tongue to its surface. The taste of salt makes her throat knot up.*

*The water is inching away from her. It leaves lines of dirty foam and frayed seaweed to mark where it rested before moving on. She imagines the tide inundating some far shore then swaying back like a huge bell.*

*First she puts one bare foot in, then the other. Salt sizzles in the backs of her heels. The undertow is surprisingly strong. A rope of seaweed, caught on her ankle, snakes away after the tide. She hesitates. Then begins to follow it.*

"That's Mister Bunnyrabbit, Elvira. And there's Grandfather Clock in the corner. And see that guy coming in? That's Mister Greenjeans." As I licked a molten dollop of peanut butter from my toast, Elvira would have nodded solemnly beside me on the couch, saying a careful, "Oh yes. Yes. I see."

It was easy enough to talk to Elvira. Nothing I said ever seemed to matter. She wasn't like other adults. She didn't ask me to call her Miss Tomlinson or Aunt Elvira. She didn't fuss over me or make her



voice go tinkly when she talked to me, either. She didn't seem to know I was a child. Maybe because she had no children of her own. She was the only woman I knew then who wasn't a mother.

She and my mother never had those whispered, womanly conversations that ceased the minute I wandered into the kitchen for a cookie. My mother removed her apron when Elvira came to visit, and sat with her in the living room. What the two of them said to each other was safe enough to say in front of me, and so boring that not one word of it stands out in my memory.

Elvira was the perfect guest, nodding and smiling and wearing her manners like gloves. She lived in Toronto, came to Hamilton once or twice a year to see us and my grandmother and my Aunt Heather, then, as my mother put it, knew when to leave.

I didn't know what to call the way she looked. I didn't know then that a woman could be handsome. Her thin, mobile lips pronounced each word precisely, finishing it completely before going on to the next. Her speech didn't slip and slide around the way ours did. She didn't say things like y'know and okay.

She sat very straight, even on the couch. She always wore a suit, and a silk scarf pinned at the neck with a brooch.

*But now she is wearing a second- or third-hand dress. She is wading thigh deep in the water, just at the point where the shallows become the depths. The sun is still burning her shoulders, but the water is numbingly cold. She cannot feel her feet, though she can see them, greenish white and moving. All she can feel is the pull of the tide.*

*Drown, she thinks. She is going to drown. But how will she do it? Is it something she will in fact have to do, or will it just happen to her?*

*The water is up to her waist. There is a tickle of cold where it laps at her body. She can't see her feet any more.*

*Will the water simply open her up and flow into her? Or will she have to do it, have to decide, have to consciously, deliberately, open herself?*

*She can imagine herself dead. Floating like weed, less and less of her, eyeless and eaten away. Washing up on a shore somewhere. Being found. Perhaps even identified.*

*But that will be someone else's worry. She is not worried about being dead. What worries her is dying. The moment that it happens. The doing of it.*

Elvira walked to the sea before I was born. Before my parents were married, or had even met. When my mother was still living at home with her own parents, listening to Rudy Vallee Sunday nights on the radio.

"Now, listen. Don't ever let on to Elvira that I told you this. Okay? Promise?" My mother would have glanced out the kitchen window, as if checking for neighbours cocking their ears.

I can't remember her telling me the story. But I know she did, probably when I was about nine. At nine I was young enough to be my mother's friend. Too young to guess just how badly she needed one.

"Promise you won't let Elvira know that you know?"

I would have nodded hard, skidding my elbows forward on the red-checked oilcloth. I was about to be told some "business," and business meant secrets, and adults kept the oddest things secret. "Don't tell any of our business," followed me through the screen door whenever I was on my way to a friend's house. "That's none of your business!" could swat the most innocent question like a fly.

"I've told you about the Tomlinsons? Elvira's family? How they were part of the old neighbourhood? There since day one? Just like my folks?" I nodded to every question, wanting her to get to the well-what-I-*didn't*-tell-you part.

"Well, what I *didn't* tell you was that when Elvira was only around ten, Mr. Tomlinson, the father, left them all. Ran off one morning with a Chinese cook."

It always amazed me to hear about adults misbehaving. Growing up, I thought, was a kind of drying-out process, whereby all the badness evaporated away. Somehow, magically, the loud, rowdy boys in my class would change into silent men like my father, wearing fedoras and going to work in the morning. And the girls, including me, would stop giggling and become women like my mother, aproned and finger-waved, living most of our lives in kitchens.

Yet here was Mr. Tomlinson leaving his perfectly good wife for a Chinese cook. I saw him as a stubbled, nasty-looking creature, sneaking off in a foggy dawn with a little woman wearing a conical hat and carrying a spatula.



"And if that wasn't enough," my mother went on, "when Elvira was just fourteen and the youngest of the four boys was, oh, about your age I guess, Mrs. Tomlinson had a stroke. And died."

I didn't know what a stroke was. But from the way my mother said the word, and judging from the cartoons I had watched, I could imagine Mrs. Tomlinson seizing her throat, keeling over stiff as a board and raising a cloud of dust as she landed.

"So there was Elvira," my mother went on, picking at a hole in the oilcloth and shaking her head. "All of fourteen. No father. No mother. And four little brothers needing to be looked after."

"So what did she do?"

"She looked after them. She raised them. Did the cooking, the washing, the ironing. Helped them with their homework and got after them. Year after year. All by herself."

"How did she go to school?"

"She didn't. She quit. At fourteen. Well, you could quit whenever you wanted to back then."

"Did she want to?"

"I don't know. I doubt it. But she couldn't just do what she wanted any more. She had to grow up, right then and there. She had to do what was right."

I imagined myself in Elvira's place, my own mother suddenly dead. I saw myself having to grow up right then and there, having to do what was right. Hanging my brother's damp bluejeans out on the line. Opening cans for supper. Cleaning the canary's cage.

"Bit of a shame, y'know," my mother was saying, "about Elvira quitting school. She did well at school. And she used to sing. Whenever there was an assembly or commencement or something, they'd always get Elvira to sing. Most of the time, it was a hymn. Once though, she sang *The Last Rose of Summer*. Up on the platform. In a white dress."

I was mentally trying to iron one of my father's white shirts. Getting a sleeve all smooth and stiff, then peeling it off the board and turning it over to find a zigzag crease on the underside. The kitchen blurred. In another second, I was going to cry, and my mother was going to say, what's the matter with *you*, and I was going to say, nothing, and she was going to say, it *can't* be nothing. And then I was

going to have to tell her about imagining her being dead, and feel stupid.

So I made myself look hard at my mother, alive and sitting across from me in her rickrack-trimmed apron. Her arms were bare for the summer, her shoulders freckled brown. The sun had given her hair that blonde streak on top that she made into a wave and held in place with a bobby pin.

"The neighbours pitched in, of course," she was saying. "Saw to it that the boys had after-school jobs. My mom was awfully good to Elvira. Used to send me over with pots of food all the time. Knit sweaters for all the boys one winter."

"Did she knit one for Elvira too?" I asked.

"Oh, probably. But Elvira was pretty proud, y'know. She'd take things for the boys, but it was hard to get her to accept anything for herself. My mom would have offered her stuff. Anything your Aunt Heather or I didn't wear any more. Your grandmother would never throw anything away. Still won't. If you give her a present, she saves the paper and turns around and wraps something for you in it."

"So, what's the part I'm not supposed to *know*?"

"I was just going to tell you. But first I'll get myself another cup of tea. Do you want a Fizzy?"

"No, thanks."

"It's hot. You should drink lots of liquids."

"No."

"There's orange. Lime."

I shook my head.

"There's grape."

"Okay." I hadn't tried grape.

I didn't really like Fizzies, that is, I didn't like the drink they made, which was even sweeter than Kool-Aid. But I never got tired of dropping the little happy-face tablet into a glass of ice water and watching it dissolve like Alka Seltzer.

Today's tablet was pale mauve. It sank to the bottom of the glass and began to boil up a furious purple. I thought of squid ink, and earthquakes happening at the very bottom of the sea.



*Elvira is chest deep in the water when she steps into a hole. The sky disappears. Green soundless cold. Water up her nose. Salt water like a fist in her mouth, punching down into her stomach.*

*She thrashes, climbs an imaginary ladder. Her head breaks the surface. Her feet scramble for a foothold. Find it. Stumble her back into the shallows against the tide. She stands knee deep in water, sneezing and retching and scrubbing at her eyes. When she can see, she sees that she is facing the shore again. The water has taken her, turned her around and thrown her back.*

*She can still feel the pull of the tide, dragging her dress skirt away from where it is plastered wet against her legs. Its pull is not as strong as before.*

*And there, sitting neatly side by side on the drying sand, are her shoes. One of her bloodstained stockings is still rolled up inside its shoe. The other has unrolled itself in the breeze and, held aloft by a lone spike of parched grass, is waving merrily at her.*

My mother was taking her time with her tea, adjusting the cosy, sniffing the milk. The cup she was using was one she had pulled out of a box of Tide. It took ages to collect even a single place-setting, and the plates were chip-scalloped by the time she got around to the completer set. But my mother liked things that took time, that happened bit by bit. Chances are, if the detergent box method of collecting china had been unknown, she would have invented it.

So all I could do was wait and drink my grape Fizzy. "This Old House" was singing from the pink plastic radio on the counter beside the sink. The chicken clock was pecking away the time on top of the fridge. There was a barnyard scene painted on the clock face, and a rhythmically moving chicken in the foreground. For as long as I could remember, this chicken had pecked the ground in time with the ticking seconds, while her painted-on chicks looked up at her in frozen astonishment.

"Anyway," my mother resumed over her fresh cup of tea, "when Elvira was, what? Twenty-two? Something like that. Because she's a few years older than me. So she would have been twenty-two or so, and the youngest boy, oh, maybe seventeen. Old enough not to need her any more. Or maybe he was younger. Because kids grew up faster then, especially —"

"What *happened?*" I said. My mother was filled right up with words,

words she heard, words she read, words she was thinking, and she needed to talk them out. She couldn't even read silently to herself. "Just two lines!" she would promise, then read three paragraphs aloud while we all groaned and pleaded. She sang along with the radio, phoned in to talk shows, whistled at the canary, lectured the cat.

"Okay, okay. What happened? Well, one day, without saying a word to anybody, Elvira took what little housekeeping money she had, went down to the train station and got on a train going east. Her brothers called the police once she'd been missing for a whole day, and the police checked the train station, among other things. And they found out that a tall, kind of strange young woman had bought a one-way ticket east, out of the province. So that got the Mounties involved. And the Mounties checked with all the train porters and ticket-takers or whatever they're called, and they found out that this very quiet young woman who looked the way the brothers said Elvira did had sat up, night and day, right to the end of the line. Nobody could remember if she'd had anything to eat, but everybody remembered that she didn't have any baggage with her. Not even a purse."

My mother paused for a sip of tea, her mouth becoming a round O exactly like that of the Dutch-girl string-saver. The Dutch girl had hung on the kitchen wall as long as the chicken clock had sat up on the fridge. Her ceramic lips were puckered around a hole that made her look like she was whistling. When my father needed string and couldn't find any, he would say, "You've *got* a string-saver. Why don't you *use* it?" And my mother would reply, "Oh, I put a ball of string inside her once, but she looked like she was eating spaghetti, so I took it out." This always made perfect sense to me until I started to think about it.

"Did the Mounties ever find Elvira?"

"Oh, sure. The Mounties always find whoever they're looking for. They tracked her down to this big old house near the shore. She'd taken the train as far east as it would go, then she'd gotten out and walked the rest of the way to the sea. And that's where the house was."

"Did anybody live there?"

"Uh huh. A family. But Elvira didn't know them. She didn't even know if there would be anybody there."

"So how did she get inside?"



"Well, I guess she just walked up and knocked on the door."

"Was she scared?"

*The house is a big old clapboard with blistered white paint and a wrap-around screen porch. In the middle of the roof is a tiny gable. Elvira stands knee-deep in the water, looking at the window beneath the gable, then at the warped steps leading up to the porch's screen door.*

*She remembers looking at this house just before she walked into the water. Checking to see if anyone was watching from a window. Now she wishes someone was. Whether she saw welcome or forbiddance in their face, it would make it easier, somehow.*

*After a long time she puts one foot toward shore, feeling for sharp stones. She didn't feel any on the way in, but her feet are suddenly tender again. In a little while, she puts another foot carefully toward shore.*

*She walks slowly up to her shoes. The unrolled stocking is no longer caught on the spike of grass. It has tumbled a little way down the beach in the wind. As Elvira watches, it sidewinds like a snake into a crack in some rocks.*

*She could run and catch it. But she won't. She'll go barefoot. And she won't think about what to say until she gets there. She will just go up the steps, knock on the door, then open her mouth.*

*When she reaches the porch steps, her dress hem is still dripping but her feet are dry and powdered white with sand. The steps are gray. A lining of cobweb shows through the slats. Her feet ascend slowly, leaving white prints.*

*On the top step, she pauses. The inner door of the house is open. She can hear kitchen sounds through the screen, and can smell food cooking. After a long time, she makes a fist and raises it to the doorframe.*

*Footsteps approach from within. A blurred face looks through the screen. There is a pause, then the latch is lifted. The door creaks on its hinges. A small child, round-eyed and solemn, pokes his head out from behind his mother's legs.*

*Elvira tries to smile at him, but her lips are cracked from the sun and crusted with salt from her near-drowning. Her eyes go from the child to the faded print apron skirt he is clutching in his fist. She doesn't dare look up at the woman wearing the apron until a movement catches her peripheral vision.*

*The woman has raised her hand to touch her own hair. Her hair is pulled back and pinned. Probably no time for more. Still, when she sees a stranger, a strange woman, even a woman dripping wet and barefoot, her hand goes up to*

*her hair in a token tidying gesture.*

*It is this small tribute that breaks Elvira down. Her lips stretch, crack, burn. Sounds come out of her, not words, sounds like the waves make, like the gulls make.*

*Then there is nothing but the bib of the apron against her face, the hand unmoving on the back of her head.*

"It took the Mounties two weeks to find her. She was upstairs in that big white house, in a nice little room. You know? The kind with one pointy gable that pokes up? From the middle of the roof?"

I nodded and nodded, urging my mother on. Without these constant affirmations, she would sit and spin her wheels forever.

"Well, there was Elvira, sitting in a rocking chair in a patch of sun. Rocking away. Just looking out the window. Peaceful as an egg."

"What's that mean? Peaceful as an egg?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's just something my mom always says. Probably her mother said it. Stands to reason, though, doesn't it? I mean, you can't get much more peaceful than an egg."

This was another of my mother's sayings that made perfect sense on a level inaccessible to thought.

"Anyway, all along the window sill in the room were stones and shells Elvira had collected. That's all she'd done. Walked along the beach every day picking up shells and pretty stones."

"Did the Mounties put handcuffs on her?"

"Oh no. Nothing like that. She hadn't done anything wrong. She was just a missing person. So they weren't there to arrest her. They couldn't even make her come back if she didn't want to."

"So why did she come back?"

"Well, I guess she wanted to."

"But why?"

"I don't know," my mother said, and paused, looking down into her cooling tea.

I wondered if she was seeing what I was seeing. That little sun-warmed room with the rocking chair and the shells. Dust motes made into jewels by that long-ago light. I tried to imagine Elvira sitting and rocking, calmly waiting for the authorities to catch up with her. I couldn't. The room had nothing to do with the scarfed and suited



Elvira I saw once or twice a year. But neither did the train, or the walk to the sea, or the knocking on the door of the house.

"Did she ever go back?" I asked. "To the house?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. She's never said, anyway."

"Does she want to go back?"

"I don't know that either. And I would never ask. And don't you go asking. It's none of our business."

*Elvira does not know whose room this used to be, whether a departed boarder or a dead child. In the last few days she has memorized its details, giving them to herself like gifts. The honey-coloured hardwood floor, the round braided rag rug, the sloping ceiling, the window facing the ocean. Through this window, day and night, comes the huge breathing of the water.*

*In the morning, the sun teases pinkly through her eyelids. She is already awake by then, having felt the day's beginning far beneath her in the house. She pulls the sheet and quilt over her head. Though clean, the bedclothes have that deeply personal smell that comes of much using and washing.*

*She is afraid. The fear is like a cold fingertip pressing right where her ribcage forks. She wakes to it, goes to sleep with it. Maybe she has been afraid like this for years, but all the other fears, what will we eat, what will we wear, how will we stay warm, kept her from feeling it.*

*All she knows is that one morning last week she woke up to the boys already gone to their days, gone to their lives, and the fear there in bed with her, its cold penetrating the cave of warmth under the sheets. She carried the fear around inside her like a pain all that day. She told herself there was nothing to be afraid of. The boys were all working. Earning. They could look after her now, and they would. So she had nothing to fear, for the rest of her life. Nothing.*

*She did not know how much a train ticket would cost. It turned out she had just enough in silver and coppers, knotted up in her handkerchief.*

*Elvira pulls the bedclothes down and opens her eyes. She does not know the surname of the family stirring below. She has no idea what the woman who opened the door to her told them all, only that not one of them seemed surprised by her presence at their table.*

*She is still afraid. But the fear is at home here, in this house. It is less like a pain and more like a presence. More like something she can negotiate with, silently.*

*It is a blessing not to have to speak. Her tongue lies soft in her mouth.*

*This room is a blessing too, and her place at the table, and the plate of warm food all her own.*

*The plate is set before her in such a way that it makes no sound when the china meets the wood of the table. She looks forward to this gesture, this tenderness, as much as she looks forward to the food she did nothing to prepare but which is still, miraculously, hers.*

*The smell of breakfast cooking has reached her, filling her mouth with water. She sits up and swings her bare feet out onto the rag rug. Today she will walk along the beach again, and stoop and pry up half-buried shells, and wish them in the water, and carry them up to this room and put them on the windowsill for the morning sun to bleach clean.*

"Now, don't go screaming yourself sick," my mother said to me across the kitchen table.

"I *won't*."

"And don't stand too close to anybody who is screaming themselves sick, because you could get ear damage."

I glowered. She meant my best girlfriend, Michelle. Michelle probably would scream herself sick, come to think of it. And cry, too, and maybe even faint. She was better than me at everything else, so why not this?

"And the two of you stay *together*. If you get separated or if something goes wrong before Michelle's parents can pick you up, find a policeman. There'll be police all over Maple Leaf Gardens, thank God. So find one of them if you need help. Don't go walking the streets of Toronto." She might have been saying, the streets of Sodom.

"I'm not stupid," I said.

"Oh, I know *you're* not."

Another dig at Michelle. She was just jealous that I had a best friend. At fourteen, I spent a lot of time analysing my mother, trying to put my finger on exactly what was wrong with her. Her main problem, I had decided, was that she was lonely. Well, I'd be lonely too if I stayed in the house all day waiting for my husband and kids to come home. The only time she talked to people was over the phone to my grandmother or my aunt, or over the backyard fence to Mrs. Kiraja. But she could get out of the house, if she really wanted to. Join committees. Make friends. Even get a job, now that my brother and I



were growing up and didn't need her any more. So if she was lonely, I told myself, it was her own fault, and she had no business taking it out on Michelle.

"Michelle's father won't let her play Beatle records for a *whole hour* after he comes home from work," I said fiercely. "And when he saw her Paul McCartney haircut, he said, That's not coming out of my wallet, and then he made her *pay* for it. Out of her *allowance*."

"This is the same man who stood in line for ten hours to get you both tickets to the concert."

"He only did that to keep Michelle from doing it. Because she would have."

"Oh, I know she would have."

"She had her sleeping bag all ready and her bus tickets to Toronto and everything, but then her parents caught her sneaking out and they *grounded* her. Except for the concert tomorrow, she can't go *anywhere* for a *month*."

"Somebody should get the Children's Aid after those two."

I tried to sulk, but I was too full of emotional helium. The very next day, tomorrow, in just twenty-eight hours and seventeen minutes, I was going to be breathing the same air as John, Paul, George and Ringo. I had never heard of molecules, but I had a notion that that air would contain tiny bits of the Beatles that would somehow bypass the other thirty thousand screaming fans to enter my nostrils alone.

I would come home changed. In what way, I didn't know, but I would be different. How could I possibly be the same after breathing the dandruff of the gods?

"Excited?" my mother said, watching me.

I shrugged. "A bit." I stared down into my mug of milky tea. The mug was printed with a black and white photograph of Ringo Starr, and had cost \$2.95. My mother had said that was highway robbery for a cup, but she had paid it anyway. I took a sip. I didn't like tea, but the Beatles drank it.

"You know you're getting pretty?" my mother said. "In spite of that haircut?"

I rolled my eyes. I had had my hair cut like Ringo's. I didn't like Ringo's hair either, but I had to be loyal. *Somebody* had to love Ringo. Besides being the least attractive of the four, he had nothing witty to

say to reporters, couldn't sing, and as far as I could tell, wasn't even much of a drummer.

I could have guessed that Michelle would go for Paul. She belonged with the best-looking of the Beatles. She was tall and blonde, with cheekbones she didn't have to suck in to make show. I used to imagine the two of us somehow meeting the four of them. I could see Michelle going right up to Paul, giving him that cool look she was starting to give boys. And there would be me in the background, finally managing to catch Ringo's eye.

I didn't know if I was getting pretty or not. But if I was, I wanted Michelle to tell me, not my mother. All Michelle ever said were things like, "You know, it wouldn't *hurt* you to pluck your eyebrows."

"When I was fourteen," my mother was saying, "for me, it was Rudy Vallee." She was using that shy, coaxing tone she used when she wanted us to talk. It made me itch with embarrassment, but it also made it impossible to get up and leave.

"He used to come on for Fleischman's Yeast on Sunday nights, and I used to dress up and sit in front of the radio."

Oh God.

"And one night, when he was singing, I lost a button off my blouse. It just popped off and went scooting across the kitchen floor. And my mother said, Well, *somebody's* heart's beating."

"What did Grandma think of him?" If I asked questions I could at least steer the conversation away from anything truly nauseating.

"What did my mom think of Rudy Vallee? Oh well, he sang nice songs, and he always ended with a hymn, so she didn't mind." I had once seen a picture of Rudy Vallee singing into what looked like a giant lollipop. He had a face like Howdy Doody and a mountain range of hair parted as by a river. There was nothing there that I would scream at, let alone lose a button over. "And she'd had kind of a crush on Maurice Chevalier herself when she was younger," my mother continued, "so she knew what it was like."

"Grandma?"

"Your grandmother was a girl once, believe it or not. So was your mother."

"I *know*."

I looked up at the clock on top of the fridge. Twenty-seven hours



and fifty-seven minutes to go. It was the same chicken clock, still pecking away. The Dutch girl string-saver still hung on the wall, still without string, despite my father's pleading. My mother continued to wear aprons, though I had told her not to, and she still got her hair done just like the Queen's.

"There might be something on the radio about the Beatles arriving in Toronto," she said, getting up and going to the counter. At least the radio was new, a transistor. But she wouldn't throw out the pink plastic one. It was down in the basement with my and my brother's old toys and books.

"... pushing through the crowd..." an excited announcer was saying. "Security personnel are having great difficulty getting the Beatles safely to their waiting limousines. They are having to guide them, because they're bent over with their jackets up over their heads, and — What? Which one is it? Some fans have broken through the police cordon and have grabbed hold of one of the — Who? Ringo? Ringo Starr?"

My mother and I looked at each other. Her eyes were as big as mine felt.

"... Security personnel have pulled the fans away from Ringo Starr, and have gotten him and the other Beatles safely into the..."

"Thank goodness," my mother breathed when the broadcast was over and A Hard Day's Night was belting out of the radio. "They could really have hurt Ringo, y'know. Pulled out his hair. Grabbed his nose. He's got *such* a nose."

I was suspicious of my mother's fondness for the Beatles. I thought it might have more to do with trying to be my friend than anything else. But maybe not.

"Oh, they're *cute*!" she said the first time they were on the Ed Sullivan show. "Their hair must be really *clean* to flip around like that."

"I give them three months," my brother said. "Six, tops."

"Jesus God," my father whispered, raising his newspaper like a shield.

"Ooooooh!" my mother was singing, trying to imitate Paul and John's falsetto. "Ooooooh!"

"Ringo must be Jewish, with that nose," she was saying now.

"No, he's *not*," I said. "He's from Liverpool."

"Well, there are probably Jews in Liverpool. There are Jews all over. I was reading somewhere the other day that there are even Chinese Jews."

"But not all Jewish people have big noses."

"I know. But lots do. Look at Elvira."

"Is Elvira Jewish?" I pictured her high-bridged nose, her large brown eyes, the lids sliding slowly down when she blinked, then slowly back up.

"One of her grandmothers was. I forget which one. But look, don't mention I said that, all right?"

"I *won't*. Why would I?"

"People kept that kind of thing quiet back then. And then the war came, and they *really* kept it quiet."

I hadn't said more than two words at a time to Elvira in years. The fact was, she had started giving me the creeps. The last time she had visited, I had come down the stairs on my way outside just in time to catch a glimpse of her sitting in the living room. My mother must have left her alone for a minute to go to the bathroom or do something in the kitchen. She was sitting absolutely still, in perfect profile, as if cut from paper. I suddenly got spooked by the idea of her turning and seeing me. I tiptoed out the side door so she wouldn't.

*Waiting*, my mouth said all by itself once I was safely outside. She had been *waiting* for something. Almost as if she believed that if she just sat perfectly still for long enough, she would find it. Or it would find her.

*Elvira has found a beach of stones. It is low tide, very sunny and hot. Tidal pools are forming and the gulls are circling down to feed on whatever is trapped inside them. Weeds like bunches of tiny dirigibles crunch and pop underfoot.*

*Elvira picks her way across the slanting, tippy surface with the help of a stick. The stones of the beach have been rolled by the waves into egg shapes. The boulders are like the eggs of dinosaurs; even the pebbles are pointed at one end, round at the other.*

*Her dress pockets are already full of stones. They knock softly, insistently against her thighs like the fists of small children.*



*She'll empty them when she gets back to the room. She'll arrange the stones on the windowsill, perhaps by size, big to small, or perhaps by colour, grey, salmon, speckled, striped.*

*Her ankles begin to ache for a flat surface. Bracing with her stick, she steps over a tidal pool onto a huge egg half buried in sand. She sits down and rests her stick in a pebbled groove beside the stone. Then she draws her knees up and circles them with her arms.*

*She looks around at the seashore and laughs silently to herself. She should abandon the idea of putting her stones in any kind of order on her windowsill. There is no order here, or none that she can discern. The seashore is a torn edge, a smelly mess at low tide. The waves and gulls make a racket that never lets up. Things are dying and being born everywhere, fish flopping in tidal pools, insects flying up out of the weed, baby crabs skittering on tiptoe.*

*Maybe she was expecting the kind of thing she had seen in paintings. Postcards. The smells are another surprise, everything from this salty, fishy stink to the wintry smell of high tide. An awful smell, she thinks. Awful in the Biblical sense of awful. The smell of a maker of stones into eggs.*

*The big stone she is sitting on has gotten so hot in its few hours in the sun that it seems to be generating heat from within. Elvira imagines it submerged at high tide, still warm at the centre, sending up shimmers of heat through the water.*

*A breeze cools her face for a second. It catches one of the waves and pushes it further and faster than the others. She watches the wave snake through the twisting waterways of the low tide shore and find her rock. Actually lick the toe of her shoe. Cold seeps in through the broken stitches in the cracked leather. Lorna, the woman in the house, has given Elvira a new dress and underwear, well, new to her, but there are only enough shoes to go around in the family. She explained this softly, apologetically, while Elvira was stepping into the offered clothes. Elvira nodded and reached and touched Lorna's hand. She still has not spoken. She knows she will talk, in time, when the time comes. At least, she will open her mouth and make a sound. She has no idea what the sound will be, whether words or singing or something she cannot even imagine. Her tongue is still resting soft in her mouth. She is very aware of her tongue, now that she is not using it. It feels oddly new, almost alien, a thing she must get to know.*

*Perhaps she will never get to know it. Perhaps it will keep changing, and she won't be able to keep up with the changes. She might wake up tomorrow*

morning with her tongue forked, divided down to the root, and herself speaking in tongues. Or she might find her tongue gone altogether, a small nub or nothing where it once was, and a hard beak instead of lips and teeth. She might sing like a bird.

Another cold wave licks her toe. She inches her foot up a bit higher. She notices that the gulls have stopped circling and feeding. They are sitting on the water now in bobbing flotillas, smiling long, thin smiles.

Her tailbone is starting to ache. She is not sure she has ever sat this long on a stone. Or on anything. Doing nothing. She knows she should be ashamed of herself. She isn't. Not that she's proud of herself, either. She couldn't say what she is, right now. Maybe she's lost her mind. She's acting the way crazy people act. She's done what crazy people do.

Well. If this is crazy, then it's very ordinary. Very simple. She eats, she sleeps, she walks the beach. Nothing surprises her. If the largest stones were to shiver and rock, hatching in the sun, and sticky baby dinosaur heads poke out, squealing for their mothers, she would not so much as blink.

Even the extraordinary kindness she has received, and in a dimmed, waiting part of herself she knows it is extraordinary, even that seems only natural, like water flowing into a hollow.

She feels hollow. Empty as the shells she finds. Maybe when you lose your mind you really do lose something, and there is a space left.

Her mind used to be so full and hard and tight with all she had to do, had to make happen, had to keep from happening. She had to stretch a loaf of bread. She had to find a dollar. She had to see to, look after, make sure.

And she did. She did what was right. She did all the things she was raised to do. Have pride. Not ask. Mind her own business. Never beg. Keep control. Hold in. Not let on. Never break down.

Where did all that go? Did she leave it in the station like a lost suitcase when she boarded the train? Is it waiting for her?

A wave washes right over her foot. She reaches for her stick and touches wet. Her stick is floating. She watches it lift free of the pebbles it was resting on, watches one end swing toward shore, and the whole thing begin to move with the incoming tide.

She grabs the stick while she can, then stands up on the half-submerged rock, rubbing her numb backside. She had better get back to the house. Her stomach tells her it is time to eat.

She smiles, walking the stones with the aid of her stick. Her cracked lips



*have healed, thanks to a homemade balm Lorna gave her. Her tongue moves in her mouth, as if with a life of its own. The time is coming to sing.*

My mother seemed to know that She Loves You, the first song I ever saw the Beatles perform on the Ed Sullivan Show, had a religious significance for me. She said nothing until the last “Yeah” had died away and I had stopped the almost Hasidic rocking that took over my body whenever the tune was playing on the radio.

“Did I ever tell you that your grandmother saw Buffalo Bill? In Glasgow? When she was just a little girl?”

“Grandma saw Buffalo Bill?”

“Uh huh. She did. And all she ever said about it was that the Indians smoked cigars, and the horses looked awfully thin, because the poor things had come over in the hold of a ship.”

“What was Buffalo Bill doing in Glasgow?”

“It was his Wild West show. He took it all over Europe. So my mom and her family and the whole village came down on the train.”

I couldn’t stand it any more. “What made you think of Grandma seeing Buffalo Bill?”

“You seeing the Beatles tomorrow. I just thought it was kind of interesting. Buffalo Bill and the Beatles. Hey! Sounds like a song title, doesn’t it? Buffalo Bill and the Beatles.”

I had to cut her off, or she’d start making up lyrics and a tune. “Did Elvira like Rudy Vallee too? The way you did?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think the Tomlinsons even had a radio. And Elvira wasn’t going to school, remember. She was just like a mother with four kids. So she didn’t hear what all the other girls were talking about. She might not even have known who Rudy Vallee was. She didn’t have any kind of a girlhood. No dances. No boyfriends. It was as if a great big apple corer had come along and just lifted all that stuff right out.”

“Is that why she’s so weird?”

“How do you mean?”

I couldn’t say. I kept thinking about the last time I had seen Elvira. That sense of waiting. There had been a terrifying patience to the waiting, like the patience of statues, the patience of portraits. Whatever it was, it had sped me out the door.

"It's like she's not *real*," I said at last. "Like she's not really *there*."

"Well," my mother said, "she's very, very reserved. That can happen, when somebody's been through something. And Elvira's been through a lot. She's been scarred. And they say that scar tissue's tougher than skin. Maybe that's a good thing. Because nothing ever came easy to Elvira. She did everything the hard way."

"What about walking up to that house?" I said. "She got taken in. Just like that. For nothing."

"That was luck. That was just pure luck. Happening to find the right kind of people. I mean, when you think about what she could have found. People who'd have set the dog on her. People who'd have had her jailed as a vagrant. Anything could have happened to her. She could have ended up in a mental institution. There were people who thought she'd gone crazy. And in those days, crazy was next to criminal. You didn't get any sympathy."

"Why would anybody think she was crazy?"

"Well, look at what she did. Oh, I know. It looks awfully brave, going off on her own like that. That's how people think of it now. But then? A young single woman? Going away by herself? Without telling her family?" My mother shook her head. "In those days what you should and shouldn't do was chiselled in stone, especially if you were a girl. And if you once did something you shouldn't, you were either bad or you were nuts. Take your pick. So if you think Michelle's parents are being hard on her for trying to sneak off to Toronto . . ." She shook her head again. "I don't know what was riskier for Elvira. Running away or coming home again."

"What happened when she came home?"

"Well, over night she stopped being the brave little girl who raised her brothers single-handed, and turned into the woman who ran off. Amazing how people can drop one thing and pick up another without missing a beat."

"Is that why she moved to Toronto?"

"Oh, she didn't move then. She couldn't have gone anywhere then. She didn't have one red cent to her name."

I thought of the quality of Elvira's suits, the silk scarf always at her neck. "So where did she get her money?"

"She worked for it. Starting with a little nothing job she managed



to get somehow. Remember Bing's Variety? Down on Commercial?"

"Yes."

"Where we used to get ice cream? And now it's a drug store?"

"Yes!"

"Well, Leonard Bing hired Elvira as a clerk. There was talk about that too. The theory was that Bing figured people would come into the store just to get a look at the woman who ran off. And he was right. So help me, people would come in and buy some silly little thing, a spool of thread or a pair of shoelaces. But they'd really be there to look at Elvira."

"So what did Elvira do?"

"She counted out their change and looked right back at them. Oh, there was talk. My mom went to a Ladies' Aid meeting where Elvira might as well have been the only thing on the agenda. And the talk didn't stop until some pillar of the church announced that she for one had not been born yesterday, and she was keeping an eye on the girl's waistline and just waiting. And that's when my mom stood up and said if they didn't all quit tying their tongues in knots about Elvira, she'd quit the Ladies' Aid."

"Grandma said *that*?"

"Hey, listen. Your grandmother doesn't open her mouth much, but when she does it's to *say* something. Besides. She had a lot of clout with the Ladies' Aid back then, and she knew it. It was bazaar season when all this happened. And she was their champion knitter."

*"Lorna? My name is Elvira. May I sit down?"*

*Lorna's heart jumps at the sound. The words were dry. Sticky-sounding. But they were words. So she has a voice after all. And a name.*

*She knows she should be relieved to hear the woman speak at last. But she's actually a little sad. There was something child-like in the silence. Trusting. But of course, it couldn't last. That kind of thing never does.*

*The two of them sit carefully at the kitchen table, facing each other. Elvira has eaten with Lorna at this table three times a day for more than a week. She has slept in a bed whose sheets Lorna has changed. She has shared the privy with Lorna and her family.*

*But now they are beginning all over again. With words. The words will be a difficulty, at first. A thing to get used to.*

*"Lorna, I'm going to have to go back where I came from soon. They're looking for me. I can tell. I can feel them getting closer."*

*Lorna nods, gets up and pours Elvira a cup of tea. She moves slowly, deftly. There is listening in every gesture.*

*"Something like this happened to me once before," Elvira continues. "When my mother died. I woke up one morning, and my whole life was gone. Just like that. But there was another one waiting for me. The boys were hungry. The boys were scared. The boys needed clean clothes. So I got through that day. The next day, they were hungry and scared and dirty all over again. So I got through that day too. And the next one. And the next."*

*"But the boys are men now. Whatever they can't do for themselves their wives will do. I've lost my life again. It's gone. Just like it was before. Only this time, there's no other life waiting for me."*

*There is a time to speak. Lorna knows that. It's a very precise time, very exact. She can feel it coming now, like a wave still far out to sea. Speak too soon, and the wave dies. Too late, and it's already crashed.*

*"I'm afraid, Lorna. I keep telling myself there's nothing to be afraid of. But it's the nothing that I am afraid of. And the nothing is me."*

*The time is now. Quick, before the crash. Lorna prays, no more than a breath, then says, "What do you love?"*

*It was the right question. Elvira's cheeks darken. In a rush, she says, "Here. This place. This house. My room. The beach. The sea. The tides. The stones. The shells. The seagulls. The sound of the place. The smell."*

*Lorna nods. Says nothing. Now it's time to be silent. That's about the only thing she knows, come to think of it. When to speak and when to be silent. She seems to have been born knowing it. She can remember, as a tiny girl, being astonished when people spoke during a necessary silence.*

*"Nothing else matters," Elvira continues. "I think of having to go back, and I do have to go back, I think of all the years to come, and it's nothing. It's like seeing my own ghost. It's like being my own ghost."*

*"But here? I know that I could be old here. No. It's more than that. I know I'm going to be old here. I can see myself old, picking up stones and putting them in my pockets. Keeping them for a little while on my windowsill. Then bringing them back to the beach, and picking up different ones."*

*She takes a deep breath. "I could sing here. I haven't sung in years. Probably haven't any voice left. But I could sing here. Sing and gather stones."*



*She looks down at her hands. In the space of a few days of no work, no dishes to wash, their redness has started to fade and their callouses to soften. "But that's not a life. Singing and gathering stones. You couldn't plan for that. Live for it. Make a life out of it."*

*Lorna says nothing. Elvira raises her head and looks at her. "Could you?"*

"Why don't you go back to school or something? Take art? You always wanted to go to art school."

"Yes," my mother said obediently, nodding over her mug of tea. "I did, once."

I had finally bullied her out of her Tide box china, and gotten her a set of lumpily glazed, earth-coloured mugs that crunched like concrete when they were set down. She used them when I was home from university, but I suspected that when I was away she reverted to her old, chipped teacups and saucers.

"Well? Why don't you sign up for some courses or something? Dad's said he'll pay for them. And he worries about you having nothing to do, what with him at work all day and us both away at school."

Actually, what my father had said was, "Just chat with your mother when you come home. And try to keep it light. I think she's lonely."

He had put my back up, saying that. He was her husband, after all. Wasn't it his business if she was lonely? And what did he mean by "keep it light"? Couldn't he see that she was in a rut? That she wasn't realizing her potential? That she hardly knew there was a world out there? She was like so many women of her generation, living in a time-warp, clinging to roles that had become useless, meaningless. So if I didn't tell her these things, over and over, who would?

"You could even get your B.A.," I went on. "Lots of women your age are doing it."

"I'd look like the Wreck of the Hesperus, sitting there in a class full of kids."

"We're not kids. And most of the professors are your age or even older."

"Well, anyway. I don't think I'm bright enough."

"Yes, you *are*! Don't be *stupid*!"

We drank our tea in silence, save for the hum of the digital clock

on top of the fridge. It had been my Christmas present to her, the only way I could force her to get rid of that damned chicken. The thing was probably still pecking away in the basement with all her other banished treasures. Probably she wound it, surreptitiously, every time she did the laundry.

I couldn't force a replacement for the string-saver on her, since she still didn't use it to save string. At least she had painted the Dutch girl's hat when she painted the kitchen, so it blended into the background a little.

But robin's egg blue! Hadn't she heard of avocado? Or Chinese red? *Nobody* painted a kitchen robin's egg blue. Except my mother.

"Pincurls. She actually does her hair in pincurls. With bobby pins. Little metal crosses, all over her head. It looks like Arlington."

My roommates and I swapped mother stories, shaking our heads, sipping cheap red wine, sharing a cigarette.

"Margarine. I kid you not. I go home. What's on the table? White bread. White sugar. And margarine." The fact that these had been staples of our own diets as little as six months before was conveniently forgotten.

The chicken clock and string saver had me tied for first place with a girl whose mother not only still went to church, but did so in white gloves and a hat. "A *new* hat for Easter, of course," this girl would say. "But white shoes and gloves and purse *only* after the twenty-fourth of May. *Never* before."

In our waist-length hair, peasant skirts and pooka beads, we would groan as one. How lucky we were to have escaped the restrictions and conformity that ruled our mothers' lives!

"How long is your hair getting now?" my mother asked.

I bristled. "Why?"

"I was just wondering. Did I ever tell you that your grandmother could sit on her hair when she was a girl?"

"I wear my hair long because I *want* to," I said. I could never pass up an opportunity to educate my mother. "Grandma had no choice in the matter. Keeping a girl's hair long in those days was just another way of turning her into a sex object and limiting her freedom. If she had chosen to cut her hair short, she would have been a social out-cast." I tried not to imagine my roommates' cool stares if I walked in



with a pageboy or pixie cut.

My mother's lips twitched. She tried to stop them, but they twitched again.

"What?" I said. I hadn't said anything funny. Had I?

"Oh, nothing. Just something I've noticed lately. Now and then you talk like Elvira."

I flushed. I didn't want to be compared to anybody else. I wanted to be unique. Everybody at school was trying to be unique. "What do you mean?" I said.

"The way you pronounce things. Every single word a little jewel."

I flushed darker. Sometimes my mother could surprise me, and this was one of those times. She would show just a bit of grit, a cool-eyed touch of humour that had nothing to do with being a mother. It was as if she had a whole other self, a selfish self, one that could just get up and walk away from all of us and never look back. Except for these split-second glimpses, she kept it hidden. But it was there, and it could make me feel very young.

"What's Elvira doing these days?" I said, trying to change the subject without appearing to do so.

"I got a postcard from her. Just the other day. Tuesday? No, Wednesday. No, it would have been Tuesday, because —"

"Where was it *from*?"

"Just a minute. I'll get it." She got up from the table and rummaged through the stack of coupons, bills, letters and junk mail that had always lived behind the radio. "Here it is."

I put my hand out. "Don't read it to me. Let me read it for myself," I pleaded. But she had already sat back down, holding the card and squinting at it.

"It's from Land's End. Where she always goes. Dear June, she says. I am taking my usual two weeks here. The sea and the beach are what they always are. I hope all goes well with you and your family. Elvira."

"That's it?" I said.

My mother nodded. "She never writes much."

"Did she ever explain why she ran away from home that time?"

"No. She never talked about anything personal. And she hasn't even been to visit in a while. She's too busy. She was taking night school

courses in business for a couple of years. On top of working all day. And now she's an office manager. For a big firm in Toronto."

A momentary bafflement came into my mother's eyes. She had the entrenched Hamiltonian's combined worship and dread of Toronto. Why anyone would go there willingly to live was beyond her, as was the idea of a woman being an "office manager" in a "big firm." One of my roommates was heading for law school, and my mother's only comment was, "Imagine a girl wanting to be a lawyer." She didn't disapprove. She just couldn't understand.

She couldn't understand my wanting to go away to Guelph, either, when I could have stayed home and attended McMaster. "Why would anybody who has a home want to *leave* it?" she had asked rhetorically, over and over. Leaving home for marriage she could at least relate to. She had done as much herself. But all the years of her wifehood and motherhood, whenever she visited my grandmother, she called it "going home." And she had told me about lying awake in her childhood bed the night before her wedding, homesick in advance.

"Fugue," I said. "It's called fugue, suddenly running away for no reason." I was taking Psych 100.

"I thought a fugue was something you played on the piano."

"It just means flight."

"It does? Fugue. Flight. Well, there's fugitive."

"And refuge."

"And refugee."

Her cheeks were getting pink. She loved playing with words, always had. In a second, I saw all that she needed and wanted. Just some conversation with me, a bit of wordplay, an easy, uncomplicated kindness.

But it wasn't easy. Not for me. It meant letting go my cool scorn for the things of her life, seeing my new, shaky independence for what it was. It meant growing up, right then and there. Doing what was right.

She was still playing with words out loud.

"Let me see that postcard," I said abruptly, reaching for it. She handed it over, hurt from the interruption showing in her eyes for just a second.

I studied the back of the card. The handwriting was neat, almost



unnaturally legible. A professional businesswoman's script. *The sea and the beach are what they always are.*

I flipped the card over and looked at the picture. Land's End. Typical east coast scene. Water. Rugged, stony shore. And far up the beach, tiny in the distance, a big old white house.

*Elvira is sitting in her room, rocking in her rocking chair. She is holding one stone. She has taken the others from the windowsill back to the beach, but has kept this one. It fits perfectly in her cupped hands.*

*She lifts it near her face. Touches it with her lips. It is cool. Less smooth than it looks. She sniffs. Dust. She touches it with her tongue. Salt.*

*The stone's colour is subtle and complicated, a stippling of gray, blue and pale magenta. The spot where her tongue touched is darker, like meat, like blood. For just a moment, when she saw the stone under the water, she thought it was a heart.*

*She rocks in her chair, holding her stone. She hears a car pull up beside the house. A car door open. Shut.*

*The stone is getting warm in her hands. She imagines it dimly alive, with presence and awareness. It has been heaved into place by ice, rolled into shape by water. And now picked up and placed on a windowsill by herself. She wonders if it knows where it is, what has happened to it. If it wants, if it can want, to get back to the sand and the waves.*

*She hears a knock. Hears Lorna getting up and going to see who's at the door. Hears men asking questions. Hears Lorna's answers, reluctant but truthful.*

*Elvira rocks and thinks. She could take the stone with her. Or she could leave it in this room. Or she could return it to the beach. What does the stone want?*

*Steps on the stairs up to her room. Heavy. Slow. Authoritative.*

*She brings the stone once more close to her lips. She whispers to it. Then she rocks and waits, listening to the steps, hearing them pause. She does not even turn her head to look at the uniforms filling the door to her room.*

*"Miss Tomlinson? Miss Elvira Tomlinson?"*

"I got a letter from her the other day," my mother tells me. "She's taken early retirement and bought herself a big old white house. You'll never guess where."

"No!" I say, slowly grinning.

"Yup. That's what she's gone and done. Worked hard and saved her money, all those years."

She puts her hands flat on the kitchen table in front of her and looks down at them. She deliberately stretches and flattens them, I know, to check on the encroachment of her arthritis. The flesh of her face hangs a little forward, deepening the creases at her nose and mouth.

We are silent together for a little while. We often are now. Sometimes I'll ask her questions, to get her going on her old stories. Then I sit and listen to her digressions, which are becoming fewer and shorter. There are lapses and omissions, too. I usually remember the parts she has forgotten, but I don't correct her. I'm not sure that it isn't natural and right for parts of her stories to be falling away now, like petals.

"Didn't you tell me once that Elvira used to sing?" I coax. She glances up, her eyes round and young.

"Did I?"

"Uh huh. You told me once that she used to sing in school. At assemblies."

"Did I tell you that?"

"Yeah, you did. And you told me that once she had on a white dress . . ." I go on encouragingly. The memory comes suddenly into focus for her.

"Oh, *right!* I remember now. And she sang — Damn it, what did she sing?" After a moment, she looks at me. "When did I tell you that about Elvira singing?"

"Ages ago. I think I was just a kid."

"Well, kid, you've got some memory. Funny. I can remember her singing, I can hear her voice, I can see her clear as anything. But I can't remember what she sang. And I can't remember telling you about it either. Funny." She looks at her hands again, smiling a little to herself.

I have come for the day from Toronto, where I live now. I visit her more often than she visits me, though she can still manage the bus trip now and then. I meet her at the bus station and take her north on the subway. Each time we pass Wellesley Station, she says, "Elvira used to



live on Wellesley Street.”

Just once, early on, I suggested looking Elvira up and going for a visit. “No, oh no,” she said quickly, her eyes taking on that young, fearful look that used to infuriate me. It is equal parts longing and fear, and in old age the fear is winning.

But there’s more to it than that. My mother knows something about Elvira, has known it all along. And I’m beginning to think that I’ve known it all along too. You don’t visit Elvira. She visits you. You do not haunt a ghost. You let it haunt you.

I suppose that’s why, though I haven’t seen Elvira in decades and will probably never see her again, hardly a month goes by that I don’t search my mind and find her in it somewhere. Walking to the sea.

In my apartment I take my mother around, showing her my things. They are new to her each time, even the old things she has given me. “Did I?” she asks wonderingly when I remind her that yes, she actually gave me the chicken-pecking clock, the Dutch girl string-saver and the pink plastic radio. She doesn’t remember coming up from the basement during my last visit, wiping dust from something with her sleeve. And, when I tried to protest, pressing it on me, saying, “Oh, come *on!* You *love* this old stuff!”

*Elvira is walking the beach. She walks with her head bent, looking for stones to pick up and take back to her house. Her hair is as gray as the sea.*

*She is singing. I strain my ears. I think I know what song it might be. But the words and the tune are shredded to silence by the wind and the waves.*

## H. June Hutton / NEXT OF KIN

It's time for the truth, so here goes: I came to in a room full of strangers, and I've done it before.

Ask my family.

Oh, they'd have had lots to say about me doing it again, but I saved them the trouble by not calling.

I think it was the stink of dog and dirty feet festering all night in a closed-up room that woke me. Then again it might have been that lame-assed dawn peculiar to this place: pale, cool, leaking through those wilted curtains, then sliding damp across my nose like a tongue. Either way, I gained consciousness right next to some old fucker in baggy pants and suspenders, whose belly shuddered at the opposite end of a beat-up couch.

My heart lurched, you bet: an out-of-body jolt like waking up someplace where you aren't supposed to be sleeping — church, a poetry reading — and you wonder for a moment where you are. But this time the moment didn't go away, just dug right in there, took root in my stinging eyes as they darted over the room.

Shit.

*Nothing* familiar. Not a wall, not a guy. Usually I recognize *someone*.

(But even then I couldn't help wise-cracking, couldn't admit that this was scary stuff.) *Jesus*, I whispered to myself, *hope to Christ I didn't go and sleep with one of them*. And I think I even laughed.

One guy was sprawled across the raw floorboards, his cheek smeared against the hide of that stinking dog; another, his mouth open in a nest of brown hair, snored from the bed in the corner. Two more, dark haired and scarlet skinned, spilled under the table like shadows. Real beauties.

The old bugger beside me was white-whiskered and almost bald. He gummed the air like he was about to wake up, his red lumpy hand jerking towards his fly as a silent reminder to me that I hadn't been to the can since — well — who knows when?



I grabbed the nylon bag beside me, rocked to my feet and high-stepped over bodies, cursing every leg thrown wide. There was just one door and it had that look of a front door: tall, wide, a handle with dead-bolt. What kind of house doesn't have a bathroom? But I held my breath — hell, I've been in worse — gripped the doorknob, and hoped for the sight of a gas station. At the very least, a big bush.

What the —? My eyes took in the blighted landscape, the snow-dusted weeds, the frigid breeze. My head snapped back to the carcasses behind me: parkas, long johns, toques — how had I missed all that?

And *still* I was smirking.

It wasn't until someone gurgled, "Shut the fuckin door!" that finally, something somewhere inside my head clicked. I didn't have time to consider it right away — I was tugging ferociously until the splintered door shut, eager to oblige so I could avoid all that morning-after crap — but when I squatted over the dusty weeds, sniffing furtively for the tell-tale tuna scent of sperm and, gratefully, finding none, I had to admit I had really done it this time. Done it beyond the point of pretending I was okay and that everyone including my mother — and sometimes especially my mother — should shut up and stop bothering me. This was not okay. I was up north somewhere. In jeans and a windbreaker. I should be walking the seawall in this outfit, stopping for coffee at an outdoor table on Denman.

What the hell was I doing up here?

I zipped quickly, my butt stinging from the cold, then shouldered my bag and crunched up a gravel embankment to the highway, gnawing rapidly at a stick of gum I pulled from a pocket.

The highway ran in two directions, of course, confounding me. How do you know which way to go when you don't know where you are?

But a truck coming over the hill gave me hope. I stuck out my thumb and it swung over, jiggling across the frozen gravel.

The driver leaned over and called, "Inta town good?"

"You bet!" I called back, and climbed in.

His pale eyes slid over my thin jacket and shoes, but whatever he was thinking, he kept to himself. I appreciated the silence. Only when we passed a highway sign that said WHITEHORSE 9KM did I know exactly where I was.

•

"You drink too much," my mother had told me two weeks before. "And now this talk of moving away — it's dangerous out there!"

"Like it's safe here," I cried.

Murder is supposed to be a hot item for the six o'clock news, not a silence that swallows you one autumn day when you arrive home to find *Mom* hunched on the top step, searching her flowered apron for the right words.

Someone tell me: what do you do when chaos comes home, when one of the faces on the TV screen is yours, a white arrow dancing over that picture of last year's picnic, freezing over the round woman with the flashing smile, identifying the rest of you as next of kin? Maybe until that newscast you were the one who each evening paused over your pork chop and potato to say, "Too bad," or "Thank God it's not me," or even "How can those people live with themselves? The regrets, the guilt, the anguish?"

Me? I drank.

Oh, there are uglier stories. I was watching the very next night, when the mother with her face in her hands begged, *please, we just want our little girl back*. But it was *my* story, and *my* thoughts that kept dragging me down into that same old nightmare where the soft hands that moulded the stories of my childhood now claw monstrously for mercy in the blackening air. And that's all I see, which enrages me, because *I want to know*, when she saw the knife coming at her, *I want to know*: did she realize this was it? *I want to know*: Did *she* know she would die lips hanging in a smile that would make her neighbour scream?

"For goodness' sake," said my mother. "There's no answering questions like that."

No, she refused to share my hell, to crack. So I, not just loaded again but nasty drunk that night, searched for the words that would bruise her rosy resilience, would dig under her firm resolve that we get on with our lives. "What's the matter with you?" I began, pausing just long enough, delighting at the purpling of her skin: "She was your *sister*."

Yeah, and she was my auntie, a position in our family so secure that a second name was never needed, any more than you need to add



another name to *Mom*. As the driver geared down for our back-door entry into Whitehorse, bouncing and rocking us past the industrial park and then the shacks of the Indian village, I could hear Auntie's voice lifting clear and sharp across her kitchen, could see her arms jiggling as she peeled carrots at the sink, her hips just starting to vibrate, her shoulders shuddering until she shook her hands free and flung out her arms, plum-painted nails scraping the walls, full chest heaving and straining at the flimsy tangerine dress. I had to take a deep breath, too, and softly hum along to plug my thoughts from splattering the high notes into sounds that I wasn't prepared to hear yet . . .

*Mañana, mañana, mañana ees good enough for me!*

and I let brown-skinned girls with compact breasts finish the lines, their baskets of fruit poised perfectly above their heads, each knowing that to tip even slightly would cause an avalanche.

Railway tracks flashed at me from the banks of the Yukon River; ravens bounced blackly on the power lines. "Main Street!" my driver called and skidded to a stop. I thanked him for the ride and hoisted the bag back onto my shoulder. As fresh air filled my lungs and blood pumped life back into my brain, more scraps of the night before floated down.

My family wasn't too thrilled with the way I'd left, pissed once more and this time cursing them *all* for acting like everything was so normal now. "Why don't you just cry, for Christ's sake?" my sister yelled back. "You didn't even go to the funeral! Maybe if you had you wouldn't be so screwed up."

But I pretended I was suddenly deaf, leaped up and bolted out the door. Told them often enough that I'd be leaving: this time I'd show them. On Fraser Street I flagged a cab for the airport. No one ran after me or called out my name. Not even my brothers. I think they were more concerned about the neighbors because once before when we'd had a yelling match, me on the front lawn and them on the porch, somebody had called the police.

I like to tell people I chose the Yukon after staring into my glass and seeing the ice cubes slam into each other like ice bergs. That's only partly true. Oh, the inspiration came from the bar, my first stop at the airport, but it was the sudden notion of a land where everyone

drank as much as I did that really charmed me.

My second stop at Vancouver International was the shops, where I did some serious travel planning. I'd been in such a rush to leave the twisted, purple faces of my family that all I'd grabbed besides my coat was my camera, which hung from the same hook because I took it everywhere, as conversation repellent. Try it some time: hold it up to your face and people stop mid-sentence and start grinning like banshees. Of course, I also had my wallet (in pants pocket; comb, in shirt; tampons, tucked into tops of socks — a purse just gets in the way). But I needed luggage now, so I bought one of those navy blue nylon travel bags. Also got a travel toothbrush, toothpaste, the works. Even bought underwear, although all I could find were boxer shorts with red hearts between *I* and *Vancouver*. What the heck, I thought. Who'll see them? No guy's been near me since I gained those last 30 pounds.

Mom never lets up; she says it isn't just the weight that scares them off. For a long time she used to say I was going to turn out just like Auntie, and I used to say thanks for the compliment. But I knew she wasn't talking about the funny Auntie who had us howling over the time the buttons popped on her Depression panties, sending them tumbling to her ankles. Or the one about putting Ex-Lax in Grandad's lunchkit to teach him for stealing her and Mom's chocolate bars. She said that all the way home that night he bolted down the alleys, using the trash cans as crappers, and in his cockney best, screaming, "Ya bleedin' bloo-dee bitches!" so loudly they could hear him from the back porch.

No, Mom was talking about the divorces, the short skirts on such heavy hips, and that legion where the band played *Mañana*.

There are no snakes up north. Back on Main Street I consoled myself with this fact as I shuffled around the drunk who sat on the ground staring at the frozen puddle of puke between his legs, a sight that made me feel like puking too. I must have read about snakes on the plane because somehow I knew they can't live in permafrost. But I'm not positive. The truth is the entire flight including my arrival remains one big blank.

It took only five minutes to walk the entire length of Main Street's false-fronted shops and businesses, but by the end of the first block my



toes were numb. My freezing nostril hairs tickled and I sneezed, bringing tears to my eyes that instantly froze, gluing my eyelids shut. Blinded, I pulled my fingertips from the relative warmth of my nylon pockets and pressed them to my eyelids until the ice melted. By then my knuckles were shot through with so much pain I could have cried but for fear of my lashes freezing shut again. I stumbled into the cramped lobby of a two-storey hotel that must've been named after a husky, and I booked a room.

"How many nights?" asked the desk clerk at the Taku.

I stared hard at the blacks and golds that swirled crazily in the carpet, then ran a hand through my reddish hair to tidy it. "One," I decided. Why would I stay any longer?

But upstairs in my room my reflection in the full-length mirror snagged me: pudgy, pale-skinned, mine was the kind of body meant to be swaddled in an arctic parka. With the hood up and the zipper to my nose, you'd never know I was female let alone fat.

Next night I was sitting in the Taku bar nursing a beer, watching smoke curl up from every other hand, when a chunky blonde woman in an army-green parka approached me. I could picture her out on the tundra, zipped from crotch to snout. Pass for a guy for sure. But unzipped, her breasts swam under her shirt like they were ready to lactate.

"Hear you take pictures," she said, jerking her head towards her table. I squinted through the bar smog and saw the guys from yesterday morning. Shit. Even the old fucker, the upper half of him still showing long johns. This must be where we all met.

"Sort of," I said, nodding to them, then turning back to the big chick. If I was the typical pear, she had to be two axe handles. Bigger than Auntie ever was. For a second I felt my face crumple but covered it in a cough. "I've taken a couple of courses."

"Any good?" she asked.

I narrowed my eyes, she stuck out her chin, then shoved her hand forward and introduced herself as Alex, the editor of *The Whitehorse Star*. I surmised correctly that that must mean she was hot shit in this town, so I, jobless since I got canned for absenteeism at the photo lab, introduced myself as Jay, short for Jane. Then, to get over the awkwardness of two big women standing to shake hands and hip-checking

two tables apiece, I told her I had some pictures on me that I'd just had developed, and suggested we sit. I dug in the pocket of the navy parka I'd bought on plastic that morning after it hit 30 below.

"Here," I said.

I'd snapped off a roll the day before. Couldn't think of how else to spend my first day in town. I liked the one of the late afternoon sun, which is really about 1 o'clock since the sun sets at 3:30, hitting the clay cliffs and turning them golden. She preferred the one of the drunk sleeping on the Post Office steps. I liked it enough to take it, but something about it made me feel guilty or nervous, or maybe embarrassed for him. I don't know.

She tossed me her card. "If you want some freelance work, gimme a call."

A few days later I was hanging from the rail bridge at Carcross, snapping a dead-straight shot of the engineer waving from the train, as we had pre-arranged. My toes were toasty in my new, lace-up leather hiking boots. It had warmed up to 12 below; still, I blew into my hands to keep them warm, since gloves made shooting awkward. But the instant the steam engine rumbled under me and blasted its horn, I felt a red-hot scream erupt in me, more a whoop than a wail, starting way down in my gut and shooting straight up my throat. Because in all that cold and wind and scared shitlessness of dangling above a frigid lake was the sheer joy of knowing that if I'd been in Vancouver right then, I'd have been fighting rush-hour traffic, I'd have been watching my mother and my sister pore over those newspaper clippings that criss-crossed the kitchen table in a patchwork of attempted understanding: "Found in her east-end apartment" and "Unknown assailant" and "Bread knife wiped clean." Jesus. Some getting on with life.

"You wanna know why she was killed?" I blurted one time, which was cruel, given our sex and marital status, but cruelty was the whole point. "Because she was female. And *alone*."

After each shoot I headed back to the darkroom. Inside those black walls, with just a red bulb glowing and the gentle bubble of rinse water flowing from the sink, there was peace. Life grew at my fingertips; stories bloomed in the dark. Like magic, the faces of the Yukon leapt out from the tray of developer. Edith Johns grinning over her beadwork at the Native centre. Three-year-old Nathan Green hugging



a husky. Toothless old goats raising mugs of beer. Best of all, once that door closed, no one, not even Alex, was allowed to open it.

So I marked time in headlines. Each atrocity out there I noted up here and claimed another day of safety for myself. Mother would be pleased. In the rest of the world, bombs dropped out of the skies, governments collapsed and black markets festered in the vacuum, children were snatched from playgrounds and nurses raped on their way home from the night shift. But up north, the front pages tried to claim there was big news in government meetings or Chamber of Commerce awards. Only once in a while did someone freeze to death or drown, and even then you felt they should have known better. So I was fooled into thinking the craziness was like the snakes, slithering and multiplying far away in the warm sunshine. Then one night Alex sent me to record the "incident" out in Porter Creek. I thought it was a house fire. Maybe a dog fight. But when I pulled up in the Star truck my headlights shone on the RCMP handcuffing a man too drunk to stand. He was on his knees, his dark hair winding over his cheek. Beside him lay a bloody hunting knife. I heard him slur something about stolen beer as I stepped over his upturned boots and through the door to find two more men, their bodies limp on the floor, the all-too-familiar couch tipped over, the wilted curtains twisting in the breeze from the open door, the floor rushing towards me.

The cops must have called Alex. There's no shortage of bars in Whitehorse, and I'd hit a few before she caught up with me. I remember her holding my hair back while I puked out the car door, her milky voice assuring me that everything was going to be okay, that nobody was after me.

I didn't sleep well, the floor spanking the ceiling every time I closed my eyes. Then there was Alex, tucking me back in whenever she found me hanging out of her couch.

Early the next evening she forced me to swallow some tea and then moose stew and bannock, which I have to admit tasted better than it sounds. It was all very nice, but I couldn't stop thinking about all the other times I'd done this. Especially about that roomful of strangers my first night here. I was even remembering how long it had been since I'd run my hand up a man's thigh, dipping my fingers into frog-damp folds of flesh, exquisitely smooth, fish-quivering to life; how, despite my initial fears, it was the *last* thing me or one of those guys

would have considered that first night in Whitehorse. We were too far gone.

So I must have looked a bit down. Alex stood up. "Let's go for a drive," she said. I didn't feel much like getting into a moving car until she said we were going to the hot springs. I thought a hot soak might help my hangover.

Neither of us owned a bathing suit (think about it), but the manager gave us a couple of gigantic T-shirts. I stripped quickly then yanked mine on, darting out of the dressing room to give Alex some privacy. But she came charging out after me, leaping in the air for a cannon ball plunge that sent her T-shirt flying up around her ass, the surface of the hot water exploding upon impact. Just before the steam boiled up and over I saw her bobbing on her back, legs in the air, her sex a split peach spreading, lush and unapologetic, in waves of water and skin. I kept expecting that flesh to part and magnificent things to emerge: brown-skinned women, their baskets dangling carelessly, the fruit tumbling unblemished — I don't know. It was probably the hangover. But other than my own self, I'd never seen a naked woman before. A glimpse of a breast here, a tuft of hair there, maybe. Usually in gang dressing rooms where the exposed part was quickly covered with a towel. But to see her parts flung out to the world so trustingly — well, I could have cried. I wished I'd brought my camera.

I wished even more that I could be like her, but the turmoil that drove me north and wrapped me in bulky clothing kept a firm grip on the hem of my T-shirt as I eased into the water. Behind us we could hear more feet slapping along the tiles, ready to join us. Quickly, I swam to the other side.

I won't say I'll never have another drink, or that sitting in that stew of body parts was my moment of revelation, the big thaw, that I cracked open and howled my agony the way they do in movies. All I can say is I haven't had a drink since then, and it's been a couple of months. You'd think the sight of those dead guys would have cured me on the spot instead of sending me on another bender, but my mother would say that was just like me, to do the opposite of what was expected. Guess I needed to go on one more big tear just to prove how much I needed to stop. I don't miss the booze terribly, except when Alex and I go out for a nice meal somewhere and I think a glass



of burgundy would go down well with the steak. She always has one. Says the trick is to buy it by the glass, not the bottle, and limit yourself to the one glass, only. "You, too?" I asked her one time. "Yeah," she said. "Me, too, if I'm not careful."

I think one day I might be able to do that, too, allow myself the one glass, then stop. But for now I need some distance between me and alcohol. And time. It always come down to time, doesn't it? The cure-all for whatever ails you: hangover, addiction, love, death.

All day I've been listening to the unmistakable sounds of break-up: the ugly groan of plates of ice grinding the Yukon River free of winter, their jagged edges ripping along the riverbanks, uprooting whole trees and tearing to chunks any foot or leg caught in the cracks. It was first thing this morning, when Alex and I were driving back from Dawson City, that break-up hit. We had slammed to a stop, knowing a front page shot of a berg sailing down the Yukon would sell more papers than that bi-election we'd been covering. Scrambling up the dirt bank, parkas unzipped against the softening air, we laughed to be so high above the danger. Voyeurs. She talked about ankle-high mud that will soon appear on Main Street and the cheap brilliance of ragged wildflowers, colours you'd never combine in clothing, especially on butts as wide as ours. But my laughter was stopped cold when those wrenching moans of splintering ice began again, sounds that raised the hair on the back of my neck, sounds that fell somewhere between the yanking out of a tooth or the screaming of the word *cunt*, as only a man with a knife can scream it. And I was half-tempted to fold right up, right there, jackknife into oblivion, kiss my own snatch goodbye rather than go through all the agony and effort of being alive another year and wondering if I'm next. But then Alex said I'd made it this far; why give up now? I knew that, of course, but I had to blink hard because it was the same half-assed kind of thing one of my family would have said — and probably I should have hugged her for it, except that I was flustered by all this quick emotion welling up inside me.

So instead I reached down, fingers fumbling for the cold edge of zipper, and pulled the right-hand half of my parka over my chest, then wrapped the left-hand half over top of that, then crossed my arms over the both halves, and held tight. I looked straight ahead but could feel her hand against my back, urging me towards the car. Almost there, I told myself, almost there.

## Grant Buday / WHITE LUNG

At three in the morning Epp thinks of White Lung. His buddy Klaus was always warning Epp about White Lung, the baker's version of Black Lung, which miners got from breathing coal dust. And it was true that every graveyard shift Epp inhaled flour by the sack full. He'd been doing it for twenty-two years. Klaus said soon Epp'd be on one of those oxygen cylinders. And after that it wouldn't be too long before it was straight to the boneyard. Which was why he wanted off graveyard shift. But they were giving him the run around. Klaus said statistically speaking Epp had seventy-four years. That meant thirty-three to go, barring another injury. Epp knew he was accident prone. Still, he meant to make the most of those years, especially since graveyard was killing him. Klaus said so. Epp believed everything Big Klaus said.

Epp was dumping flour. At 5'3", 120 pounds, Epp was a runt; the flour sacks weighed 40 kilos each. Epp didn't know exactly how much 40 kilos was in pounds, but it was too much, it was dead weight, like shifting a corpse, or how he imagined shifting a corpse to be. But a corpse at least there'd be arms and legs to grab. The 40 kilo sacks only had ears. That's what they called the corners, the points of paper that Epp gripped when he heaved the sacks from the pallet to the flourdump. The flourdump was the size of a ticket booth. It was a chest-high sieve with walls. And it vibrated. He dragged a sack from the pallet, slit it lengthwise, then wrestled it onto the vibrating wire mesh where the flour got sucked down to the silos, except, that is, for the flour dust which puffed up in big clouds that Epp inhaled, contributing to his White Lung. When Epp got home each morning he coughed flour dust. He picked it from his nose, his ears, even dug it from his belly button. It went right through his pants and clung to his crotch. There was flour on his basement suite floor, his couch, his sheets, even in his coffee. Epp drank 15 - 16 cups a day and lived on raisin bread he stole from the bakery.

By three a.m. everything in the bakery had settled down for the



night. The bread had been sliced and wrapped and it waited in trays for the trucks. They'd shut off the overhead and it was quiet, a three a.m. lull in the world, a low-tide calm during which everyone dwelled on his own private concerns: money, baldness, paunch, sex, the fact that graveyard shift took ten years off your life.

Epp thought of Lee. They'd lived together. They'd had things in common, like flea markets. They were connoisseurs of flea markets and garage sales. She'd plan out their entire weekend around them. When she got the table at the flea market on Terminal, Epp was thrilled. Her own table — their own table. Epp was proud of being with Lee, proud that the other vendors knew them as a couple, and that he didn't have to pay the quarter to get in. He'd always bring Lee a coffee, or spell her so she could step out for some air, because after awhile you didn't notice how musty it got, and he worried for her lungs. After all, everything in the flea market was turning to dust. It was bad enough that she smoked rollies without inhaling the dust of old books, old *National Geographics*, crumbling couches, rotting shoes. Everything had that basement smell. That was something Epp didn't like. That and the men who looked at Lee. Lee was five-feet-even and a hundred pounds. A hundred-pounds-perfect, Epp always said. He liked the ring of it. A hundred-pounds-perfect. She made leather clothes and sold them: belts, bags, moccassins, coats, and a specialty line of panties and brassieres. You had to order and pay for those in advance. The guys'd always ask about them. They'd grin and ask was she wearing them and could they see. And Epp, all 5'3" of him — 5'5" in his Daytons — would feel the blood pumping up big in his ears and his heart panicking in his chest. But he'd stand up to them. "It's none of your business what she's wearin'." The guys'd eye Epp and laugh, but move on. Sometimes Lee had got mad and said he'd chased off a customer. Epp had always studied the guys she said that about.

Lee was a number. A fox. And she looked hot in that leather coat with the tassles along the backs of the arms. Epp liked that sweet leather smell he associated with her. It was her smell. Smell was important. She liked that he came home smelling of baked bread, even though he was only a janitor and not a real baker. And there was that time, his 30th birthday, when she buttered him, buttered him like he was a cob of corn. He'll never forget that birthday, especially since the

next one she was gone. She left because "They weren't going anywhere." Epp had asked where she wanted to go. She couldn't say, but she left on the back of a motorcycle.

Every time Epp saw a pair of LEE jeans he thought about her. She used to get a charge out of the fact that she was named Lee and so were the jeans. She collected the leather LEE patches. Epp figured he should've taken that Small Arms repair course he'd seen advertised in a matchbook along with Power Engineering and Hotel/Motel Management. He'd've had a trade. Lee said he should because it'd be a step in the right direction. Klaus had agreed.

Klaus was on days now, so they only saw each other when their shifts overlapped for half an hour in the morning. Epp felt betrayed when Klaus left graveyard for days. He wanted onto dayshift too, but Singh, the Supervisor, wouldn't let him. "Why not?" he'd asked, "I got the seniority." Singh had told him why not: "Because you're a fuck-up." Singh kept him tucked away on janitor shift for his own good. But even there Epp screwed up. He got his hand flattened between the rollers of the moulder four years ago and it swelled to the size of a boxing glove. He nearly blew his eardrums out cleaning them with an airhose. He broke his fingers on the iron bread racks at least once a year. And one time, when they let him load the oven, the mechanical arm that raked in the pans caught him and he got dragged right in. Klaus hit the Emergency stop. They hauled Epp out by his feet, hair burnt and eyebrows scorched.

Epp knew they laughed. He heard them. He ripped open another flour sack. The flour came in boxcars. Five Roses Flour. By the end of a night of unloading one of those boxcars your fingers were shot, the tips bruised and bleeding like they'd been hit with hammers. Epp slit open another sack and heaved it onto the vibrating grate. He slit the sacks with a small piece of slicer blade wrapped at one end with electrician's tape. The slicer blades were 12 feet long and ran in a loop around two spinning drums. That was how you got sliced bread, and why most of the guys who ran the wrappers had stumps for fingers.

Epp gutted another sack. Flour puffed up, dusting his face. He thought of his lungs. When Epp tried using White Lung as a reason to get off graveyard, Singh had pointed out the box of disposable face masks right there by the door next to the earplugs and gloves. Epp



didn't know what to say. He didn't want to wear one of those gauze masks. Klaus always said it was too late for masks because they were all dead anyway. Epp had liked that. He liked the sound of it. And it was true. They were old guys now. Let the kids wear masks, there was still hope for them. Thinking like that had made Epp walk differently, like he was an old campaigner, a veteran of the wars, a sod buster who'd been walking these goddamn cement floors since before some of these young jobbers were born. Epp remembered when they used real eggs in some of the breads. They'd actually stood there cracking eggs into the buckets of flour. Epp was forty-one; he'd be on graveyard until he was sixty-five. Unless the plant shut down first. Ever since the roll-back that's all anyone talked about. Except Klaus. Klaus hardly talked at all anymore, and when he did just said it didn't matter. Epp figured he meant it didn't matter because Klaus was going to open up his own bakery soon, but Klaus wouldn't talk about that either. Epp thought of that oxygen cylinder awaiting him. An oxygen cylinder and a wheelchair. And no Lee. Suddenly all that crusty romance was gone. He turned and shouted at the cement walls: "THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT GRAVEYARD SHIFT!"

He glanced around, embarrassed. He was alone though, nothing there but sacks of flour and the forklift. Epp had never driven the forklift. Twenty years and he'd never been allowed to drive it once. Singh wouldn't let him. He wouldn't even let him sit in it and pretend. It was parked ten feet away, a Mitsubishi.

The first thing Epp did was lurch the forklift forward and slam it into the wall. "Shit!" He hit the gas, backing around the corner toward the edge of the loading dock and a five-foot drop.

Donnelly, spraying insecticide along the walls, screamed: "EPP!"

Terrified, realizing this was a bad idea, Epp jumped out. But he forgot to put it in neutral, and he watched the forklift run straight over Donnelly's foot then glide right off the dock.

Singh called the ambulance while Dean Smee, the First Aid man, cut Donnelly's boot from his foot. Donnelly's shirt was transparent

with sweat, and he was shrieking, beating the floor with his hand like a hit bird beating the ground with its wing.

When the ambulance left with Donnelly, the others headed to the coffee room. Smee set Donnelly's boot in the middle of the table.

"Steel toe." He tapped the toe cap with a spoon. "He's lucky. Be walking around on a stump otherwise." Then he pointed to the arch support, which, cut open, revealed its anatomy like a surgical exhibit. "Good boot. Three-ply sole. Air cushion heel." Smee was an expert on footwear. He knew all about industrial shoes, earplugs, face masks, safety goggles. He'd trained in Industrial First Aid to improve his job prospects against the day when the Vancouver plant shut down. Smee was practical. He was taking more courses, thinking of becoming an ambulance attendant. People were always getting hurt or sick so the prospects were good. Smee had three kids. His wife was a nutritionist. They both weightlifted because it was good for your bones.

Singh looked around. "Hey. Where's Epp?"

They found him out back by the sinks where the machine parts got washed. He'd barricaded himself into a corner with stacks of blue plastic bread trays, and armed himself with the power washer, a pressurized hose that shot scalding water.

"Stay back!" Epp fired water over their heads to prove he meant business.

"Okay," said Singh. "Come out've there." And Singh, holding out his hand for the weapon, walked toward him.

Epp saw him coming. He panicked. He gripped the lever and hit Singh square in the chest with a blast of water that knocked him on his ass.

Smee pulled Singh out of range.

"Call Wong," said Smee. Wong was the General Manager.

"At four in the morning? I'm calling the cops."

"You'll traumatize him."

Singh gave Smee a look. He knew Smee was taking those medical courses.

"Wait'll Klaus comes in."

Singh knew Epp and Klaus were buddies. Singh also knew that Epp began getting worse when Klaus quit graveyard. "Epp. You wanna talk to Klaus?"



"Yeah! Get Klaus! I'll talk to Klaus!" And even as Epp spoke he felt his throat thicken with tears. He saw the cops on the TV news hunkered behind the open doors of their cars waiting for the signal to storm the bakery and haul him out in handcuffs.

"Can you hold on?"

"Yeah! Sure!" Now Epp felt a little better. He heard the concern in Singh's voice, like he cared, like they were working together on this, like Epp was in a bind and it wasn't his fault. And it wasn't, not really. If Singh'd only have let him drive the forklift even once or twice this would never have happened. If they'd only let him off graveyard everything'd be fine. So Epp held on. He stared at his watch, the watch Lee gave him, like a miner trapped in the dark staring at a light. He wondered if Donnelly was going to beat him up. He wondered if he was gonna have to pay for the forklift. Or go to jail. All he wanted now was to go home, to bed. He put his watch to his ear and listened to the ticking. He shut his eyes and a sob surged like a hiccup. He quickly knuckled the tears from his face then peeked through the gridwork of the trays. It was 4:20. Forty minutes before Klaus'd be in. Epp peered out at the sacks of flour and sugar, the boxes of Australian raisins, the barrels of waste dough swelling up and flowing over and filling the air with a live-yeast stink. He cupped his palm over his mouth and nose and breathed, imagining that oxygen cylinder Klaus said was waiting for him. White Lung. He wondered if it'd hurt. He should've taken that course in Small Arms repair. He hadn't though because Klaus was always talking about quitting and opening his own bakery, and saying how Epp could come work for him. That was before he went and got off graveyard. Now Epp thought maybe Klaus didn't really want Epp to work for him.

When Klaus plodded in at five a.m. Singh was waiting. He explained the situation. Klaus said nothing. He'd been drinking. Just a few beers to get him started. Everyone knew Klaus was an alcoholic. They also knew that no matter what shift he was on he always arrived an hour early. Klaus and Singh headed out back.

When Epp spotted Big Klaus he shouted. "Klaus!"

Klaus shoved his hands into his pockets and swallowed a belch. He had his beer buzz up and going and wasn't really surprised to find Epp holed up behind the trays for running over Donnelly's foot with the forklift.

"Klaus!" Epp wanted Klaus to toss him a line, to haul him out of here. He waited, wide-eyed, to see what Big Klaus was gonna do.

Klaus spoke quietly, as if Epp was sitting across the lunch room table from him. He said, "Epp."

Epp huddled forward, face to the trays.

"What happened to all that beer?"

"Beer?" Epp wiped the tears from his face. Klaus meant the beer Epp made in the green garbage can last summer. Epp and Klaus had sat sucking on that siphon hose like Turks sharing a hookah, the floor covered in bottles and caps and carboys and spilled corn sugar. Klaus had talked again about opening a bakery of his own and baking quality bread, not the white flour crud Bestbuy pumped out. And Epp had nodded yeah, yeah, getting all worked up, thinking it was really gonna happen. Epp laughed now, remembering. "We drank it!"

"Did you get any into the bottles?"

"Sure! I got some in. It's still there!"

"Well let's drink them."

Epp was weeping now, the hot tears softening the dried flour crusting his cheeks. He wished Klaus was still on graveyard with him. They used to meet before the shift at the Blue Boy and down a few fast ones, and Klaus would talk about that bakery he'd open, how he'd make his own hours, be his own boss, even get to know the customers. Then they'd head to work, always arriving just in time to punch in at ten, so Singh couldn't give them shit. And they'd be smiling, smiling like they knew things, like they had plans, inside information, like yeah, we're on graveyard alright, but fuck you, we're not dead yet.



## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**ROBIN BLASER**, in company with Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, helped bring into being a poetry known and revered as that of the "San Francisco School." Over the years he has published numerous works, including *Pell Mell* (1988), and in 1993 he brought together all the elements of his poetry in *The Holy Forest* (Coach House Press). Robin lives in Vancouver. Here he replies to Colin Browne, continuing the correspondence begun in *TCR* 2:17/18.

**LEE ANN BROWN** received the New American Poetry Prize for her book, *Polyverse* published in 1996 by Sun & Moon Press. She lives in New York City.

**GRANT BUDAY** lives in East Vancouver. His most recent book, *Monday Night Man* (Anvil Press), was a finalist in the 1996 City of Vancouver Book Award. "White Lung" is the opening chapter of a novel.

**MARK GRADY** is 45 and feeling it. He was born in Liverpool, England, which seems a long long way away. He continues to pursue Art.

**MARGARET GUNNING** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in a wide variety of B.C. and national publications. She contributes book reviews frequently to the *Vancouver Sun's* weekend supplement, *Saturday Review*. Her poetry has won awards from the *Edmonton Journal* and the Salmon Arm Sonnet Competition and has been published in *Prism International*, *blue buffalo*, and Peter Gzowski's *New Morningside Papers*.

**H. JUNE HUTTON** teaches and writes in Vancouver. She read part of this story aloud at the first annual Literary Blues Night at the Yale. This is her second appearance in *TCR*.

**K.D. MILLER's** stories have appeared in *The Capilano Review*, *Writ*, *The McGill Street Magazine* and *The New Quarterly*. Her first collection of

stories, *A Litany in Time of Plague*, was published in 1994 by The Porcupine's Quill. She is currently working on a second collection which will include "Missing Person."

**ANN ROSENBERG** is a Vancouver critic, curator and art history instructor who worked at Capilano College for 17 years. She is a former visual media editor of *The Capilano Review* who now serves on the board and smokes her face off when volunteering at casino nights to benefit *TCR*. She has been following Mark Grady's work since "The Small Museum" show at the Contemporary Art Gallery in 1990 and exhibited his work in several venues in "The Spectacular State: Fascism and the Modern Imagination" show in 1995.

**ANDREW VAISIUS's** poetry has appeared in over twenty-five journals and magazines across Canada. He reviews poetry regularly for *Prairie Fire*, and most recently *Event*. Flat Singles Press (Toronto) published his chapbook, *But The Fools Got In The Way*. He is also a child care worker at an inner city day care centre in Winnipeg.





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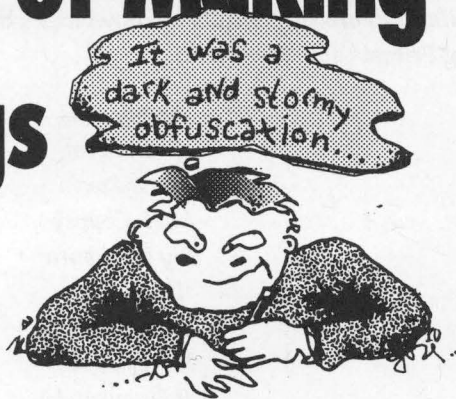
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