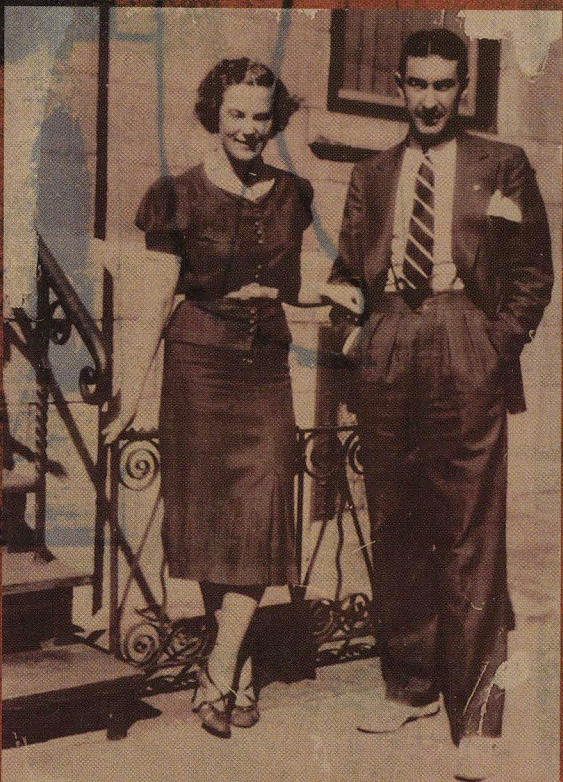


THE CAPILIANO REVIEW



I finally persuade Bernini to reappear.

(COURTIER) The King is in a mood, Cavaliere. Be gentle with him.

(as BERNINI) I am also in a mood. Who will be gentle with me?

— Don Druick

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The Capilano Review is published by The Capilano Press Society. Subscription rates for one year are \$25 (\$30 for institutions), \$45 for two years. All prices include GST. Address correspondence to *The Capilano Review*, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V7J 3H5. *The Capilano Review* does not accept simultaneous submissions or previously published work. U.S. submissions requiring a reply should be sent with Canadian postage stamps or international reply coupons, not U.S. postage stamps. *The Capilano Review* does not take responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Copyright remains the property of the author or artist. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the author or artist.

The Capilano Review gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Capilano College Humanities Division, The Canada Council, and the Government of British Columbia, through the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture.

The Capilano Review is a member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association and the B.C. Association of Magazine Publishers. *TCR* is listed with the Canadian Periodical Index, available on-line through Info Globe, and with the American Humanities Index. Microfilm editions and reprints are available from the University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Desktop publishing by June Hunter
Printed in Vancouver, B.C. by Advantage Graphix
Publications Mail Registration Number 151335

ISSN 0315-3754

(Published August 1998)



THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS SINCE 1957	LE CONSEIL DES ARTS DU CANADA DEPUIS 1957
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THE CAPILANO REVIEW

Series 2, No. 26

Fall 1998

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FRONT & BACK COVERS

Requiem Diptych I

(Altered version)

Soft ground & photo-etch on zinc

Intaglio & relief on

Arches Cover Buff

Colour Trial Proof 1

Image size 18" x 24"

Sheet size 22" x 30"

Pierre Coupey

Mona Fertig / SIX POEMS

TRAVELLER BEDS DREAM

She wants to sink deeper in to this horizon. A sweep of violet reaching as far as the delirious eye can see, as deep as your hands will plunge. Jacarandas. Sensuous blossoms. Joyous as a new body of love. She wants to stop this ebony train. This hot sleek machine snaking through New South Wales savannah. She wants to step off & be pulled down in this enchantment, in the middle of this private lush land. Heat of December. Australia. She holds her breath. Pink feathers, parrots, galliards, tremble in lavender branches. Holds her breath again. This is like love. This desire, this intoxication, (this suffocation.) She sweats like a butterfly in a jar, fertile, caught. Explosions delayed. Thighs ache. Come darkness she'll drown feverishly in her first fresh frangipani. Come easily in its soft golden center. Creamy sides. Smooth as silk. Sheets. Landscape covers her, lips to petal, stamen. Woman beds dream.

MANGO WOMAN

On a hot tropical beach she slices ripe oval mangoes, *dripping* sweet orange fruit. Bends the peel back again and again into *tangerine* crescent moons. Sweet squares. Offers pieces to you. She is *suntanned*, *luscious*, a pandanus tree shades her eyes. You are *electric*, *summoned*. Have a desire for. Your hand around her wrist. *Waist*. The (brown ankles) turning in the sand. The salt (nut) scent of. She falling into you. The lush (body) taste of. Her watermelon nipples. *Almond areolas*, as smooth as butter cream. *Mangoes*. Nothing else touches your naked chest. Her throat curves towards the rumpus coral sea, a melon sunset. *Passionate mouths*. Saying (more and) no more. You dream of your separateness unbinding, losing shape. You drown in each other like torrential rain. Bodies feeling too much. You are as smooth & as firm as a porpoise. *Hot waists*, *a comet plunging through rings of Saturn*. Love leaves good marks in the soft white. *All night, sky* (as plush) (as quiet) as mango, peach, banana, papaya. *Couple as still life*. Asleep under the Southern Cross. Heat thunders like a dream.

TABOO SEX

They fucked for the passionate first time and the gentle last. They fucked on a peaceful summer beach, in a brassy new city. They made love to the beautiful *genesis* of the world, and all its tragic decline.

The rumpled sunny bed, the faded living room sofa, the fragrant summer field melted away. The island could have buckled and tipped. They noticed nothing except Hunger & Thirst. The speed their clothes vanished. The aching atlas of their bodies. Lover's tongues. Closed eyes, clear backs. The man fitted the woman so *perfectly*. The *gorgeous* spacious sky of a woman. She squeezed/ pulled him deeper. Up to her waist. He was a hard tawny arbutus. All night the *rocking* tight cave. Her circular breasts rose & fell, *inside coursed the salty sea*. Throbbing stars. Sleep. Then the Universe spiralling open once again. She took him into her like a finger into a mouth. *Sucked*.

They were noisy black cats, shy birds, wild sweaty horses, breezy butterflies, biting dogs, soundless snakes, silky white rabbits, quick mink, the thirsty, burning flesh of the desert. The passionate line, *landscape*, of the body, peeled back, sounding, letting go. They were the world

desperately remaking itself. Joined so well, *so divinely*, they wanted to stay that way forever. Die that way.

They fucked for the foremost and tender last time. They fucked in a lush viridian forest, in a friendless winter city. They made love to the past & the future, the final couple left. *United*. They centred the dying earth, breathed life into each other's mouths. *Saved the world again and again.*

MEN KEPT FALLING INTO HER EYES SOME DROWNED THERE

All that summer, men kept falling unexpectedly into her eyes, into her lamp black irises, calm lake waters. She doesn't remember how it all began.

The first week a handsome man drowned there. An afternoon treat. She told him to grab on to her dark combed eyebrows, grab onto their soft wings and she'd fly him free, but he wouldn't listen. He wanted to stay there *forever*, drowning above her radiant smile. Now he's gone, floating around somewhere in her mind like a log in a lake. She feels responsible, slightly guilty, his wife says he hasn't come home yet, the police are still searching for him. All she did was look *into* him and he disappeared.

Next two fine men fell in. One came into the shop where she worked and splash, that was it, he slipped on her tanned cheeks, saw something he wanted and dove right in looking for *treasure*. He was a good swimmer, so he escaped her deep undertow, climbed out exhausted but happy. A *golden coin like love warm in his palm*.

She invited the last one into her warm as a hot tub eyes. She was enjoying herself. So she let him swim in her sunny vacation lake where he floated on his back for a while drinking margeritas pretending he was in Mexico. He wouldn't leave and she realized she didn't want him to. She couldn't stop thinking about him, looking at him, into him. She wanted to swim out & offer him a meal, dessert. She became obsessed, *sex sex sex* was all she could think of.

Then he started to paddle towards the shade of her sunset lips, bronze arms stretching, dark eyes on fire. He began sucking on grapes, the sweetness of papaw, took a slow climb between her melon breasts. He kept travelling further, deeper. *His phallus amaryllis blooming. Enjoy* her body said. And she did. They both did. *Afterwards he came out wet and grinning.* Swam back up to her eyes, he was just warming up, she could tell and so was she, but she decided enough was enough. Pleasure was addictive and she had an addictive personality. So she walked away, *(as cool as a summer popsicle).* Promised herself no more treats. She would buy sunglasses, avert her eyes, *stay home & work fertile miracles in her garden.* Look at trees, the failing shapes of flowers, wait for autumn mushrooms. Put up signs like *No Trespassing, private lake, mirror, woman.* Come back next summer.

WOMAN WHO RUNS WITH WOLVES

She has left the tiny town. She is as wild as an eagle, clever and clear as a winter stream. She has left her husband, her friends, her children, the mortgaged house, the tame confining weight of books & fences. She has done this suddenly. Like a phone call from earth. She just threw up her hands and said, *I'm coming!*

This is the story she tells the wolves. They read her like a book. They are her friends, *her lovers*. Their fur, silver brown waves, deep black currents, her fingers *run/relish* through. They have found her & led her to a secret cave, dry & high in the misty forested mountains.

She teaches them not to be afraid of the fire she makes, it is the same fire that burns in their eyes. They bring her fresh sweet lamb, farm chicken. She plucks and skins, roasts the meat over hot alder flames. Their teeth do not frighten her.

After dinner they clean their fur, then lick her, from head to toe. Over the shell of her eyelids, down her neck, her pendulous smooth breasts, her erect nipples, their wet tongues slide down her arched back, the slopes of her buttocks, over her

supple belly, slowly between her open legs, *too tenderly*. Their heated wolf breath. Their warm wolf tongues. The scent of sex and wolf fur, *trembling bones*.

Once a month during the full moon they turn back into beautiful wild-hearted men. She chooses the best story-teller to make love to. *Satiated appetites*. This is a night that never ends. The rest of the men, leave the cave for town dance halls, the loving beds of wild & free women.

She lives out a long & enchanted life. Runs with the pack in spring, her willowy legs as sensual as deer thighs. Her hair a long mane that smells of arbutus leaves on dry rock, sunlight on cedar boughs, a smokey alder flame. *Legends surface like pink blossoms*. Flock like blue jays above the town.

The wolves would die for her. They believe she is the moon goddess. Such moon breasts, such moon belly, such moon eyes. They would sacrifice their last meal for her, go lean as pines in winter. Men in the village roll restlessly in their beds. Turn to their women when they hear the wolves. Make love with a slow hungry fever. Close their soft animal eyes.

PENIS FLOWER

In the middle of our kitchen table your long electric green stalk pumps forth mint stars, *drowsy bees*. Unfurls butterscotch ardour. Spreads blushing fire south. Points winter northward, gives it the boot. Washes Greek kitchen *rose dore, lilac pink, creamy white. Couples water*. Outside the frozen pavement is mystic blue with piled snow, ice cuts us with its glass chill, 5 degrees below 0. Snow measures up to our bundled waists. How far up do the black fur-lined boots go? Inside our amaryllis steams. Warms the house. Pushes forth luxurious cinnamon blossoms in time to the fire crackling in the wood stove. Banners of petal red scarves. Fat flowers the circumference of silk pillows. You put your whole face in and sigh. *Scarlet movies play. Brilliant tamarillos are bought. Juicy mangoes devoured. Red Cuban bananas peeled. You invoke mating animals, penis of bull, chocolate horses, naked oiled gods. Lusty seamen. Our cockatiels mate beside you in their cage. Outside winter watches. The male rocks on the grey back of the female, small perky noises logging in his throat. Their yellow crests high. Orange pancake cheeks blooming. You long for the tight insides of women, goddesses. I hear you sigh. You crave more pollinating bees. Their tiny stinging kisses. You*

sigh again. Velvet tongues that polish pearls. *Mouth around your firm flesh, hands cupping ripe figs.* A winter romance. In the middle of January, your magic green wand manifests the tropics, *the hothouse tango, orchids opening at night*, sex as smooth as ice cream.

Nora Kelly / QUEBEC STREET

Overhead, furniture is dragged across the floor. I stand by the window and look out, watching the movers lug a grimy old sofa down the front steps and up the ramp to the van.

I've been living in the building for almost a year. It's an old apartment block that's seen grander days, still hanging on at the edge of a residential zone, just where the green yards give way to parking lots. From my windows I can see three churches, the employment centre, the post office, and a Catholic school. The school is right across the street. Behind the telephone poles and scruffy tree branches and squares of sky reflected in the school windows, I catch glimpses of the students in their classrooms. They swim close to the glass in their green uniforms, then fade into the murky depths. Twin globes, one terrestrial, one celestial, stand together on a windowsill. I can't see the stars, but the blue oceans and familiar continental shapes are distinct and beautiful.

In the evenings, when the students have gone home and the sky darkens beyond the squat silver cupolas of the Ukrainian church, the school is empty and quiet, except for bingo nights and basketball games and dances. On bingo nights, the players come in cars, filling all the parking spaces for blocks around. In the warm weather, they fan themselves beneath the fluorescent lights and open all the classroom windows. The numbers, quavering over the P.A. system, boom hollowly through the night air. I could play, in my apartment, if I had the cards. There's also a bingo hall in the next block. Some of the residents in my building are regulars.

Up the hill, there's the fire hall. The trucks thunder past my windows at all hours, but I've learned to sleep through the sirens. Other noises wake me up—drunks returning late from the Legion, old cars starting and dying on cold mornings, the man who coughs under my windows, the women on the corner cursing their johns. And, until last week, the television upstairs.

Most of the tenants here are used to the racket, or they're deaf. They hardly notice the fire engines or the dance music blaring from the gym.

They've lived here for a long time, longer than I've lived anywhere. Longer than I ever want to live anywhere. The couple who had this apartment before me stayed for forty-nine years. She yelled at him a lot; he smoked on the sly. Like it or not, these things are known. The apartment curls around a light well, one of the hollow, skylit shafts that pierce the building's core. The interior windows of eight apartments on four floors open into each well. One day I burnt the toast and had to shout up the well so people would know there wasn't a fire. If you smoke, everyone on the light well gets a whiff. If you have something private to say, you don't say it in the kitchen or the bathroom.

Back in the fifties, before I was even born, the couple raised a family here in this apartment. It's big, by today's standards—seven hundred square feet, eleven-foot ceilings, two bedrooms. Still, I've heard they had three kids. Everybody did—that was the baby boom we're always hearing about—but how did they stand it? Three kids bouncing off the walls, no back yard, no upstairs to send them to. Last year, the husband died. Emphysema. The children came and cleared the place out, moved the wife somewhere else.

The building is changing now; it's 'in transition.' The old renters are slowly dying off, and the new people are young, like me. The new occupants pay higher rents, but the apartments are still a bargain, unless you can't live without a dishwasher. They're never advertised; you have to hear about the building, track the vacancies, get to know the manager. When the old couple left, I moved in. I'm only twenty-six; I don't plan to die here, but I'm not going to leave for a while. I'm scraping by on student loans; I don't have the money to move upmarket, and most places where the rent is reasonable have major problems. This is paradise compared to my last apartment—two tiny rooms and the guys next door were always drunk. This building has no cockroaches and no drug dealers. Mainly, it has tenants older than my grandmother. They've known each other forever, and they feel safe here. The landlord isn't going to boot them out, or jack up the rent, or let rock bands move in.

When the old tenants go, they sometimes move to the Chapel of Chimes, the funeral home around the corner, lit up in pink and white neon. Now and then I walk to the corner store at night, to buy milk or juice for the morning, and I see fog coming in off the water, swirling around the Chapel of Chimes like pink smoke. The Evangelistic Tabernacle, right next to the chapel, is illuminated too, but its tall, silvery steeple disappears into the upper layers of mist. Miles away, there are mountains. They're often hidden by clouds or smog, but on clear days I can see them from my north window, filling the horizon between the tabernacle and the Baptist church.

The lights of the city turn the clouds strange colours in the evening—sooty orange and mauve. Once, a little after sunset, when it was already quite dark in the street, a big orange cumulus cloud hung right behind the cupolas of the Ukrainian church, and for a moment I thought the church was on fire. At night, the mountains and the sky merge into a flat blackness above the street lights. A single constellation hangs low in the tree branches: the lamps of the ski hill, twinkling like Scorpio.

It's not the end of the month, but everything in the apartment above mine is being carted away. Tables and chairs, a box spring and mattress and a chest of drawers have disappeared into the deep interior of the moving van. Cars pass, and a few pedestrians. The drivers crane their necks as they go by, everyone peers into the back of the van, as if the furniture will reveal a secret. Pedestrians slow down, even stop, for the spectacle. There are museums with rooms full of furniture arranged to show how people lived in the past—the pioneer's cabin, the Victorian kitchen with its spits and copper pans—but most people find them boring. Instead, they are transfixed by the momentary exposure of the sagging, grease-spotted sofa from upstairs.

I stand back from the window, so they won't see me watching. A hornet buzzes against the panes, desiring the light. Outside my apartment door, in the vestibule, the caretaker is hunched against the wall, observing the movers as they toil up and down the stairs. He wears a striped engineering cap pulled tightly over his thin white hair. His arms are folded, the anchor tattoo on his left hand tucked under his right arm. His red-rimmed gaze rolls upwards, following their feet as they climb the cracked stone stairs.

I don't need to see him to know he's there. He keeps an eye on things, watches everyone come and go, knows whose clothes are hanging too long on the lines in the laundry room, whose empty bottles are in the garbage cans. His dim basement realm smells of boiled potatoes. In the summer, strips of flypaper, ancient yellow like the newspapers under the linoleum floors, extend in long tongues from the ceiling. Each week, he floods the floors with disinfectant; the odor of hospitals and jails seeps under my door, into my kitchen.

The caretaker doesn't do repairs. He puts the garbage out, mops the floors and patrols the corridors. He lurks on the steps to the basement, jingling his keys. When snow dusts the sidewalk, he's out at five o'clock in the morning, scraping the metal snow shovel over the concrete a few feet below my bedroom window. He prints misspelled commands in felt pen on pieces of torn cardboard and nails them to the walls of the laundry room. "This means you," he adds, underlining 'you' three times. Once, when a friend of mine came to visit carrying a bottle of wine, he told her she wasn't allowed to bring it into the building. We laughed about that, but it isn't exactly funny to see him prowling the corridors, his mouth working, his eyes bulging with suspicion. He looks like one of the Boyars slinking around the palace in that old Eisenstein movie.

The movers bump down the stairs again and lumber past the windows carrying a cracked headboard. Where will all this junk go, I wonder. Everything is cheap and ugly, worn out and filthy. There won't be much more, apart from the television. A kitchen box with chipped plates and a thin frying pan, and an old valise, probably, stuffed with soiled cardigans and trousers and pairs of heavy leather shoes.

There won't be any records, I know that much. No pictures, no bric-a-brac. I saw the apartment once, when I first moved in. I went upstairs to ask the old man to turn down the volume on the television set. There was nothing on the walls, and if he'd ever listened to music, I would have heard it, the way I heard the TV. The set stayed on all day, so I can guess that there won't be any boxes of books, either. If he'd been a reader, I wouldn't have had the same noise problem. He watched television or looked out of the window. He was staring out the morning I moved in; I saw his face then, through the glass, heavy and

pallid, the flesh sagging off the bones. His mouth gaped open, a dark shadow behind the smeary windowpane.

The apartment he occupied has the same layout as mine. It looks east and north. Only the windows are different. The upper floors have bay windows. Under them, the old metal sheathing has rusted through, and sparrows have found the dry cavities beneath the sills. They build nests there in the spring. For some reason, the old man was annoyed by the birds; he kept trying to drive them out.

"Damn birds, damn birds," he'd say, when they landed on the sill. "Goddam birds!"—his voice cracking.

Incensed, he'd open the casement windows wide and slam them shut, over and over. The glass rattled. I'd see the sparrows swooping and twittering with distress just outside my windows. He frightened them, but they stayed. They outlasted him. I still hear them in the mornings, and I often see them perched on the ragged forsythia bush beneath my northern window, plumping their feathers. A dingy plastic bag, its catch of rain bulging in one corner, has hung there for months. Beside the building, the shaded earth is black and greasy, and slugs leave glittering trails in the weeds. The birds move lightly among the bending branches, wary of cats.

One of the movers shouts from upstairs. He wants help with the television. It's as big as an armchair.

The climate here is gray, and the seasons turn slowly. In winter, the hawthorns that line the street are bare, revealing the clumsy pruning of the city's landscaping crews. Criss-cross wires seine the sky. Now it is spring, and the branches bear clusters of leaves and dusky red blooms, half concealing the ragged wounds in the bark and the unpruned suckers. When the clouds lift, in any season, the morning sun shines directly into my windows. I watch it slide up behind the horizon of roofs. Slatted beams, like golden rulers, pass through the Venetian blinds and fall on the books on the opposite wall. Being unemployed, I can stay in bed and watch the light gilding the spines, travelling slowly from one end of the shelves to the other. One day last month I was listening to the sparrows and the early traffic when the sun suddenly rose from behind a low-lying cloud and struck a shaft into my room, hitting the gilt lettering on Grimm's Fairy Tales. The letters flashed the light back like a mirror.

In the worst part of the winter, I caught a bad cold, maybe the flu. I don't know how to tell the difference. For a week, I stayed in bed all day, reading and sipping mugs of tea, keeping warm under the blankets. It was quieter in the bedroom, I could try to study there. My so-called living room was uninhabitable; directly above it, Mr Todd watched his television. He used to turn it on some mornings as soon as he got up and leave it on for sixteen or seventeen hours, until he went to bed. He had a hearing problem, so he would turn it up all the way. He wouldn't wear a hearing aid, or even put a rug under the set to muffle the vibrations that travelled through the floorboards and the joists and my thin plaster ceiling. Coming home sometimes, I could hear the voices of the news anchors or the game show hosts leaking through the walls into the vestibule, even before I opened the door to my own apartment. Inside, the voices throbbed, loud and unintelligible. The ceiling filtered the words, retaining a sediment of consonants, letting the vowels ooze through. The worst programs were the comedies, with the laugh tracks. I had to close the kitchen window; the yammer echoed maniacally up and down the light well. Some people hear voices in their heads instructing them to kill; they must sound like that incessant bedlam, a noise that can't be shut out. My thoughts were murderous, that's for sure.

Not right away. I'm a reasonable person. When I first moved in, I knocked on his door and talked to him. I was polite; I thought he probably didn't know that the TV was a problem. It was obvious he didn't hear too well, but he heard me all right, and I wasn't shouting. He was so rude it shocked me. He didn't think I had any business asking him to lower the volume—it was his TV in his apartment. I guess nobody had ever complained before. Sometimes people get angry when you talk to them about noise, or their dog dumping on the lawn—whatever—but later they calm down. I let things ride, hoping that if I waited, he'd have second thoughts.

After two weeks, I was going crazy. I went upstairs again. He came to the door, egg yolk glistening on his bristly chin, and he told me he'd lived here for thirty years so he could do what he liked. I tried to explain how loud the noise was downstairs. I offered to buy a little rug and bring it to his apartment, just a mat to put under the TV to muffle the vibrations. He wouldn't listen. He just slammed the door and

clumped back down the hall in his heavy shoes. I wasn't going to get anywhere talking to him. So I complained to the manager, and then to the owner. Nothing changed; he's old and sick, they said. His kidneys don't work. He'll die soon. The manager never did a thing, except collect the rent and play bingo twice a week.

Mr Todd was almost alone. His wife had died eight years before; a sister came once in a while to clean a little. She humored him, hardly listening to what he said. It was always the same, anyway. She would turn the television down while she was there and do the dishes, standing at the kitchen sink with the window open to the light well, saying "That's right," or "What a shame," while the pots banged and the old man shouted at her from the doorway. Every few weeks, he telephoned someone and hollered into the receiver for ten or fifteen minutes. He never went out, except on Sundays, when he laboured asthmatically down the stairs and walked to church, wearing a long, thick gray coat and a hat like the ones businessmen used to wear forty years ago.

A couple of times, one of his knees gave way, buckling suddenly so that he fell down the steps, or collapsed on the sidewalk. The manager told me about this when I paid my rent and made my usual complaint about the noise. I was glad to know; I hoped he'd fall and crack his skull. The first time, I was ashamed of feeling like that. But not the second. By then I'd been in the apartment for six months, and I was way past any shame. I was knotted tight. Waiting.

Often, he would stand in the kitchen and scream abuse at his dead wife.

"Go to hell," he would shrill. "Go to hell and stay there! Shut the door and your mouth, too. Burn in hell forever!"

The hoarse shouts would dwindle into a long, accusatory mumble and then rise again, boiling with temper, until he grew tired. After I talked to him the second time, he started yelling at me, too. From his kitchen, he could squint down the well and observe my bathroom window. If he saw a light behind the wavy glass, a fusillade of curses would burst into the narrow concrete shaft, echoing from wall to wall like gunfire in a canyon, until his fury exhausted him and he broke into strangled coughing.

I took to bathing in the gloomy twilight that seeped through the glass lid above the shaft, and I fled the apartment, even on the days

when I had no classes to attend, walking until my feet were tired, sitting on benches in the park in good weather, or spending whole afternoons in the public library, like the shabby men who went there to keep warm. Coming back home, I would feel my muscles tense. Hostility breathed through the ceiling like the smell of potatoes coming up the stairs. Mr Todd's malignant spirit metastasized, inhabiting the walls, colonising the light well, the air I breathed. It got in everywhere. I could feel him above me, as he sat in his armchair, an inert lump of flesh in a gray food-stained cardigan, his eyes on the *Wheel of Fortune*, the life guttering out of him, nothing left but hating his dead wife, hating the birds, hating me, hating everything, no impulse but the spleen that still prodded his decaying carcase into rasping, spitty utterance.

Silence is something you can buy, if you have enough money. I've never lived in a building that was quiet—the kind with thick, clean carpet in the halls, concrete under the hardwood floors and extra layers of drywall. Economically speaking, Mr Todd was the kind of problem you have when your rent is low, the kind of problem that no one is paid to fix—like the warped window, the nests of frayed electric wire, the furred pipes. Like my wonderful plumbing, which regurgitates the used bathwater from the apartment next door.

I suppose some people will think I should have felt sorry for the old guy. To them I say, you try it. I started out with those feelings, the first time I saw him, but he kept on cranking up the TV and telling me to burn in hell because I'd had the nerve to ask him to turn it down. Sure, he probably forgot my existence half the time, but he wasn't always out of it. There were days when I'd walk up the front steps and see him at the window; I'd unlock my door and walk into my apartment and it would be quiet. Then, a minute later, the TV would go on. He'd seen me come in, and he'd do it just to show me, like it was his last little power trip before God pulled the plug.

I don't sound very nice, do I? I can remember when I was a nicer person, last year. Maybe it's useful to have had some insights into this state of mind—the kind that makes a guy go across the yard with a shotgun and blast his neighbours to smithereens—but, given a choice, I'd have passed. Instead, I got stuck with Mr Todd, and, after a while, when the TV went on, I just wanted the dumb bastard to die so

the TV would go off.

One time, I asked Marge, across the hall, how the old couple who used to live in my place had managed to tolerate him all those years. She just laughed.

"They were hard of hearing, too," she said.

Marge moved out recently, but not to the chapel. She went to a seniors' residence. I wish she were still around. I liked her. She was a kind person, but she had a sort of bite to her, and I could tell that she enjoyed her life. She hadn't been beaten down. Sometimes I think that half the tenants have lost their marbles. Martha, in number twenty-four, goes out every day in good weather and screams at sinners on street corners. Ellie, in nineteen, scours the dumpsters and staggers home with shopping bags full of other people's garbage.

They all have a hard time with the stairs. There's no elevator in the building, and most of the tenants who live on the upper floors stop in the vestibule to catch their breath before shuffling slowly up the flight to the second floor, or two flights to the top, where the water pressure is unreliable and the summer heat blisters the paint. I've carried stuff up for some of them, when they've been shopping. They flock to the supermarket on discount days and struggle back laden with cans of soup on special. Then the vestibule looks like a lobby in one of those nursing homes where they park the residents. It freaks me out. Most of them are nice people; they're OK, not like Mr Todd. Maybe they've had interesting lives. But how do they accept what they've come to? How do they laugh about it? Some of them make jokes. I think they're great when they do that, but I don't want to hear them talking about their bodies. I walk up the front steps, and they'll be going on about bum knees, dicky hearts, arthritis, or so-and-so's cataracts. Marge had a name for these sessions: she called them 'organ recitals.' I say hi and head straight for my apartment. Then sometimes I stare into the bathroom mirror, thinking I'd rather kill myself than be that old. I look at my skin. Skin's nice when it's young, when it's smooth and tight. How do you look at yourself when your skin gets baggy? When everything hurts and you can hardly walk up a flight of stairs? How the hell do you joke about it? I don't want to know.

A few months after I moved in, an old guy, Jerry, was found dead of a stroke on the third floor. I'd seen him a few times; he was thin

and totally bald, and he used to work in one of the salmon canneries. Hard work, standing all day long, chopping heads off fish. He was carried around the corner to the chapel, and then the apartment was painted, and a younger woman rented it. She's pregnant, I've been told. The old ladies are all excited. A baby in the building! When it cries, they'll be too deaf to hear it.

Everybody was sorry about Jerry, including me. But I really wished the grim reaper had harvested Mr Todd instead. I thought about moving out, but finding a good place gets harder all the time, and after I'd been in the apartment for a while, I couldn't give in. I was too angry. The old man wanted to drive me away, but I wasn't going to let it happen. I could wait. I could outlast him. I stayed up late and slept until noon, stealing a few hours of peace after he went to bed. Even then, the television sometimes woke me up early. When it was the first thing I heard, I would feel the world recede, go out of focus; nothing was there except the noise that I couldn't stop. Drawing my knees up to my chest, curled around myself, I lay in the bed with the blinds closed, imagining silence. I waited for him to die.

From time to time, I would open my eyes in the morning and hear no sound from above. I would begin to hope that he had died in bed, that his flesh was already cold on the greasy sheets. Hope would stretch as the minutes ticked by, then snap at the sound of the first footstep. Always, he had overslept.

Then there were evenings when the television stayed on late, past the usual hour of relief at midnight, nights when I would picture him dead in the chair in front of it, slack-mouthed and blind, still staring at the flickering screen. I would think of the noise, of the set staying on all night, roaring and bleating at the corpse. I rehearsed phoning 911: the paramedics would force open the door, the neighbours would stand around the hallways in their bathrobes, whispering. Someone would rouse the manager. An angel of deliverance would march in and turn off the television forever.

I waited, thinking of the colors I would paint the apartment when Mr Todd was dead. I survived on fantasies of death: a fall down the stairs, a slip in the bathtub, some swift organic failure. I didn't have pain in mind, only extinction. "He'll die soon," the manager said. I waited for months. In February, when it was wet and cold, and I was

stuck at home with my flu, I hardly thought about anything except when the old man would cash in his chips. But he lived on until the spring. Until the birds were nesting and the hawthorn trees were in bloom.

And then, at last, he did die. A week ago. I missed the whole thing. I'm taking a French course, and I was very worried about the oral exam. I'm not good at foreign languages; I'm studying French because it's a requirement. I went to the library to look for some tapes. And while I was out, he died. He didn't die in his apartment, though; an ambulance came and took him to the hospital, and he died there, late in the afternoon. The weather being pleasant that day, I was gone until the evening. Then I returned to a heavenly silence. The quiet! It filled the apartment like a fragrance, it lasted all night and went on into the morning, way past the latest hour he had ever slept. I felt the knots in my shoulders and my solar plexus begin to loosen, I had an almost light-headed pleasure in the traffic noise outside, the birds, the man with the spectral cough, the student with the guitar playing "Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore" for the fiftieth time. The stillness above was profound. I waited, not daring to believe it would last, braced for the clumping step, the slam of the window, the clatter of applause as the television burst into life. At eleven o'clock, there was still no noise. Like a soldier wondering why the shelling has stopped, stepping dazedly from hiding, I finally opened the door of my apartment and went to find out the truth. And the truth was that Mr Todd was dead. He'd died the day before, while I was out. The manager smiled when she told me.

"I guess you won't miss him," she said.

Bingo.

It's been quiet all week. Silence blankets the apartment like snow, like Sunday in a God-fearing town. I make my bed each morning, I drink my coffee in the living room, I spend all day in this space which now belongs to me. Today, there is noise from overhead as the movers go about their business: scrapes and thuds, footsteps, the hard, hollow sounds of vacant rooms. But these sounds don't disturb me. The old man lies in the Chapel of Chimes; tomorrow he will roll through the little curtained doorway into the furnace. The apartment above empties like a tub of dirty water.

The movers make the last, lurching trip down the stairs, carrying the television set in its gigantic housing of dark wood. They pass through the vestibule and appear on the sidewalk beneath the window. The television's monstrous eye is closed by a wooden lid. They thrust it into the van and close the doors. An oily cloud of exhaust spews from the tailpipe as they start the engine.

The caretaker, winding a length of string, watches them drive off, then shuffles down the stairs to the basement and opens the door of the incinerator. He feeds junk mail to the flames, piece by piece. I open the window in my living room. The hornet blunders out. I can hear the baby sparrows in their nests under the sills begging to be fed. I open a bottle of wine I've been saving, and pour a glass. I spread my papers on the table and begin to review the lesson on the subjunctive.

Don Druick / AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

The writing of every play is a personal odyssey, an inquiry into representation, expression, and desire. Difficult and exhilarating. For as my Gianlorenzo Bernini says: the disappointment of expectations makes us foreign to our own universe. Another battle. THROUGH THE EYES began several years ago in Tokyo: the first draft was written in ten days. Originally, a research offshoot of my BAROCCO ROMANO in which there is yet another Bernini character, THROUGH THE EYES has its very own and special patina of voice and experience. And why Bernini? Because Bernini, as the definitive artist of the 17th century, as the creator of exquisite form and beauty, as an individualist, as perhaps the most celebrated and prosperous artist of all time, as the master of the total environment, Bernini becomes a model for what an artist can be. He is our filter, our cypher to the past. He also becomes that part of all of us which moves mountains in our dreams.

THROUGH THE EYES is a play in two acts, for one actor; the story of Gianlorenzo Bernini's visit to France, in 1665. It is told to us by the COURTIER. All the other voices that we hear, some frequently, some only once, are related by him, through him. Anonymous, the journey of the play is finally his. At various times, the COURTIER can be thought of as: defending himself, explaining his retirement from court, consoling a depressed friend, bidding farewell to all that he has loved and valued, expressing a tirade of contempt, indulging in bravura, sharing something new and beautiful, and talking in a lonely intimate manner to an ornate baroque facade.

THROUGH THE EYES was premiered by Nightswimming Theatre, at the Theatre Center West in Toronto; October 1995. The COURTIER was played by Julian Richings; direction by Brian Quirt; design by Dany Lyne; lighting by Bonnie Beecher.

I would like to very much thank: Jane Buyers, Patrick Conner, Michael Devine, Zoë Druick, Peter Hinton, Jeannette Lambermont,

Mollye Reisler, Michael Rudder, Canadian Stage Company, and Playwrights Workshop Montréal, for their generous insightful discourse and support. And especially, the gang at Nightswimming Theatre: Brian Quirt, Julian Richings, and Naomi Campbell, for demonstrating such an excellence of artistry and commitment in their production of my play.

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Don Druick, Elmira, 21 April 1998

Don Druick / THROUGH THE EYES

Over and over again
it is always necessary to keep reminding myself
that I have ever really done anything

— Gianlorenzo Bernini

To Brian and Julian

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COURTIER There is an incident at Fontainebleau. Our master Louis is hunting, is it the falcons or the hounds?, and, and we with him. It is beautiful beautiful an early spring day, how I love these days, the buds the air, crisp and clear so clear. One feels for a moment one can really see. We are all in fine fettle, the gentlemen of the court, despite having been up oh so late the night before tasting of the sparkling local vintage. That night, how we did laugh, the King at his wittiest as we sang the old songs of François Villon. So beautiful to remember this soulful melody. And why? And especially now? Can it be that it is like my childhood?

So as is said, we are hunting but we can find no worthy prey. No brocket no boar nor stag. It is the nature of the game but nothing worthy nothing banal nothing nothing at all. We search and search we ride we seek but nothing absolutely nothing. After a long while of this, mon Louis, the mirror of all our souls, turns suddenly to his Master of the Hunt, his father's Master of the Hunt, Pierre Claude-Marie LaRoche.

(as LOUIS) And so, Monsieur LaRoche?

(as LAROCHE) M'Lord?

(as LOUIS) And so?

(as LAROCHE) M'Lord?

(as LOUIS) There is nothing, Monsieur LaRoche. What are we to imagine?

(as LAROCHE) Je suis désolé, M'Lord, but what can one do?

(as LOUIS) Is that it then?

(as LAROCHE) M'Lord?

(as LOUIS) Is that it? Would you have done as little for my father?

(as LAROCHE) Old King Louis, m'Lord?

We laugh at poor Pierre's plight. I decide then and there I will give him a bottle of my finest cognac when the day is done. We laugh but something, how shall I convey this, in the King's tone quickly sobers us. Mon Louis, our heartbeat, hesitates. The Marquis de Bellefonds, the King's left hand, the Minister Of Culture, and perhaps it is rumored, the Fifth Musketeer, whispers in the royal ear.

(as BELLEFONDS) What say you, Sire, should not this LaRoche be our prey?

(as LOUIS) Ah. *PAUSE*. Yes. So be it.

(as LAROCHE) I do not understand, M'Lord.

(as BELLEFONDS) Be as a little animal. Go. Run. Scamper.

(as LAROCHE) M'Lord?

Monsieur LaRoche is shivering in the morning cold.

(as LOUIS) Be off. *PAUSE*. Now.

(as BELLEFONDS) And without your horse.

In the silence, a bird, suddenly so large, flies across the sky. Pierre turns and runs. We look to the King.

(as LOUIS) Give him five, no, ten minutes, and then we pursue. We will have meat for the table tonight, eh?

The laughter that follows is dry, and quickly disappears into the landscape. The silence is long.

(as LOUIS) *PAUSE*. Now. Loose the hounds. We ride. Which way? Which way? Yes. There. There he is. Towards the palace.

LaRoche is almost at the gates. Mon Louis, the regal Louis laughs. The Marquis de Bellefonds cannot resist the opportunity to shout:

(as BELLEFONDS) He is looking for a bed to hide under.

(as LOUIS) A bag of gold to the man who kills the game.

We enter the palace itself, horses hounds harriers. An awesome sight. Inside the palace inside the very palace. A roar like I have never heard before. By now LaRoche has climbed the grand marble staircase magnificent glistening pure white, the heartbeat of the palace, broad and sweeping up and up and up till it almost touches sweet heaven itself. Our Louis the sailor of all the oceans, charges the staircase his

horse slipping and cracking on the marble. Most follow the King, but I . . . stay behind. The smell in the air is blood.

(as LOUIS) Flourish the mort. Flourish the mort.

The roar the racket a symphony of death. The devil's hounds do howl. LaRoche is almost at the top when the first rider, the Chevalier de Nogent, the youngest son of the legendary Prince de Condé, splendid in a blue damask jacket splendid upon a regal white stallion reaches him passes him rears above him. The moment is sublime: white horse white marble white eyes. Forever. Suddenly with a swift oh so swift swift motion, the Chevalier de Nogent reaches down with his dagger and cuts Pierre's throat one side to the other. Blood everywhere now the marble alive with colour. Blue jacket white horse red blood. Pierre Claude-Marie LaRoche with a gagged cry slowly crumbling jerking painfully spasmodically arms legs flailing as he falls tumbling slowly down down down down down accelerating now more and faster faster again and coming to a rest his final rest just two stairs from the bottom. Almost in front of me. At moments like this, I pray: oh Lord, please grant me just one more day on this earth.

(as LOUIS) Well there it is.

LaRoche's eyes remain open.

It is our sacred tradition that the royal family may never sleep, will never sleep, in a house where someone has died. So the Marquis de Bellefonds drags the perhaps and barely alive Pierre Claude-Marie LaRoche, a trail of blood, to die alone in the darkening mist of the courtyard. I think of Isabelle, his wife of so many years. I silently vow never to hunt again. I know I will drink that bottle of my finest cognac when the day is done.

The King turns to me.

(as LOUIS) And is not Cavaliere Berninino arriving at Versailles tomorrow? Certainly there is still much to be arranged.

(COURTIER) Is it not Bernini, Sire, or so I have been led to believe.

(as LOUIS) These Italian names. One can hardly understand

the very sounds. Mon Condé, where is the Queen? I wish to see her.

Mon Louis is right, as always. For weeks the talk at the King's levée has been of nothing else. Revered in Rome, sculptor architect confidant to the Popes builder of brilliant monuments and palaces, yes, Cavaliere Gianlorenzo Bernini now comes to France.

(as LOUIS) A royal escort is to be given to the Italian. All is to be a magnificent triumphal procession. Be certain that he is impressed. I cannot believe, mon Bellefonds, that Innocenzo could have let such a treasure fall between his fingers. I tell you I cannot believe it.

BELLEFONDS laughs. The Marquis de Bellefonds' laugh, as prominent as it can be, is barely heard midst the now more than usual uproar of Versailles. All is abuzz. Chaos barely controlled. It is also whispered that Cavaliere Bernini is despised by the new Pope, Innocenzo. Our young King, Louis, the fabric of all our dreams, would be preeminent over Austria over Rome and as always, over Spain. Scheming, ruthless Pope Innocenzo blocks him at every pass. It is whispered that the presence of Cavaliere Bernini in Paris will clearly and undeniably demonstrate the truth of France's majesty. All is abuzz in Versailles.

In honour of the Italian's arrival, the court has been instructed to appear in sumptuous new clothing. Therefore a mad desperate I have never ever seen it like this a desperate scramble for tailors dress-makers working frantically feverishly throughout the night. Myself, I will wear Poussin bleu. And such a shade . . . from old Provence. All is so abuzz in Versailles.

As I speak a little of the Italian I have been given the task of attending to the Cavaliere's needs. It is the very first occasion that I have been graced with a request by my beloved Louis and I cannot refuse him. I now have apartments in Versailles, small ones to be sure and off an irksome noisy corridor but none the less in the north wing. One never knows midst the endless rumors and desires and variations of the truth at Versailles where it will all lead. At last a position of quality could be mine. *PAUSE.* Then will She be mine?

We arrive early in the morning, I and this Italian artist, for the King will see Bernini at the levée. As we approach the Royal apartments the Cavaliere remarks on the small golden vessel, a little ship in the center of one of the long succession of silent outer chambers.

(COURTIER) Ah, c'est les Nef Du Roi. Oui. Ummm. Ummm. Tovagliolo. For cleaning the royal genitalia. *PAUSE*. Organi maschili. We will have our ways in France, Cavaliere. These napkins are, for us, in a sense, the future, and ritual demands, that everyone passing les Nef Du Roi bow. Like this. Let me show you. You are in France now. We are most particular. The left leg thrust forward so. The right knee bent like so. The hat moved like so in a graceful semicircle head to stomach. No no, Cavaliere, start with the other leg. You have gotten it backwards. *PAUSE*. I protest, Cavaliere.

The next antechamber is small and dim a single oval window set on high. Here, crushed together, are the most eminent gentlemen in France waiting to greet the glorious Louis.

(COURTIER) Do you remember the bow?
Could he feel the contempt in my voice?

Our noble King is by the window with the First Gentleman Of The Bedchamber and The Master Of The Wardrobe. There are the gentlemen of the King's family: the Grand Dauphin, who is the only legitimate son and a mere child, and the King's brother, Monsieur, the Duc d'Orléans. Is it clear that the Cavaliere is impressed by the elegance of the room? The King's bed on a dais of red damask behind a gilded wooden balustrade the corners surmounted by white ostrich plumes and egret feathers like jets of water over breaking waves. A cold light pervades the room the courtyard below full of mist.

The King prays his hands are washed in a gold and porcelain cockleshell he is shaved. His son and brother hold a dressing gown as a screen letting it fall, revealing mon Louis drinking his broth. I smile inside. I am in the presence of the King, the spirit of greatness that is France. The father of all brothers. The Master of Ceremonies, the Royal Butler, the Royal Taster and the man whose function is to hold the plate under the royal chin form a semi-circle about him. Mon

Louis puts on his coat chooses a cravat handkerchief gloves hat cane. Resting his hand on the jeweled hilt of his sword his other hand idyllic on the knob of his cane, mon Louis turns to the Cavaliere.

(as LOUIS) So now you are in France, Cavaliere Bernaizi.

(as BERNINI) Bernini, Sire.

(as LOUIS) Good, very good.

(as BERNINI) Majesty, it is my desire to serve you in all things. I have so many many ideas. I have built the greatest palazzi for the glory of the Popes of Roma . . .

(COURTIER) But for the complete allegiance to the King of France . . .

(as BERNINI) But for the glory of the King of France, a monarch of our own time, there is a need for something still greater and even more magnificent. Your Majesty, I crave to serve you, but I make one request only.

(as LOUIS) And that is?

(as BERNINI) I beg you: speak to me only of projects not diminutivo.

(COURTIER) Inconsequential, Sire.

(as LOUIS) Yes yes, I know. Exactly, Monsieur. Good. Very good. Now this indeed is the man as I have imagined him. Unlike elsewhere, we truly appreciate you here in France. Cavaliere, I have the notion that I will not be able to surpass history. What do you think of this?

(as BERNINI) We will see. I will try. You will try.

(as LOUIS) Good. Very good. As far as money is concerned there is no need for any restriction. See to it, mon Bellefonds.

I had not seen the Marquis de Bellefonds enter. I am becoming careless.

(as BELLEFONDS) At once, Majesty.

I am becoming careless. Oh but we live in difficult and dangerous times but who can not say this? The struggle. The journey of my life. I am tired for it. Exhausted with expectations at court frustrations at court despair and loneliness. In the depths of the night I crave tenderness, a true intimacy.

The noise of the men on the other side of the door is suddenly very loud. It draws me startles me from my reverie.

(as BERNINI) He is a divinely gifted monarch . . .

(COURTIER) Mais certainement.

(as BERNINI) . . . with an understanding of art.

I shake my head. Can the Cavaliere really be so naive?

We meet Marie-Thérèse, the Queen of France; in attendance, Madam La Princesse, the sister of the King of Spain and therefore the Queen's aunt, and the Prince de Condé, the Queen's cousin and her personal emissary to the King's court, wounded in battle, his horse fell upon him, he now dresses only in ultramarine. The shade has been named after him.

Today, I have bowed, for the first time I have bowed this very day to the Queen of France. She is very kind to the Cavaliere. They speak in Italian but rapidly in the Vatican dialect, the language of secrets. It will be better if I do not understand them.

The Marquis de Bellefonds himself, I notice the Queen does not deign to look in his direction, escorts the Cavaliere to the Hôtel de Frontenac in Paris where he is to live and work. The Cavaliere goes to the chapel where he remains a long time in prayer, prostrate upon the floor, kissing the marble. Kissing the marble.

We meet Cardinal Antonio Barberini, the Papal nuncio. Has this been arranged? Impeccably elegantly dressed in his scarlet robes, speaking slowly, as always, in his deep booming melodious voice, his Eminence has the reputation of one who always achieves his ends. I must be careful. It would not do to be considered too close to the Italians.

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) The Queen of France has spent much time in Roma, though I did not know her there of course.

(as BERNINI) I had the pleasure of Her Majesty's company in Roma.

I cannot think for the horror of what this might mean.

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) Look over there. From this height

Paris seems nothing but a mass of chimneys. Like the teeth in a comb.
(as BERNINI) Roma is a very different sight, much more beautiful.

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) Perhaps Roma is where you should be, Cavaliere, instead of here, among the French.

(as BERNINI) The French appreciate me.

This early spring the daffodils are for me these days suddenly not sufficient. Je suis tellement triste.

He is in his atelier in the Hôtel de Frontenac working on his own self-portrait in red chalk.

(as BERNINI) In Roma I am in the habit of walking up and down and up and down the galleria where I put on the very walls the ideas as they come to me. I miss this.

He becomes very annoyed, suddenly, and stops his work. I cannot understand it. I wonder what in the work can be so displeasing to him.

(as BERNINI) Nelle mie opere caco sangue. What does this mean? Do you know?

(COURTIER) In my work I shed blood.

(as BERNINI) Sì, esattamente. I have heard from various sources that the King wants me to make his portrait in stone. Is this true?

(COURTIER) The Marquis de Bellefonds has said nothing about it. Who has told you this?

(as BERNINI) The Prince de Condé was kind enough to mention it. Then Cardinal Antonio Barberini.

(COURTIER) Do you speak often with the Cardinal?
The Cavaliere receives so many foreign letters.

(as BERNINI) So? Is it true? Does the King wish this?

(COURTIER) How do I know? I am not party to the intimacies of the King's mind.

(as BERNINI) I will start with a bust and I will need to get started right away, à presto, for it will take me four months such a

commission, and there is more and other significant work that I wish to do here.

I remain silent.

In order to keep him amused and placated, I am required to spend many hours in search of a suitable block of marble. The day drags on insufferably. The Cavaliere is so particular. The gardens of the Tuileries along the waterside with its celebrated beech and popular trees now gloriously in bloom are so beautiful. To the Vial-de-Grâce, where the Cavaliere finally chooses, begrudgingly, only three stones (imitating BERNINI) perhaps possible to work with. (as himself) The costs are sixteen hundred and three livres.

(as BERNINI) So expensive in France and such poor quality.

(COURTIER) If you insist, Cavaliere, I will write a letter on your behalf to someone, a dealer I have heard of.

(as BERNINI) Grazie. I must have my marble immediately.

The Cavaliere is invited to the stables at Versailles, a private and select ceremony, to witness the elegant Louis preside over the gelding of the royal stallion, Brutus. The Chevalier de Nogent, splendid in a blue damask jacket, is present, as is his father, the Prince de Condé, and the Marquis de Bellefonds. The great Molière, forever in the Temple of Memory, who is the King's favourite, and mine, regales us.

(as MOLIÈRE) De non jamais te servire

De remediis aucunis . . .

Maladus dû-t-il crevare

Et mori de suo amillo? Juro.

Molière laughs his quiet laugh.

(as LOUIS) For it is this idea of myself, my essence you understand, that I wish to have carved in marble.

There is a roar, a shriek, of excruciating pain from Brutus.

(as LOUIS) This will be my legacy to history.

(as BERNINI) It will be very inconvenient for you, Sire, as I will

require, a bust is so difficult, need, twenty-five sittings of three hours each.

Our Louis seems somewhat appalled. He rests his hand on the jeweled hilt of his sword his other hand languishing on the knob of his cane.

(as LOUIS) LONG PAUSE. Oh. LONG PAUSE. So much time?

(as BERNINI) How else can history be achieved?

(as LOUIS) I will speak to Bellefonds. Rest assured, Monsieur, your absolute mastery is incontestable, especially in France. You are not appreciated half as much in Rome.

(as BERNINI) PAUSE. Perhaps it is as you say, Majesty.

(as LOUIS) I suspect that it is. What will you do? How will you start? Tell me.

(as BERNINI) It will be very difficult to capture in stone your long eyelashes.

(as LOUIS) Ah.

He draws the royal head, full face and profile.

(as BERNINI) To steep oneself in the likeness I must study you not in fixed pose but as you move normally about your daily business. I make many rapid sketches for the liveliness. The best moments are when someone has just finished speaking. Or is about to.

(as LOUIS) One tires so quickly. I will not be speaking today. On another occasion perhaps.

With that mon Louis leaves and so do many others. The Cavaliere seems disappointed. I tell him that the King will have his way. The vast scope of his desires is common currency. They all require his constant attention.

I spend all my afternoons with her of late in the gardens amid the lime trees the hyacinths the wisteria. Still, at least She sees me.

The Cavaliere and I are invited to eat at the King's table. An opportunity for me. In our honour the Queen is in attendance and Madame

La Princesse. The Prince de Condé, silent, watchful, remains at the Queen's elbow.

Four courses of different soups, pickled starling tongues, a red Chateau Buzey from Provence, some fruit.

(as BERNINI) I adore raw fruit. Often it is all that I eat.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) Fruit fruit fruit. Is there not more to life than that, Italian Gentleman? It must be difficult for you here in France. Wouldn't you agree, Louis?, language food wine.

(as LOUIS) Or so one would imagine.

A whole partridge stuffed with truffles.

(as BERNINI) There is a foreignness here, yes, that is familiar to the artist. I am used to it. It is all familiar and falsely complex.

(as LOUIS) What? But life here in France is quite simple.

(as BERNINI) Can that be true?

(as LOUIS) Do you doubt it?

(COURTIER) Perhaps what the Cavaliere means is that life is other than what we would believe it to be.

The Marquis de Bellefonds is quick to notice and whispers to me.

(as BELLEFONDS) And now you speak for him?

A quantity of salad.

(as BERNINI) The disappointment of expectations makes us foreign to our own universe.

(as LOUIS) Where would we be if the Cavaliere had not come to visit us?

The Queen smiles.

The Marquis de Bellefonds asks after the French artists who work in Rome.

(as BERNINI) There are two or three perhaps very competent French sculptors. I seem also to remember a painter.

(as BELLEFONDS) And who are they?

(as BERNINI) I cannot for the moment recall their names.

(as BELLEFONDS) And how is this portrait to be, Cavaliere?

(as BERNINI) Si si. How do we capture the complexion of a face with merely monochromic marble? So, it is necessary to represent features in marble as they can not possibly exist. The eyes, we must hollow them out to achieve these missing effects of colour. In the end we have what? A symbolic portrait of a great leader.

(as LOUIS) Good. Very good. Very very good.

Some mutton and ham.

(as BERNINI) I will do the best I can, Sire. Even the great and divine Michelangelo was never willing to undertake portrait sculpture.

Salmon meunière with dill à la Flavigny.

(as BERNINI) Grato m'è il sonno, e più d'esser di sasso
Però non mi destar; deh! parla basso.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) And this means exactly?

(COURTIER) Sleep is long and loved like a stone . . .

The Queen, luminous, gently touches her brow.

(as QUEEN) Allow me, Monsieur, to translate.

Deep to me is sleep, more dear to me but stone;

Then wake me not; speak in an undertone.

Is not the Italian so beautiful.

(as LOUIS) Ah, very subtle.

(as QUEEN) Like music. You should learn more Italian, mon Louis, out of respect for our guest.

(as LOUIS) Only if I can have you as a tutor, my dearest Marie-Thérèse.

A dish of pastry.

Her Majesty, smiling, says to me:

(as QUEEN) How is it that you speak Italian?

(COURTIER) I traveled to Italy with my uncle. As a boy, Your Majesty, after the death of my father. I have only a little of it left but I try to make myself understood by Cavaliere Bernini so as to attend to his needs.

(as LOUIS) And his ideas, you find them interesting?

I hesitate. No one answer seems best.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) He praises very little here, Louis.

(COURTIER) He also finds few faults, Sire.

(as QUEEN) He sees nothing worthy of praise because he has been so very hard at work on your portrait since his arrival in France.

(as LOUIS) This is most unfortunate.

The King turns to me.

(as LOUIS) Let him see the country.

A last course, that of compotes and preserves, is brought in. I feel that the moment of departure has suddenly passed.

(as LOUIS) The Isle de France. Rochefort-en-Yvelines, where the great cutting runs through the woodlands rolling to the farthest western horizon. Chérence and the renowned pair of oak, so perfect in the spring. Wy-dit-Jolivillage, simply perfect. Montgeroult. It has always been the same, and will always be so. I adore the outdoors. I tell you I think nothing of riding from Paris to Fontainebleau or hunting wolf deep into the darkest night.

(as BELLEFONDS) His Majesty once killed nine wolves in a single day. LaRoche could not believe the King's prowess.

(as LOUIS) You must come hunting with us, Monsieur Barnani.

The Cavaliere whispers to me:

(as BERNINI) It is Bernini.

(as LOUIS) Come. We will go to Fontainebleau tomorrow after mass.

(COURTIER) I'm not sure that the Cavaliere would really like it. The table is now littered with dishes. The King picks at a carcass.

(as LOUIS) That is most disappointing, Monsieur. Most disappointing.

We visit the cabinet meeting at Saint-Germain. Affairs of state are conducted as the King plays tennis with the Chevalier de Nogent. The Cavaliere draws with intense concentration. How peculiar he is.

(as LOUIS) I was on the point of dining with my brother, the Duc d'Orléans.

The Marquis de Bellefonds turns to the King.

(as BELLEFONDS) Then I fear you would not have eaten especially well.

(as LOUIS) Still there are other attractions. They all laugh knowingly. The spirits are high. Bernini banters and exchanges gallantries with mon Louis.

(as BERNINI) Sto rubando.

(COURTIER) . . . I am taking something from you.

Mon Louis, eloquent as always, replies in Italian, much to the admiration of the cabinet:

(as LOUIS) Si maè per restituire.

(COURTIER) . . . Yes, but it is only to give it back.

(as BERNINI) Pero per restituit meno del rubato.

(COURTIER) . . . I give back less than I take.

The cabinet buzzes over the meaning of this exchange. It bodes well. I now feel pleased that I am with Bernini. Their game resumes. Its particular sound. Is it a snap, a ping?

Suddenly and unexpectedly the Cavaliere arranges the King's hair to suit himself. All are silent.

(as LOUIS) As you wish, Monsieur Burnned.

The Prince de Condé, slowly limping across the wide space. In a quiet voice he speaks briefly into the royal ear and then slowly, leaves. The Queen arrives, she is brittle, there are whispers of war. She seats herself with Madame La Princesse while the Cavaliere, on his knees upon the floor, draws the King. Bernini seems overjoyed at the Queen's visit. They speak briefly in Italian. Suddenly he is different, more subtle. I have never seen anyone like this before.

(as BERNINI) Madame, your presence overwhelms me . . .

(COURTIER) Remember the bow, Cavaliere.

The Queen stops me with a gentle motion of her hand.

(as QUEEN) I knew the Cavaliere, the Maestro, in Roma . . .

The Queen turns to mon Louis.

(as QUEEN) May I speak with you, Louis, as soon as the Cavaliere has finished his work for the day?

(as LOUIS) But of course, my dear Marie-Thérèse. I am always available to you.

Her smile is so radiant.

(as QUEEN) Thank you, Sire.

With that exchange the Queen leaves and Madame La Princesse with her . . . The Marquis de Bellefonds whispers in the royal ear, and momentarily mon Louis tells the Cavaliere he too must go . . .

(as LOUIS) . . . But I will return whenever I am needed.

I spend all my afternoons with her of late in the gardens amid the lime trees the hyacinths the wisteria.

(COURTIER) Perhaps tomorrow I will be able to present you to Signor Bernini.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) I have already met your Cavaliere.

(COURTIER) Who has introduced you? The Chevalier de Nogent?

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) How funny you are .

She smiles and turns away from me.

At the Hôtel de Frontenac, mon Louis is here before me. The Marquis de Bellefonds is with him, as is the Prince de Condé, and forty or fifty others. All is abuzz. The Chevalier de Nogent arrives, splendid in a blue damask jacket, to much applause, and joins his father. There is a great press in the room. Almost unpleasant. So many perfumes and waters. The Cavaliere smiles when he sees me.

(as BERNINI) Ah, a familiar face. These people it is like an army.

The King has brought several of his favourite hounds. The animals

growl and bare their fangs. I pray for just one more day on this earth. Surrounded by these large animals mon Louis rests his hand on the jeweled hilt of his sword the other as always on the knob of his cane.

(as LOUIS) And so?

(as BERNINI) It is time to see what the stone will tell us.

The Cavaliere begins to work directly on the marble. Wooden mallet on steel chisel. The ringing never seems to stop.

Mon Louis asks the Marquis de Bellefonds in a whisper all can hear if his nose is really so misshapen.

Laughter.

(as BELLEFONDS) Pray consider His Majesty's passion for symmetry, Monsieur.

(as BERNINI) The King's mouth and nose are far from classically perfect. Look. The nose is narrower at the cheeks than at the top. This I faithfully represent. Look here, one side of the nose is wider than the other.

Silence.

(as BERNINI) The marble is turning out better than I expected. But I must take the greatest of care with it. It is so delicato, delicate you understand.

Mon Louis does not banter with the Cavaliere. The King leaves and so does everyone with him.

(COURTIER) The King is very sensitive about his nose.

(as BERNINI) Of course, who isn't?

(COURTIER) But he is the King.

(as BERNINI) Kings popes, they all have noses. Please beg the Marquis de Bellefonds on my behalf to ask His Majesty that henceforth I will need a more regular schedule for the sittings. And a smaller army perhaps? Can you do that for me? Can you? No one else will help me.

(COURTIER) I will try.

(as BERNINI) The days are long now. The light is too good to waste. I have asked for, was promised, twenty-five sittings of three hours each. Three hours. I need this time with the King. Ah, Cardinal Barberini said I would die on this journey. Perhaps he was right.

I speak to the Marquis de Bellefonds at the King's levée.

(COURTIER) I fear that the Cavaliere will be put off by the slowness of the work.

(as BELLEFONDS) These Italians. It must be their abominable cuisine.

Mon Louis, the sun of the world, overhears us:

(as LOUIS) I do not care. I will not sit for anyone if and when I do not wish it. You would be wise to keep him under control.

The early summer is upon us gratefully upon us.

Cardinal Antonio Barberini comes often to see him. The whispers at court tell me that the Cardinal's presence is too often noticed. And mine with them. The King sends word that he will not now be available until further notice. I begin to fear now for the Cavaliere's safety. It can all become quickly unfortunate. I remember Pierre Claude-Marie LaRoche.

An early morning. The Chevalier de Nogent and . . . and Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe arrive. It is She, my heart. We do not speak in the public view, She and I, but but it is so painful to have agreed to this. The whispers now say She loves another. She murmurs to the Chevalier de Nogent, and they laugh.

Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe admires the fine bearing of the portrait.

(as BERNINI) The pose is so natural to His Majesty that every time he comes, infrequent as it is, he assumes his place in exactly the same manner.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) I am reminded of the head of Jupiter.

(COURTIER) Exactly right, Mademoiselle.

The Chevalier de Nogent asks of the stubble.

(COURTIER) Stubble, my dear Chevalier? You speak of stubble?

(as BERNINI) No no. A man's face only remains smooth for two maybe three hours after shaving. Therefore some stubble should be hinted at. It is correct.

Cardinal Antonio Barberini arrives and reads a poem in Italian he has received from Rome. I do not quite understand all the words. Is that a quiet sneer from the Chevalier De Nogent?

(as BERNINI) It is a request for me not to do this bust.

(COURTIER) But why?

(as BERNINI) Why? Why? Because what's the point of remaining in Paris when there can only be one Louis. It is nothing but flattery.

(COURTIER) From whom is this poem?

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) Pope Innocenzo.

She is impressed.

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) The Holy Father has come to appreciate the superlative artistry of Cavaliere Gianlorenzo Bernini.

Surely now the Cavaliere will leave Paris. Will I now lose my apartment in Versailles?

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) He would like nothing more than for you to return to Roma, Gianlorenzo.

(as BERNINI) Ah really?

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) Bellefonds believes only in French art for the French by the French.

(as BERNINI) He has been prejudiced against me from the first. I know this.

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) Exactly my point.

(as BERNINI) No no, I am here. And as I am here, let us for once dispense with the services of this Bellefonds.

(COURTIER) You may have only one enemy in Paris but be warned he is a great and powerful one.

Ma Saint-Christophe and the Chevalier de Nogent, oblivious to the ongoing conversation, giggle and whisper to each other.

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) Come back with me to Roma.

(as BERNINI) No, I stay here but I am unimpressed by everything. Everything. Paris. Oh I hope I do not offend you.

(COURTIER) One is never advised to bypass the Marquis de Bellefonds.

(as BERNINI) See what I must put up with? Bypass bypass. In Italiano we do not ever say bypass. The word does not even fit into our language. I tell you it has all become so unpleasant. This Bellefonds, I have come to dislike and despise.

A vicious whispering campaign starts against Bernini. These weary crowds in Versailles milling milling the lackeys gossip soldiers smiles princes. Chaos barely controlled. I despair. Where is my little Molière? De remediis aucunis. Juro. Juro. Only he can make me smile and free me even if for a moment from this ceaseless restless passionately relentless pain in my darkest night heart. I know the whispers cannot be true.

As the Cavaliere takes his siesta as is the Roman custom, I go to the atelier where I find the Marquis de Bellefonds, together with Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe, dressed exquisitely in blue taffeta and gray silk. She. They are accompanied by a platoon of musketeers, who take possession of the doors.

(as BELLEFONDS) Mon Louis, the father of all brothers, is coming. You are to alert the Italian.

Bernini hurriedly dresses. The Queen is announced by the Prince de Condé. The Marquis de Bellefonds seems, for once, disconcerted. All bow to Her Majesty, Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe the lowest. The Queen, with a gracious nod and a smile to the Cavaliere, immediately turns and leaves. A hush. Ma Saint-Christophe is greatly embarrassed as the whispers start.

(as BERNINI) I am truly sorry the Queen could not stay. She is the voice of reason.

(as BELLEFONDS) I am certain you are right, Monsieur Berninu.

I put my hand on his arm.

(as BERNINI) It is Bernini.

(as WARIN) And a well-admired name it is, Monsieur.

The artist, Monsieur Warin, a man much respected, a member of the Academy. Everyone eagerly awaits his opinion.

(as WARIN) I think that the great Maestro has taken too much off the forehead and what is taken from the marble cannot be put back.

(as BELLEFONDS) I think mostly that if we were to move the bust, say to Versailles, mon Louis would therefore have less farther to come for these sittings of yours.

(as BERNINI) But that is exactly the issue. Why is the King not more available?

There is no response.

(as BERNINI) Where are my chisels? Where are my chisels? Irritated, the Cavaliere leaves. In heavy silence we wait. *PAUSE*. The Chevalier de Nogent appears, splendid in his blue damask jacket, and seems surprised that the King is not here. He confers with his father, the Prince de Condé and with the Marquis de Bellefonds. Then the Prince de Condé and the Chevalier de Nogent have a brief heated discussion.

The King arrives, two hours later, alone, with the hounds. Gripping the jeweled hilt of his sword his fingers tapping on the knob of his cane, mon Louis scans the atelier, searching . . .

(as LOUIS) Where is the Italian?

(COURTIER) He will not come out because of the hounds.

(as LOUIS) We grow so tired of the Italian.

The King sees Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe and smiles.

I finally persuade Bernini to reappear.

(COURTIER) The King is in a mood, Cavaliere. Be gentle with him.

(as BERNINI) I am also in a mood. Who will be gentle with me?

(as LOUIS) I am displeased at the amount of dust in the atelier.

The Cavaliere is covered in it.

Ma Saint-Christophe and the Marquis De Bellefonds speak in an animated fashion, the Chevalier de Nogent bristles, which makes those assembled whisper that the matter is of no small import. I cannot think what She wants. They all ignore the Cavaliere. The Prince de Condé stares at me with his hooded eyes.

The Prince de Condé whispers something in the royal right ear. The Marquis de Bellefonds whispers something in the royal left ear.

(as BERNINI) Sire, we must make the most of what is fine and give the whole an effect of grandeur minimizing what is ugly . . .

(as LOUIS) Are you suggesting, Monsieur, that . . .

(as BERNINI) Your eye sockets are big but the eyes themselves are small and appear somewhat dead and that you hardly ever open them wide, you understand, contributes to a drooping shift look.

Bated breath.

(as BERNINI) Si si va bene. Thus I make them larger and thus we achieve the desired royal gaze, nobleness and grandeur befitting of a great Monarch.

(as LOUIS) I am glad to hear that, Monsieur.

The Marquis de Bellefonds now speaks at length with mon Louis and returns to ma Saint-Christophe. I hate this secrecy.

Ma Saint-Christophe then speaks to mon Louis at great length. The King listens most attentively. Ma Saint-Christophe . . . Oh I hope She will be discrete. *PAUSE*. Or do I? All the while the Cavaliere attempts to show himself to the royal gaze. Molière could not have written a better farce. I look away. The Prince de Condé slowly leaves.

(as BERNINI) Majesty, have the goodness to remain immobile. We are at a most significant part.

A secret cruel smile across the crowded room.

(as BERNINI) Majesty, observe how some locks of hair show through the others. A most difficult thing to do.

The King looks intensely at Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe. The Chevalier de Nogent tramps out. The King turns to the Cavaliere.

(as LOUIS) I will be leaving.

(as BERNINI) No, I need you here.

(as LOUIS) What?

(as BERNINI) It is imperative, Sire, that at this moment I have your complete and absolute attention.

(as LOUIS) Can you not use all those drawings you have made, Signor Barnani? After all there are simply scads of them.

(as BERNINI) Bernini, Sire, it is Bernini.

(as LOUIS) Yes, precisely.

(as BERNINI) These drawings are merely to soak and impregnate me with your image. To use these drawings for the portrait would be to make a copy instead of an original.

(as LOUIS) I will not return tomorrow.

(as BERNINI) I am Bernini.

(as LOUIS) I will not be able to come for some time.

(as BERNINI) An artist to whom even a Pope has deferred.

(as LOUIS) Je suis désolé mais le pouvoir des rois est absolu.

(as BERNINI) It is my own death. My own death.

(as LOUIS) What did he say? I do not understand. Where is Bellefonds? Where is Bellefonds?

(as BELLEFONDS) Sire?

(as LOUIS) Attend me now.

The King leaves. They all leave.

The Cavaliere throws himself into a chair and puts his head between his hands. He remains thus for a considerable time.

(as BERNINI) I will leave France tomorrow. I will write on every door, every door, arriverderci la francese arriverderci la francese. Francese. This marble is troppo cotto.

He kicks over the chair mon Louis, the ice of eternity, is accustomed to lean against whilst doing the posing.

Ma Saint-Christophe prepares to leave. I take her arm. She resists but I refuse to let go.

(COURTIER) May I see you?

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) You have broken our one and only rule.

(COURTIER) No one is looking.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) They are always looking.

(COURTIER) May I see you?

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) I will write.

(COURTIER) When?

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) When I can.

(COURTIER) When?

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) When I can.

She pulls her arm free from my grasp.

end of act



act two

COURTIER Most days now I stay to eat with the Cavaliere. Apricots are plentiful and early sweet melons. E dolce bello.

Many days pass in silence.

He lies in a darkened room with a cloth over his face.

(COURTIER) You should return to Rome.

When he can rouse himself from his lethargy these sad days, late nights, he roams through the vast rooms of state.

We stroll the upper walks of the garden. The heavy perfume of jasmine and sweet william and oleander envelopes us. A solitary lark sings its sad song.

(as BERNINI) There is no view.

I think to myself: this dark sky fills me. I am weary as again night comes to night and all is silhouette. This day and the next I will not be at home to anyone . . . She will not write. I am a fool.

(as BERNINI) Night comes to night. And all is death.

The Marquis de Bellefonds arrives with a single musketeer. The Marquis has killed the Chevalier de Nogent in a duel. Blue jacket red blood. The Prince de Condé is in mourning. He now dresses only in black. The King is furious with the Cavaliere and has refused to see him. I remember the hunt at Fontainebleau . . . and my vow.

After looking at the bust for a long while the Marquis de Bellefonds says:

(as BELLEFONDS) I would only wish that Signor Bernona had put more hair on the forehead.

(as BERNINI) Bernini. Try to say it. Bernini Bernini, Gianlorenzo Bernini.

(as BELLEFONDS) Bernini. Bernini.

(as BERNINI) Bernini. The King has a forehead of great beauty. It should not be covered up.

(as BELLEFONDS) But mon Louis, the mirror of my soul, does not any longer wear his hair in this fashion.

(as BERNINI) What does it matter?

(as BELLEFONDS) What matters more?

(as BERNINI) It is necessary for this forehead to compensate for the limits of nature.

(as BELLEFONDS) And what if this, this statue of yours, does not even does not even look like the King?

(as BERNINI) No matter what, my King will last longer than yours.

(as BELLEFONDS) Our beloved Louis is concerned.

(as BERNINI) Then let him be concerned for that is then what I will capture in the stone.

(as BELLEFONDS) By the way it is not necessary to move the work to Versailles.

(COURTIER) Why?

(as BELLEFONDS) Why?

The Marquis regards me coldly. I should not have spoken.

(as BELLEFONDS) Why? Because the court will be here in Paris for a week.

(as BERNINI) Only a week.

(as BELLEFONDS) Consider yourself fortunate to have that. Do you need anything else?

The Marquis goes without waiting for the Cavaliere's response. His soldiers go with him.

(COURTIER) I am ashamed at the way they treat you.

(as BERNINI) I do not like this Bellefonds.

(COURTIER) These days I even fear for my own safety.

(as BERNINI) But why?

(COURTIER) Because I am seen by some as your ally.

(as BERNINI) And so you are.

Endlessly he adjusts the red chalk marks on the eyes.

(as BERNINI) Look. Last evening I worked by torchlight to adjust this lock of hair on the forehead. See how I have carved it filigree-like one strand above the other. It is as if they stand free.

The Cavaliere works on the hair with water and sandpaper. Endlessly hour after hour after hour. He fills the great room with a fine white powder.

(as BERNINI) It is so difficult to work this marble.

(COURTIER) Excuse me, Cavaliere. *He sneezes.* It is beautiful.

(as BERNINI) I know I know it is the dust. And your fine clothes.

(COURTIER) It is nothing.

(as BERNINI) I see you trying to clean them when you think I am not looking. This marble is too brittle. It is a miracle that I have succeeded as well as I have.

It rains a cold summer rain. Ma Saint-Christophe appears. She sings a delightful . . . some Italian songs by Monteverdi.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) I had hoped that this aria would please you in your sadness. But I can see that I have failed.

(as BERNINI) Ma no grazie, Signorina de Saint-Christophe, grazie tante.

She looks away from me and to the portrait.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) What are these red marks, Cavaliere?

(as BERNINI) I mark the iris of the eyeball with red chalk.

When the work is finished, I shall use the chisel like so to remove them and the resulting shadows will represent the pupils of the eyes which will then tell us everything.

The Prince de Condé, in black, and many others, in black, arrive. Ma Saint-Christophe withdraws to the shadows.

The Cavaliere works at the royal portrait from many perspectives. Many of the assembled begin to giggle at the great energy and strange postures Bernini assumes. The Marquis de Bellefonds and the Prince de Condé glare at each other. The Cavaliere notices nothing.

Ma Saint-Christophe now emerges from the shadows. The Marquis de Bellefonds appears at her side. Ma Saint-Christophe is not smiling. The Marquis de Bellefonds looks away from her.

(as BELLEFONDS) What is wrong with the King's mouth?

Laughter.

(as BERNINI) Nothing. It is a mouth. Useful I am sure for those things that the mouth is good for: talking eating spitting drinking kissing smiling frowning. Here I have chosen the moment when the King is about to speak.

(as BELLEFONDS) The King has had enough of you and your noise and muck.

(as BERNINI) I will need more sittings.

(as BELLEFONDS) Do your job.

The Prince de Condé watches ma Saint-Christophe and the Marquis de Bellefonds as they have a heated whispered exchange. The Marquis de Bellefonds then storms out.

(as BERNINI) What is happening?

The Prince de Condé watches ma Saint-Christophe.

(as BERNINI) Is that the King I see in the corridor, waiting?

(COURTIER) Perhaps you are mistaken.

Ma Saint-Christophe leaves.

(as BERNINI) Is that the King? Why is the King being kept from me?

(COURTIER) The King will have his way. The royal mind everywhere curious dangerous back and forth here and there. First begonias and then palm trees. Stags then hounds. Page boys, ladies. The King will have his way. His majesty has many appetites. They all require his constant attention. At moments like this, I pray. For most of us the merely momentary royal glance is what we crave. Is it missing for so much as a day? there might be circumstances. Five days, perhaps it is true that the King desires my mistress. Eight days, we expect with trepidation to find the Marquis de Bellefonds at our door. Oh Lord, please grant me just one more day on this earth. I am very sympathetic to your position, Cavaliere, but it is highly unlikely.

I see now that all will elude me.

Cardinal Antonio Barberini and Molière sit silently by him. He has added only a single lock of hair to the forehead.

(as BERNINI) This lock of hair is totally in deference to the views of the Marquis de Bellefonds who has been so kind as to point out to me on numerous numerous numerous occasions that the King never leaves his forehead uncovered. How was I to know? The French are so concerned about seeming dated in their fashion.

(COURTIER) I like it this way, for it shows the slight hollow in

the middle of the forehead to a great advantage.

(as BERNINI) Grazie. I am especially proud of this little curl here.

Molière joins us, speaking in his soft special way.

(as MOLIERE) I congratulate you.

(as BERNINI) But finally what does a piece of hair matter?

(as MOLIERE) Exactly. The King, not his hair, is the story of this statue. And who is the narrator of the story? You, you Cavaliere, you are the narrator. It is you who tells us the story of this great King, a King who therefore becomes an actor in your play.

(as BERNINI) Si, as if a great facade. We stand back and contemplate it. La facciata. We move through parallel flexible worlds becoming aware of niches ornamented with saintly shadows. Highlights emerge lurking in some forgotten past. The eye the heart is in motion constantly constantly in motion swirled and taken this way that way. False perspectives alarm and excite us. We are breathless.

(as MOLIERE) Ah, this audience becomes your instrument.

(as BERNINI) Si si, but can this story ever be told, completely told?

(as MOLIERE) But . . . the quest, Monsieur.

(as BERNINI) Si si. I like your voice. An actor's voice. The gentle touch. The words continue though I cannot speak them. The words continue. I wish you spoke more Italian, Signor Molière.

After a pause Cardinal Antonio Barberini comments:

(as CARDINAL BARBERINI) There is talk, idle talk I am sure, of actually destroying the portrait.

Tears in his eyes, Molière puts his hand on the Cavaliere's shoulder.

(as MOLIERE) It can be a hard world, Monsieur.

The nights begin to be cool.

Nobody comes to see him. It is said of the Cavaliere in the court that he is remote and even a fraud.

(as BERNINI) I must see the King as soon as possible, for we

finish this face together, he and I. I am unable to truly work here in France. Ah, Roma. *He sighs.* So many mistakes in a life. I wish that the Queen would visit me. She is the voice of reason. Women are the source of my strength.

Is it because of ma Saint-Christophe that the Queen does not come to see him? In this I have failed him as well as myself.

He polishes the drapery.

(as BERNINI) What do you think of it? I want it to look as . . . as . . . light as airy as possible. These lesser folds, undulations, emerge, so gentle from the broad surfaces only to disappear again with a most noble harmony and without concealing these most beautiful contours of the underlying structure.

(COURTIER) Like it is floating in the wind.

(as BERNINI) See, the body moves with the drapery but I do not allow this whole left to right movement to continue unchecked. No. No no. This barrier on the right this mass of drapery curling slowly upward serves to bring it all to rest. *PAUSE.* I am afraid all the time.

I happen again to meet the artist, Monsieur Warin, and take him to see the Cavaliere, hoping that this visit will cheer him.

(as WARIN) I find the portrait striking in likeness but I feel the jaw is now too prominent. And the nose somewhat larger on one side . . .

(as BERNINI) Again, the nose.

(as WARIN) . . . and narrower at the back, here, than in the front. Is it not more symmetrical in life?

(as BERNINI) This is the way I see it. Most people think that the forehead goes back too far and is too hollow about the eyes. But be assured, the nose is the feature next most commented upon. Enough of this, enough. I am tired of it. All this chatter. Endless chatter. The noise of stupidity is loud in France and yours, Monsieur Warin, is the loudest. The loudest.

Monsieur Warin is very much alarmed.

(as WARIN) Don't speak so loudly.

(as BERNINI) I will only accept criticism from someone more capable than myself, not from someone like you, Monsieur Warin, an artist not worthy to clean the soles of my shoes.

The Cavaliere remains extremely agitated. One moment he is going to the Marquis de Bellefonds the next to Cardinal Antonio Barberini the next he is returning to Rome the next he is destroying the career of Monsieur Warin. A veritable frenzy. My own father was like this before he died.

(as BERNINI) I do not see why after all the contempt that has been shown me that I, myself, should not take a mallet to this piece of stone and destroy it. Better me than them.

A letter is brought to me. I cannot breathe.

(COURTIER) It is nothing. A dealer in marble.

After dinner I go to her apartments in the palace. She is not pleased to see me.

(COURTIER) The Cavaliere's bust is meeting with a somewhat chilly reception.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) Je suis désolé but what can one do?

(COURTIER) Be careful.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) In the future it would be best if you did not visit me unless requested to do so.

(COURTIER) Do you love me? *PAUSE*. You are most cruel to me, Madame.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) *PAUSE*. You are seen too often here.

(COURTIER) Not often enough.

(as SAINT-CHRISTOPHE) Please. For me.

His Majesty arrives accompanied by the Marquis de Bellefonds, and Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe. The King is so witty and jovial. He smiles often at ma Saint-Christophe. She is demure. I notice that the others remain at the door not daring to come any further into the room. The whispers speak of a liaison in the King's bed. I say to all it cannot be true. It is not true. The whispers say the Queen is enraged. The King is infectious in his enthusiasm. The Cavaliere works with

great joy at the nose and at the small mark that the King has near the right eye. The King walks about from time to time inspecting the work, talking quietly with ma Saint-Christophe, and then resuming his pose.

(as LOUIS) Please tell the Cavaliere for me that I find the likeness more pleasing in its symmetry especially. And that I am beginning to appreciate somewhat my new large forehead.

They all agree.

(as LOUIS) You must come hunting with me, Cavaliere. Tomorrow.

(as BERNINI) I must work. I am so in love with this stone.

(as LOUIS) Yes I understand your passion. Are you surprised? It is how I feel for the chase. And yet it all goes to ruin. Yesterday we roused a stag of ten tines; ran him for six hours; and on the point of taking him just as Bellefonds was about to sound the mort all the pack went off on the wrong scent in pursuit of a young brocket. Thus must I renounce the hounds as I have already relinquished the falcons. Ah, I am a most unhappy King.

(COURTIER) But there are yet a goodly number of falcons remaining, Sire.

(as LOUIS) But who is to train them? LaRoche is dead, a tragic hunting mishap. I alone now must preserve the true art. With my passing all will be lost and the game will henceforth be taken only by snares pitfalls traps. As a favour to me, Cavaliere, to me personally, come with us to Fontainebleau tomorrow.

The Prince de Condé arrives and without ceremony approaches the King, whispers. The King glares at the Marquis de Bellefonds, who is again disconcerted. The King raises a hand to his eyes, and reaches tenderly towards ma Saint-Christophe.

I take the opportunity to speak in Italian to the Cavaliere. I care not now who hears us.

(COURTIER) I will come with you. I will break my vow to never again the chase. It will be your first hunt and my last.

(as LOUIS) Then you'll come with us on the hunt, my dear Cavaliere.

(COURTIER) Do this. It is the only way you will ever get to finish the portrait.

Reluctant as he is to go, reluctant as I am to go, my argument is convincing and the arrangements are made.

That night against all that pride and reason tell me, my fear for She brings me to her apartments but there is no answer to my calls. Oh let me love you. I will protect you. Again without response. An air of strangeness. I see her everywhere emerging from every dark corridor. A cold wind. I see her in the distance with who? With whom? Shadows. Too soon the dawn comes.

We leave to hunt early right after mass, the morning air so clear. One might have felt for a moment one could really see. The gentlemen of the court seem in fine fettle.

(as BERNINI) These trees are so beautiful. What are they called?

(COURTIER) They are called elms.

(as BERNINI) Ah. Elms. Elms. Now tell me why does the Grand Dauphin not accompany us? Such a handsome child.

(COURTIER) According to ancient ritual the Grand Dauphin is to be kept from absolutely everything.

(as BERNINI) I do not understand.

The Cavaliere uses a calèche as befitting a Roman gentleman.

(as BERNINI) I do not like this blood hunt.

(COURTIER) Nor I.

Pheasants are abundant and the King finds scarcely a moment to rest from his shooting. He is ecstatic. I have never seen him as happy.

(as LOUIS) There, there, I have shot seven.

All applaud.

Madame La Princesse rides abreast of us on her dappled gray mare.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) Where is Monsieur LaRoche?
He is so useful on these occasions.

Can it be she does not know?

(as LOUIS) There, there, I have shot nine.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) Did you hear the scandal? The
Duchesse du Guise? Her gambling losses are so heavy that the Duc
has been forced to sell his family jewels. Not that they had much to
begin with.

(as LOUIS) There, did you see, there, I have shot twelve more.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) And have you not heard of
Mademoiselle de Saint-Christophe?

My heart stops.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) Nothing but trouble that one.
The little hussy. Found this morning floating in the Seine . . .

She leans towards us

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) . . . naked I am told. Some say
suicide but I prefer to think not.

The Marquis de Bellefonds rides by on Brutus.

(as BELLEFONDS) I have heard she was a spy for the Pope.
Bellefonds avoids my glance.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) Good riddance to bad rubbish,
don't you agree?

Brutus rears as they ride to join the King.

In the silence, a bird, suddenly so large, flies across the sky.

(as LOUIS) There. There. Thirty-eight in all. Thirty-eight pheasants.

(as MADAME LA PRINCESSE) Remarkable, Louis, truly remarkable.

(as LOUIS) Is this not the life, Cavaliere?

I have no more words.

We sit in the calèche.

The Cavaliere searches the sky.

(as BERNINI) Here, I am a strange blind bird. When I am as I am now, but in Roma you understand, I am more as if a giardino magnifico, overgrown and lush, a villa in glorious ruin. I fill my stage with lilies a festival of myself, and then I go out into the crowds. Their voice fills me. *PAUSE*. Instead of sky I once suggested space decorated with a gold coffering filled with the most delicate rosettes painted only in black and white. We are alone.

I turn and discover that the rest of the hunting party has gone. The sun begins to go down, a breeze becomes a wind and it is suddenly cool, even cold, in the approaching autumn of my life.

The days become noticeably shorter. It is whispered that there will now be war with the Netherlands. They do not require Bernini's presence any longer.

The work on the portrait proceeds easily and well. Sometime and perhaps soon it shall be over and I shall miss it more than I can ever say. With whom will I speak Italian now?

He continues to work on the collar, minutely chiseling it out and disengaging it from the hair.

(as BERNINI) Consider this . . .

The Cavaliere points out detail after detail after detail with which he is frustrated.

(COURTIER) But you are wrong. I have never seen anything

like it before in my life. I will never see anything like it again.

(as BERNINI) But you will. Every day there is a sunset. Your life is your own.

(COURTIER) I wish you were right.

We sit in silence.

(COURTIER) Expectations and disappointments.

(as BERNINI)) The disappointment of expectations makes us foreign to our own universe. Another battle. Another constant battle.

The court comes often. Controversy still continues but now Gianlorenzo seems to enjoys it and finds it most entertaining. There are many remarks concerning the collar. (*he mimics*) The French should not merely copy the ancient Romans. (*he mimics another voice*) The King should appear in the fashion of his time. (*he mimics another voice*) But do you think, it will surely be of interest to future historians. (*he mimics another voice*) Of course. Of course.

Her Majesty, the Queen, is announced by the Prince de Condé. She is radiant and magnanimous. The Queen bows very low to the Cavaliere. I am acknowledged.

The Queen says at once how perfect the portrait is. I can now understand their rapid Italian and they know this. They laugh, as if at a private jest, as if alone.

The Queen then reads the Cavaliere an Italian poem of her own devising:

(as QUEEN) Al signor Cavaliere Bernini
Qual sia più favorevole destino,
Che trovat' il Bernini habbia un Luigi,
O Luigi un Bernini.

A letter arrives from ma Saint-Christophe, mailed before her death. My hand shakes.

Her Majesty resumes:

(as QUEEN) Senza si gran scultor foran sicuri
Non poter adorar il ver semblante . . .

Her letter burns me to the touch.

The Queen glances towards me and I translate her poem for the assembled personages.

(COURTIER) The question: is it more fortun'd a destiny for Bernini to find Louis, or Louis, Bernini. Without so great a sculpture it is certain that future centuries would not be able to adore the true likeness of so great a King and no less true that there could not be throughout the world a subject better meriting his chisel.

Her letter smiles. Our walks in the garden. I am sorry, She says. We live in difficult and dangerous times, but who cannot say this. Tell no one what has happened. I never will. Burn this. I already have.

The Cavaliere, laughing, turns to me:

(as BERNINI) It is absurd but I will need more sittings. Can you not again, I am sorry to ask you this, can you not speak again to our Marquis de Bellefonds?

We laugh until tears stream down our faces. At that moment the Queen turns to me and says in Italian.

(as QUEEN) I am sorry for your loss.

Foreign to my own universe.

There was never to be another sitting. We knew this of course. The portrait, in its lonely splendor, would be considered finished.

He looks quietly about him.

(as BERNINI) Soon I will go home. There is the work on the colonnade of the Piazza de San Pietro. It is all that I have ever wanted to do. *He sighs.* It never entirely satisfies me, my work. I am never content.

(COURTIER) Nor I.

(as BERNINI) But hopeful.

(COURTIER) Not I.

He smiles.

(as BERNINI) There are only the eyes remaining.

Finally, grandly, kindly even, the King arrives. It is whispered that he has spoken with the Queen at length. He joins her and they stand together. All is abuzz.

The portrait, draped round with scarlet velvet. One hand resting on the jeweled hilt of his sword the other barely stroking the knob of his cane, Louis studies it for some time and makes the others do the same. Everyone vies to praise it. Several poems are written. The royal favourite, of course, is by Molière.

(as MOLIÈRE) Mesdames, messeieur, attention, attention. Je vous en pris.

Louis jusques ici n'avait rien de semblable,

On en voit deux, grâce au Bernin,

Dont l'un est invincible, et l'autre inimitable.

Molière bows. Looking to the King, the Cavaliere instantly replies.

(as BERNINI) Risposta del Cavaliere *Bernini*:

Non per far di Ré si grande appoggio degno.

Che de sostegno no é mestier chi sostiene il mondo . . .

(COURTIER) The artist replies: there may never exist a portrait worthy of this King. For consider, it is he, and he alone, who holds the world. Would you say this was right, Monsieur Molière?

Molière applauds and we bow to each other. And then he to the Cavaliere, and then all to the King.

Midst fanfare the final cut of the pupils is done. Slowly carefully deliberately magically wonderfully tenderly brilliantly joyously the red chalk is cut away and the soul is revealed. And I understand the Cavaliere as I have never understood anyone. The lime trees the hyacinths the wisteria. Everything speaks to me now.

(as BERNINI) It is finished. I have worked on it with such love. I wish that it had been more perfect.

(as LOUIS) Tell Cavaliere *Bernini* that if only I had been able to understand his language, I would be able to convey my deepest feelings to him and say many things that should make him very happy and reveal to him how warmly I return his affection and how much I have come to value his presence here.

All applaud. Bernini is overwhelmed and cannot speak. He weeps and is gone. Louis is visibly moved. The final word is that of the Marquis de Bellefonds who praises the portrait till the heavens and bows to me, which makes me think that mon Louis, the voice of my past, truly admires it.

That night, we are alone in the vast and now empty Hôtel de Frontenac, the fire blazing against the mist and chill. A letter burns.

(as BERNINI) The work completed becomes soon forgotten.

(COURTIER) But no. Through its eyes, which become my eyes I have discovered for the first time, myself.

We look at the bust with the aid of a single candle.

(COURTIER) It is wonderful, Maestro.

(as BERNINI) Grazie grazie, but it is always necessary to keep reminding myself that I have ever done anything.

(COURTIER) You have come to France and survived. Not all can say this.

(as BERNINI) It comes to nought. If anything justifies a foolish man it is the pains he takes to discover his own importance.

(COURTIER) I will miss you.

(as BERNINI) Grazie tante.

He bows perfectly to me.

(as BERNINI) You see, I remember everything.

With that he left Paris, never to return.

Dark night late night. I drink a glass of my finest cognac in toast to the Cavaliere and another to Pierre Claude-Marie LaRoche and and yet another to the memory of a love I once had, a dream I once lived. To those who have gone as I never will, my spirit goes with them. And

soon? And soon? *PAUSE*. Oh Lord, please grant me just one more day on this earth. A silence. A long silence. Soon I will sleep and soon I will be happy. *PAUSE*. Tears.

end of play

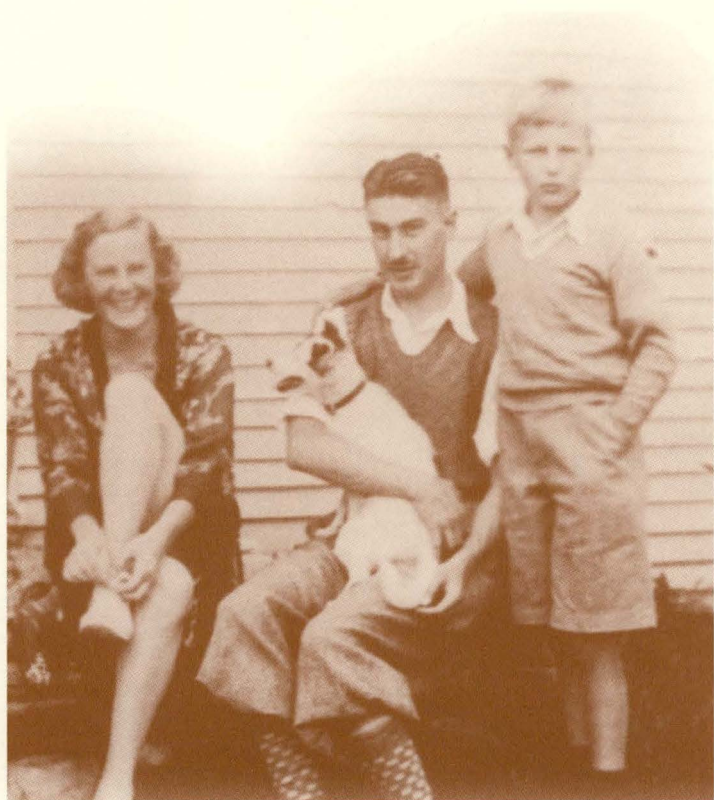
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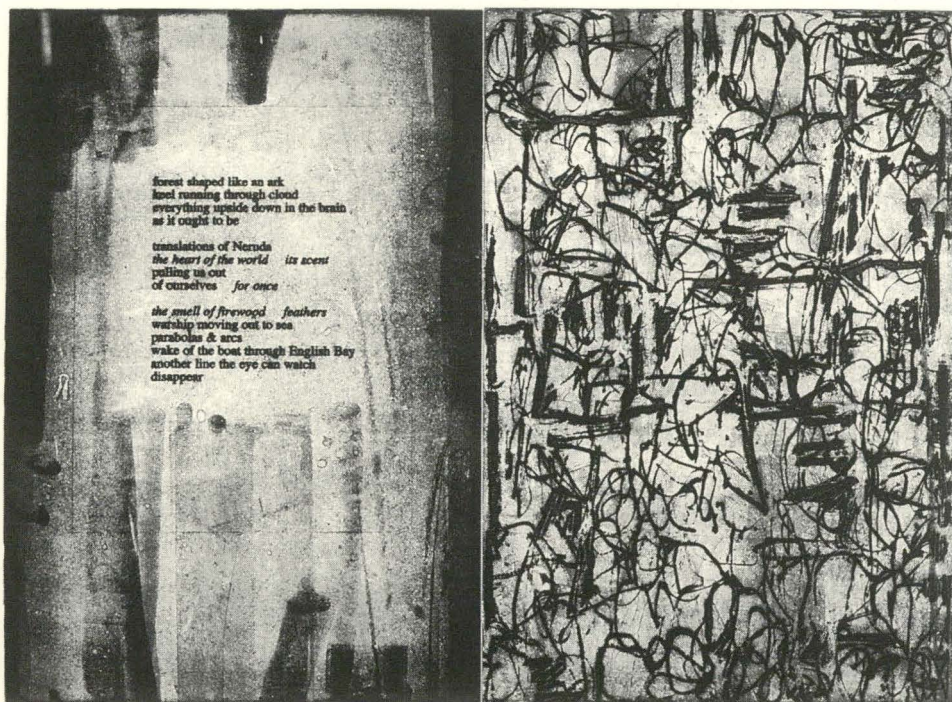
PIERRE COUPEY

REQUIEM NOTATIONS I-IX



*That which occurs has such an advantage
over our intentions that we never recover
and never experience it as it really
appeared. —RAINER MARIA RILKE*



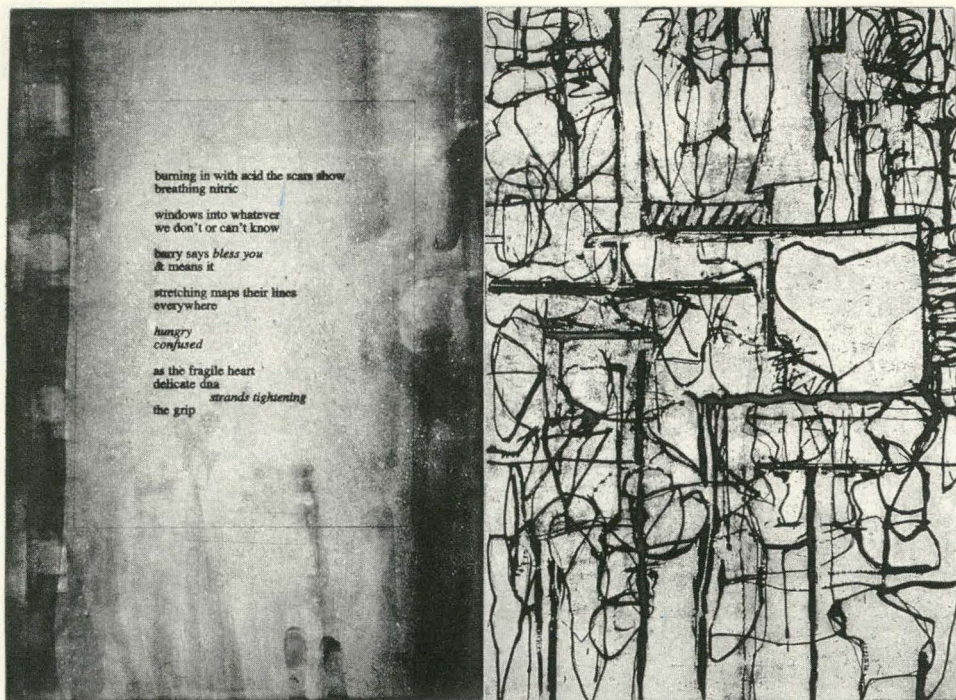


I

forest shaped like an ark
keel running through cloud
everything upside down in the brain
as it ought to be

translations of Neruda
the heart of the world its scent
pulling us out
of ourselves for once

the smell of firewood feathers
warship moving out to sea
parabolas & arcs
wake of the boat through English Bay
another line the eye can watch
disappear



II

burning in with acid the scars show
breathing nitric

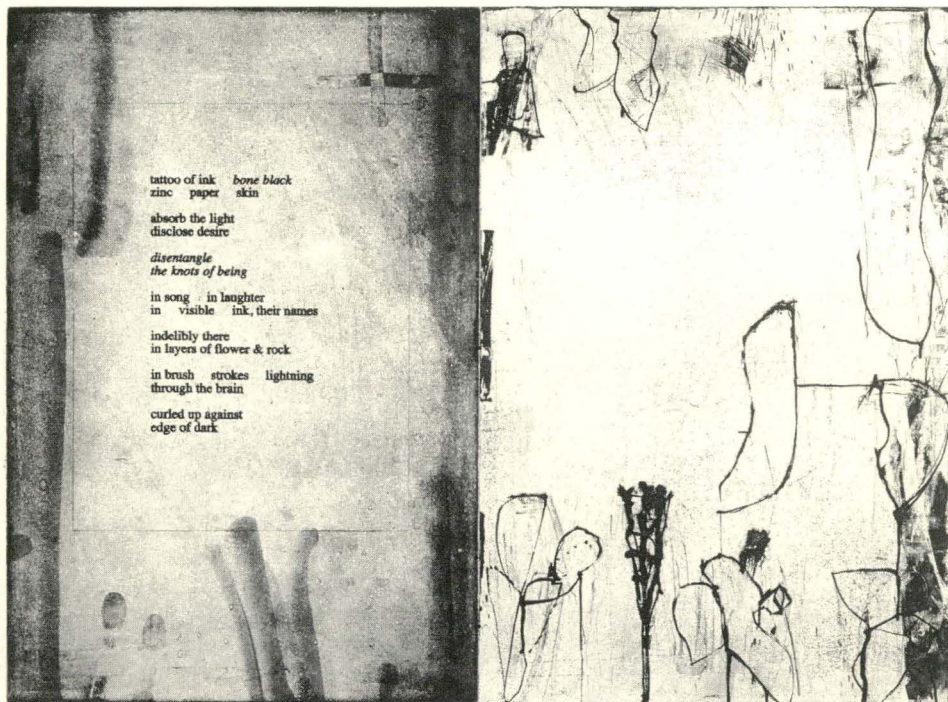
windows into whatever
we don't or can't know

barry says *bless you*
& means it

stretching maps their lines
everywhere

hungry
confused

as the fragile heart
delicate dna
strands tightening
the grip



III

tattoo of ink *bone black*
zinc paper skin

absorb the light
disclose desire

disentangle
the knots of being

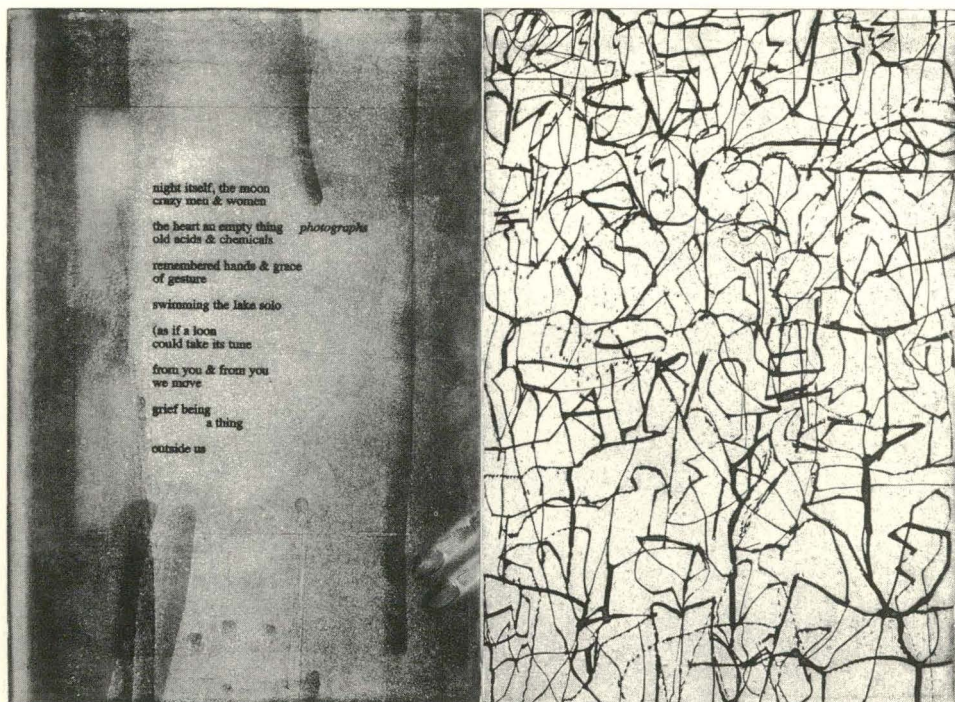
in song in laughter
in visible ink, their names

indelibly there
in layers of flower & rock

in brush strokes lightning
through the brain

curled up against
edge of dark





IV

night itself, the moon
crazy men & women

the heart an empty thing *photographs*
old acids & chemicals

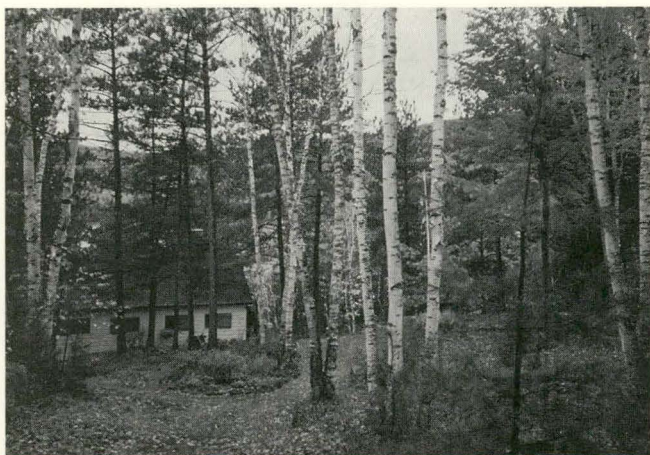
remembered hands & grace
of gesture

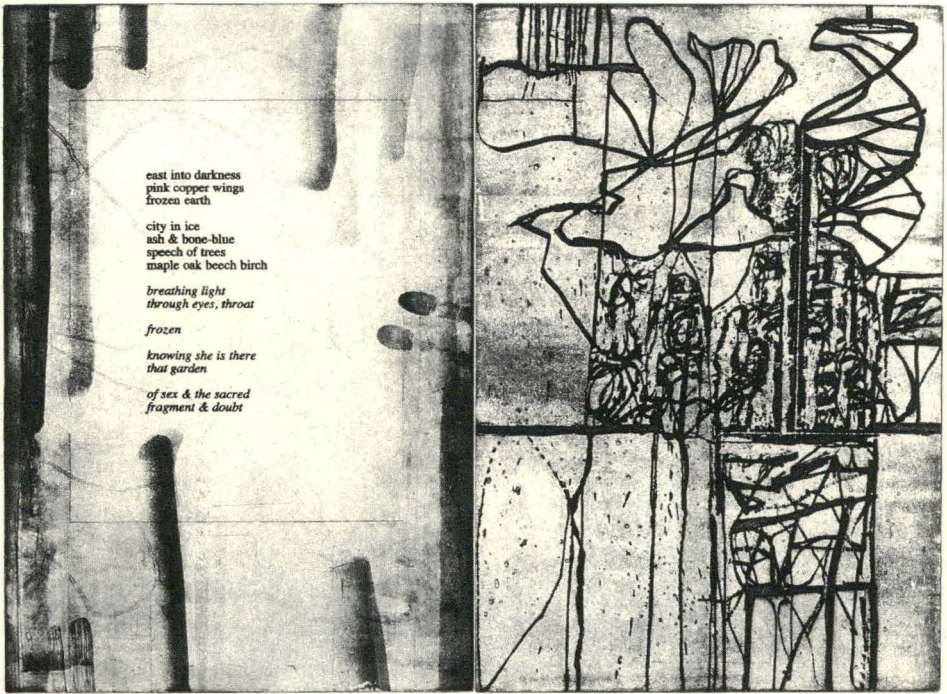
swimming the lake solo

(as if a loon
could take its tune

from you & from you
we move

grief being
a thing
outside us





east into darkness
pink copper wings
frozen earth

city in ice
ash & bone-blue
speech of trees
maple oak beech birch

*breathing light
through eyes, throat*

frozen

*knowing she is there
that garden*

*of sex & the sacred
fragment & doubt*

V

east into darkness
pink copper wings
frozen earth

city in ice
ash & bone-blue
speech of trees
maple oak beech birch

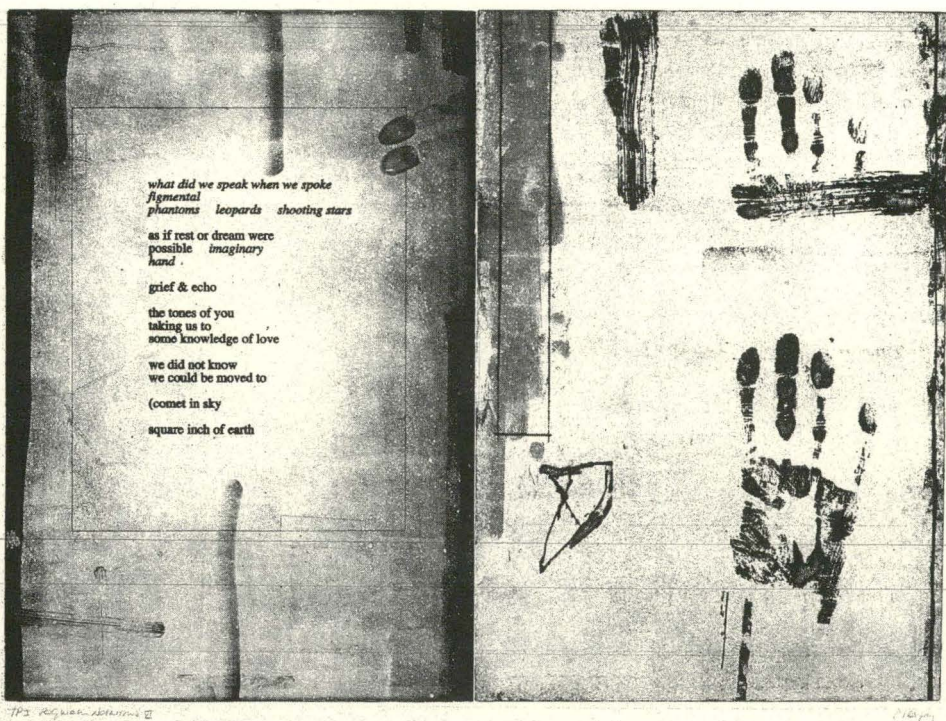
*breathing light
through eyes, throat*

frozen

*knowing she is there
that garden*

*of sex & the sacred
fragment & doubt*





VI

what did we speak when we spoke
 figmental
 phantoms leopards shooting stars

as if rest or dream were
 possible imaginary
 hand

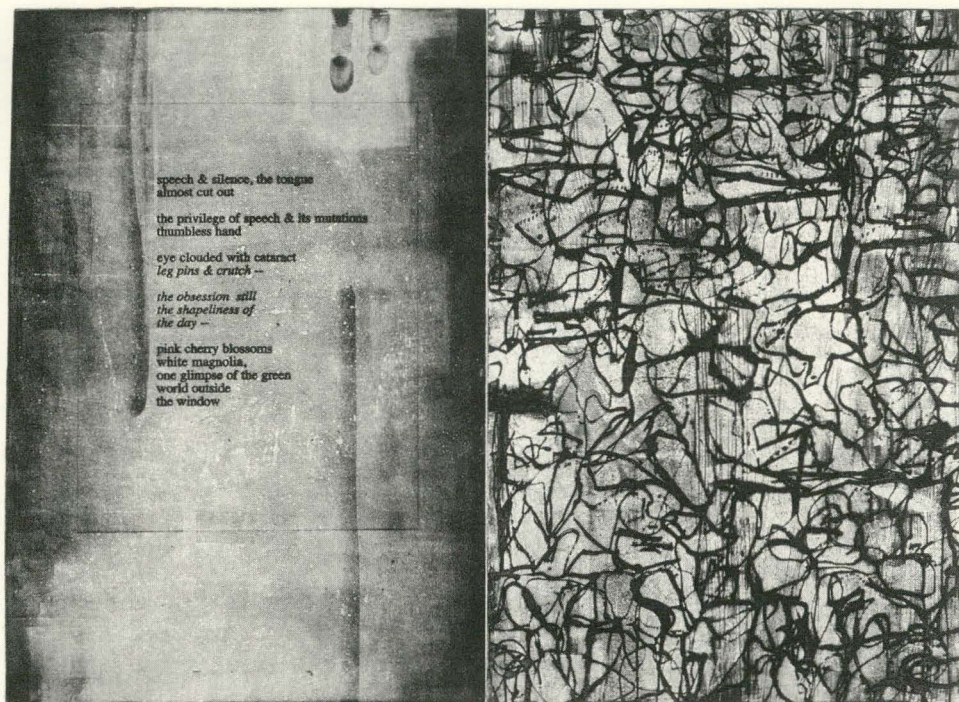
grief & echo

the tones of you
 taking us to
 some knowledge of love

we did not know
 we could be moved to

(comet in sky

square inch of earth



speech & silence, the tongue
almost cut out

the privilege of speech & its mutations
thumbless hand

eye clouded with cataract
leg pins & crutch —

the obsession still
the shapeliness of
the day —

pink cherry blossoms
white magnolia,
one glimpse of the green
world outside
the window

VII

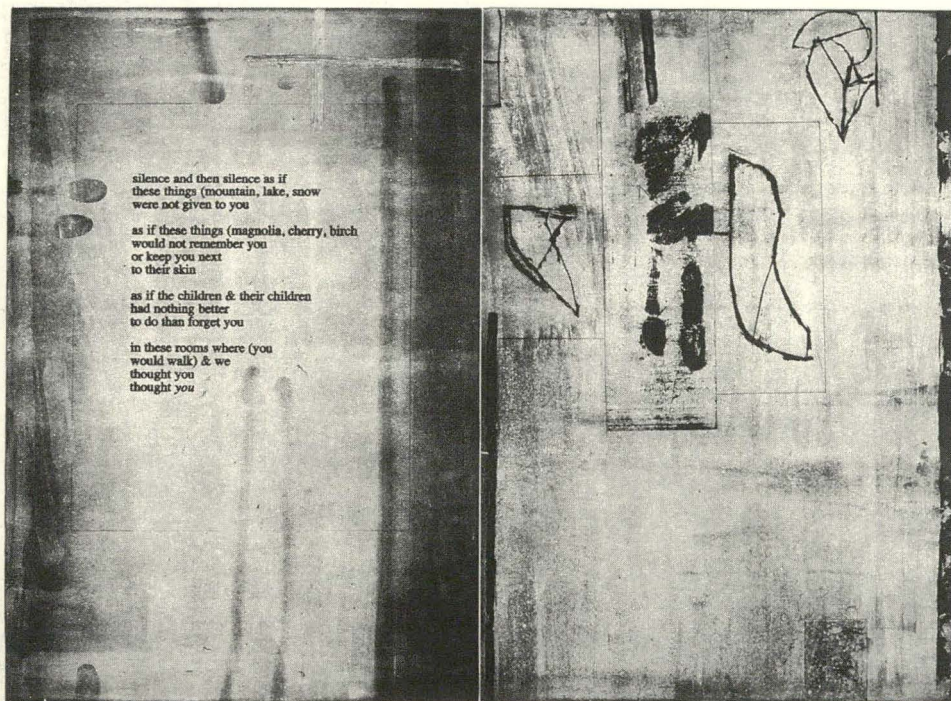
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leg pins & crutch —

the obsession still
the shapeliness of
the day —

pink cherry blossoms
white magnolia,
one glimpse of the green
world outside
the window



silence and then silence as if
these things (mountain, lake, snow
were not given to you

as if these things (magnolia, cherry, birch
would not remember you
or keep you next
to their skin

as if the children & their children
had nothing better
to do than forget you

in these rooms where (you
would walk) & we
thought you
thought you

IX

silence and then silence as if
these things (mountain, lake, snow
were not given to you

as if these things (magnolia, cherry, birch
would not remember you
or keep you next
to their skin

as if the children & their children
had nothing better
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for EVA SAARINEN COUPEY & MAURICE HENRI COUPEY

This work is the core group of a larger body of prints and projects done while on Paid Educational Leave from Capilano College and supported by a Visual Arts Grant from the British Columbia Arts Council, 1996-1997. This folio accompanies the catalogue for Pierre Coupey's exhibition, *Notations*, at the Canadian Embassy Gallery, Tokyo, September - October 1998.

REQUIEM NOTATIONS I - IX

Intaglio soft ground & photo etch on 18 zinc plates
Gamblin Bone Black on 300 gm Arches Cover Buff
Plate size 18" x 12" each

Image size 18" x 24"

Sheet size 26 1/2" x 32"

Etched and proofed by Pierre Coupey at
the Art Institute, 1996-1997

Edited by Maryke Nap at the Art Institute, 1998

Requiem Notations I - IX will be exhibited at
the Evergreen Cultural Centre, June - July 1999,
curator Sarah Dobbs.

My thanks to Bob Sherrin and Margareta Miniovich of The Capilano Review, Lana Robinson of the Capilano College Foundation, and Wayne Eastcott of the Art Institute for their support of this project in its several aspects. Thanks also to the work of Louis Dudek, Roy Kiyooka, Duncan McNaughton, Lisa Robertson, Melissa Wolsak, and others, for some of the words and lines I've stolen. And thanks to Marguerite Barbir and Philippe Coupey for their help in finding photographs. -PC

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North Vancouver, BC
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1205 Pinetree Way
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Rachel Rose / FIVE POEMS

IF ONLY

I squander my nights longing for what's lost:
the propinquity of your heartbeat,
the certainty of your weight,
your jealous dog whining at my door.

I still have the dog. That should be enough.
A small black dog, surprisingly bright.
We walk together all over Montreal
trying to forget you. In the park
at twilight your dog flips like a shrimp

in the tulip beds, zags to sniff
dogs' flagged rear ends.
I stand around and try to be more like her.
Try to improve my sense
of smell, discern cinnamon
from urine, crocus from crow. This
could be of use in my future.

Once we saw a ring of people
around two dogs
locked in coitus. The neighbours prodded
and shook their heads. An old woman
offered a bucket of ice.
The bitch's claws scraped cement
as she tried to find some place
where they could be alone,

but she made small progress
with that yellow dog's weight
anchored in her.

Your dog tugged me past.
She was trying to teach me
a lesson. She wants me
to avoid crowds and idle gossip,
to delight in Forsythia, Irish
Setters and fire hydrants.
She wants to improve
my mind.

I want someone
to teach me the heart
of things, tease the grit
from my scrapes, nudge
the dog eye sludge
from the bridge of my nose,
love me through the slits
of their eyes.

I want an intelligent cocked
ear and six nipples.
Someone to pirouette with,
someone to curl against
these cicada afternoons.

I move slowly through the dog days
of summer in Montreal,
your weight locked
around my hips, dragging
the carcass of love behind me.

THE NEIGHBORS

We've never been introduced
but we know the most intimate details
of their grief, their sexual pleasure
and the smells of their cooking
leaking under our doors.

And tonight, because it's April,
the neighbors are at it again.
Fucking surrounds us
on all sides. It starts
with the neighbors above us
a woman whose voice is a circle
of moans like a peony unfolding
a man who reaches a note
so high we can hardly
bear its weight.

We are silent in the dark,
dry eyes burning, holding hands
as they crest in screams.

We rest, all four of us
slowly growing calm on each side
of our respective walls. Four pulses
return to normal. We sleep,
the neighbors sleep,

For two hours. Then we are woken again.
We think it's the neighbors
on the left. This time
my lover is strangely affected.
She sits up trembling in the dark
waiting for it to be over.

The bed creaks
like frogs in moonlight
and above the bed their moans
shudder and weep like November.

When silence falls again
my lover cracks
into voice.
Bravo! she shrieks, clapping the wall
between us. *Bravo! You both came!*
Now shut the fuck up!

On all sides the neighbors
sit up in stunned silence.
Everyone holds
their collective breath.

By morning, none of this will have happened.

ONE NIGHT IN FIVE

The lungs project above the medial one third
of the clavicle and the skull holds a bone
like a fossilized butterfly. Each cranial nerve
tells its own story and the innominate bones
resemble nothing but themselves—

The throat begins with a trap
door. Liquid has two choices:
esophagus or trachea,
stomach or lungs. Mostly
there is no choice:
the epiglottis
clamps, water
does not enter
the lungs.

Today she drains her first lung. Last night
I held her while she told me so, I drew her
skin over mine and we pulsed. Today
in her books I find *lung*, I find
the position where her needle will enter—

All winter I have studied
anatomy. Love taught me
to cherish the sponged
bulk of a lung. When
I run my tongue

up the slopes
of her body
I know each
relationship:
skin over
manubrium
over lung.
All that I love
is layered.

One night in five I lie alone, she stays
at the hospital. At night comes the firstblown
snow. Yesterday her friend died in childbirth
in Rome. The anesthetic took her under.
Her lungs snagged on a certain breath
in a certain Roman clinic—

It was Sunday, bells ringing
past the olive trees
outside city limits.
Women in black shawls
were already gathered
for bad news. My lover
has confined her grief
to saying, as if
in prayer—

Such things shouldn't happen anymore.

Love, the world
is half in
and half out
of your tired hands.
There is a baby
left behind
in a Roman clinic
as yet
innominate.

AUBADE

Consciousness is a gift brought by the dawn.
They watch her crawl across the floor
and locate each item of clothing. Her silver chains
are lost, all her rings are gone.
They won't meet her eyes, dust cracking
their lips in the dry air.

The sand leaves a trail
from where they picked her up on shore
passed out with one hand in the sea,
the girl left behind
at the high school bonfire.

From what has fallen out of her
you could find your way back to the sea:

Pliant mute, pliant mermaid, each step
a blade entering. Love's cost.
Woken briefly
by the grinding in and out of her.
Sand in her mouth and falling from her skin
as she tried to push it away.
But it drove in. This
the price of being human.

In the bath that night, the water runs grey
with sand. She could have made a castle

with all that spilled from her body.
Made her escape to the farthest tower
 dragging
 her burden of hair
 behind her.

Beauty, she slept on bare wood
and her dreams were blunt with alcohol.
Now nothing is as tender as her abraded skin.
Even the floor of the cabin is strewn
with what was inside her: crunching
under their boots, her clothes
stiff with salt.

And it is no surprise
when one of them offers to drive her home
as if she'd had a flat on the highway
and they'd pulled up behind her with a jack.
As if she'd been rescued by them.
She resists the urge to thank them
or breathe too hard
 their smell
 on her skin.

Aurora now, one of them opens the cabin door
onto a mess of sunlight and purple alders.
Her heart jolts as they pass around
morning's whisky. Something pricks her finger.
She has misplaced
 three wishes.
 And her hands

are burned, from where, they said
she caught fire. Someone put her out.
Alcohol is ether
and she is full of unconscious
grace. He leads her to his truck,
opens the door for her
as if he were helping her escape the wreck
but he has no money; she buys the gas.

SMALL JUSTICE

For my cousin, Teresa Gonzales

He's gone before you,
the one who taught you
what you learned of love.
That's small justice,
cousin, but small coins
might make a dollar
eventually.

You will go before us.
You will drift away
in a sea of night sweats.
Already your body
has become the furnace
of a ship. You burn
through the night
and the sheets
are water.

On this shore we stand
with our foolish confetti
and our white handkerchiefs
waving up a storm. We are
not sure our voices carry
over water. You smile patiently
from where you are, long past
the bitterness that keeps

us here, and our terror
of love's pandemics.

In the toss of waves
your future beckons,
a stolen necklace.
Some crows gather,
attracted by the glitter.
They set up a dark
& raucous debate.
We don't know
if the sound carries
over water.

And finally
there is an absence.
No nipple in your mouth
these apricot nights.
No movement in love
across the living room.
Finally there is no justice.

Blanche Howard / DÖPPELGANGERS

Just before George Summers died, collapsing without warning into the crème brûlée at the monthly potluck dinner, he managed to reach across the table for Penelope Stevens' hand and whisper "Penny," even though his own wife Mildred was right beside him.

At the time Penelope dismissed this small final act as of no consequence, but it has proven intrusive; has, in fact, been concentrating her mind rather wonderfully. Not on the death itself, with its reminder that her own future no longer stretches deliciously into a haze of possible fame, glory and even riches (although at seventy that's not exactly news). Nor is it the tendency of the road ahead to peter out with neither bang nor whimper, smudging into an indeterminate greyish-brown distance, a possible oblivion, that is sharpening her focus.

It is an altogether different question that Penelope is determined to settle once and for all. (Before you die, whispers the fearmonger who plies his nasty trade below stairs—but she knows better than to give that one an inch.) What she must tackle, she points out frostily, is not so much the plausibility of immortality—she is trying to keep an open mind on that—as the quixotic conundrum it trails in its wake: who, exactly, survives? Among the selves that have heaved into consciousness in their day, that now slide and slip below the surface like tectonic plates, which will prove to be the essence?

For George's whispered plea is a potent reminder that everyone isn't home. Thirty-five years ago there was a woman who is no longer contained in her, with whom she registers not a scrap of recognition, who she would pass in the street without so much as a friendly nod. The faithless wife who longed to leap at and under now-dead George Summers. The strumpet who fantasized by day and especially by night of their falling together in a tangle of sweaty limbs; of their glorying in, exulting in, the rock-hard thrusting that she longed to experience with him over and over again.

That woman is not to be found anywhere in the emotional detritus of Penelope's past. All she is now is a memory, a curiosity, a being to whom Penelope attaches a slight aura of shame, an outgrown primitive who once bore Penelope's name.

She wonders how many other women she has mislaid. They must be scattered through her like errant *döppelgängers*, temporarily petrified, the way DNA fragments are sometimes encased in amber. Awaiting resurrection. Or, at the very least, a proper burial.

Years ago—ten years ago this February, to be exact—shortly after Penelope's husband Grover died, Mildred and George invited Penelope over for drinks and because there was "something we want to discuss." Sherry on the rocks for Penelope, a finger of vodka and orange juice for Mildred, two fingers, hold the o.j. for George. Then the three of them arranged themselves in a neat, stiff triangle on the tangle of cretonne daisies and dahlias that covered the sofa and matching chairs. Mildred raised her glass.

"To poor Grover," she said, and sighed, her rosy face settling into appropriate sadness as they tipped their glasses to whatever ectoplasmic wisp of Grover still attached itself to them.

George knocked back his drink in one go and lumbered out to the kitchen "to top it up." Mildred glared after his retreating back. The silence deepened. Penelope resisted a wild impulse to toss her sherry at the tendrils of the spider plant, open the sliding glass door and gallop down the street into the safety of her own car. She didn't. Instead she pressed her knees tightly together and sipped her sherry until George, unable to stall any longer, ambled back and eased himself into his chair.

Mildred cleared her throat. "As you know," she began, with a solemnity befitting an announcement of the re-launch of Desert Storm, "we drive to Arizona every winter."

Penelope, through the apprehension that chilled her, nodded and smiled. Mildred looked pointedly at George. George rattled his ice around in his glass, then drained the watery contents and heaved himself up to a semi-crouch before being checkmated. "George?" Mildred said, ending the word on an upswing of unmistakable portent.

George sank back. The ice cubes, as a source of inspiration, failed

him, and finally he mumbled, "Come on along if you want."

"Yes!" Mildred cried, her voice lilting with melodic overtones.

"Yes, Penelope! Get your mind off—well, off your loneliness!"

"Hotter than hell, should warn you," George muttered.

"I'm not —" Penelope began.

"It takes a year," Mildred said. "Everyone says it. A year until you're yourself again."

Penelope didn't ask who she was in the interim. She downed her sherry and held out the glass to George who sprinted with it to the kitchen.

Such hope in Mildred's eyes, such fervour. Why, Penelope wondered? Perhaps being sequestered on the desert with George was boring. He hated shopping and seemed unable to make small talk, he was bellicose and frequently despondent, he swore and in the evenings drank too much, and all too often he re-lived the glory days of World War Two, ferrying bombers over the Burma hump.

Penelope downed the sherry, thanked them, said she'd think it over, and got the hell out of there.

Mildred phoned every day, her voice increasingly at the edge of exasperation. Still Penelope stalled. The drive to Phoenix would not be much fun, of that Penelope was reasonably sure. She had never cared that much for Mildred. Mildred was not a woman Penelope could love, while George—the possibility had existed, once. Surreptitiously she examined George-now for traces of George-then and found none. Her passion, she suspected, had been nothing more than a necessary catalyst for the exclusion of raiding *döppelgang*ers.

After a suitable interval Penelope phoned to decline. To her relief George answered. "Thank Christ you've still got your head screwed on straight!" he muttered.

She heard the click of the extension.

"Hi Penny," Mildred trilled, and George mumbled "Leave you girls to it," and hung up.

Penelope repeated her invented reason. She would have to mind her bank balances from now on, it looked as though the business might not be as lucrative as Grover had thought. (After she had been cured of George she had sworn never again to lie. Still, to save face

for Mildred—?)

There was a short silence and then Mildred said, in a voice as harsh as the rasp of an old saw, "You owe me, Penny."

In European folklore there is a superstition that if you meet your *döppelgänger* you will be dead before the sun sets.

Penelope remembers, suddenly, when she first heard the word, on an evening about forty years ago in France, before George turned her head. Her parents kept the children, everyone agreeing that a break would be "good for Penny's nerves."

She had been going through a time of dislocation. She would be stricken with sudden and extreme fears, as though whatever had once existed at her core had evaporated. It was as though a road had appeared that she was not prepared to take, yet more familiar paths had become dangerous and subject to invasion.

She and Grover rented a house in Roujan in the Languedoc area of southern France, and in the warm Mediterranean evening they would laze in the tiny garden, sipping a potent local *muscat*, absorbing the evening sounds. The mourning dove, its three repetitive notes seemingly underscoring the uselessness of it all. Two sets of bells from the church and the *Hotel de ville* echoing the hour one after the other, as though Time itself were willing to wait for the other's harmonious expression.

An impassioned conversation started up and drifted over the garden wall, the voices musical in their lilting foreignness, and Penelope remembers now the sudden impression she had of waiting, although for what she couldn't have said. A presence perhaps, or another person—it was as if there were a danger zone into which something, or somebody, was about to drop.

Then she heard the word *döppelgänger*. "What's a *döppelgänger*?" she asked, and Grover explained that it was supposed to be your double, a ghostly double exactly like you, even dressed the same. Some people, he said, swear they've met this double face to face, and then he held up his hand and listened again. (Grover liked to display his fluency.)

"They are saying that—some man, Claude something, in the next village, bumped right into his *döppelgänger* in his own vineyard

and died before sunset.”

Penelope remembers the shock as the words struck and resonated with something in her that was tuned to the same harmonic frequency. Agitated, trembling, she jumped up and mumbled some excuse and ran outside for a walk through the narrow, crumbling streets. She caught a reflection of herself in her yellow sun dress in a store window, and then a flash of matching yellow behind her, and she began to shake, in case the following shade should clap her on the shoulder and spin her around and accuse her of stealing her life. And demand that it be returned.

Dread settled over her like a shroud, enveloping her from head to foot and blocking all the light. When she came to she was lying on the sidewalk and she saw faces bending over her and heard a babble of foreign words. She felt a rising panic, and then one of the women, the one in a blouse of the same yellow as Penelope’s dress, shouted, “Monsieur Stevens!” in the direction of their nearby residence.

“Anxious attack,” said a doctor who prided himself on his mastery of English, declaiming the words as though naming would cure her.

George Summers had been opportune, Penelope sees this now. He had slipped under her skin like a jigsaw piece whose border more or less matched the jagged edge where Penelope’s shadow began. The space the *döppelgänger* might have co-opted.

An almost forgotten interlude. Yet Penelope sometimes wonders if their passion, hers and George’s, had subtracted some possibility that might have been Mildred’s. Did she, in fact, owe Mildred?

When, after Grover’s death, even her own children urged her to take the trip, get started on her new life, let the healing begin, Penelope capitulated.

“We can trade around, take turns driving,” George growled as they piled into the car on a rain-drenched morning, when clouds shade sea into mountains and the operators of Vancouver’s Grouse Mountain ski hill mingle their tears with the streams of rapidly-melting snow.

“I don’t think Penny would be comfortable driving someone else’s car,” Mildred interposed, then without a pause for breath she sat in front with George. She’d navigate, she announced, at least through

Washington and Oregon. "We avoid the I-five, back roads are more fun and I'm a great navigator," she said.

Something in Mildred's voice gave Penelope pause. A warning, like a muffled foghorn, seemed to be struggling through the numbness, and in that moment, that irreversible second when it has only just become too late, she knew that the price of distraction might be too high.

The first motels featured a bedroom for Mildred and George and a make-down couch in the living area for Penelope. King, queen, neutered hag, she thought as she fell asleep. On the second night she dashed into the bathroom and collided with George. (His prostate was giving him trouble.) She would have toppled if he hadn't grabbed her, and just then, as though they were in a bad sitcom, Mildred woke and switched on the light and sat up. The thin strap of her blue satin nightgown fell over her plump shoulder, partially revealing the whiteness of her breast.

"What are you two up to?" she demanded querulously, and Penelope skittered into the bathroom and locked the door, and when she heard George shout, "Oh for Christ's sake!" she flushed the toilet so she wouldn't hear the rest.

"Get two units," she told George, the next day.

"But Penny," Mildred began, "that'll cost extra—"

"I'll pay," Penelope said.

Mildred protested; Penelope had given her to understand that she hadn't been left all that well off, but if she wanted to throw her money around she guessed it was up to her.

They rode in silence for the rest of the day.

Ever since she'd known her, Penelope had recognized that the kind of seductive behaviour that was Mildred's was probably a learned manipulation dragged along from a charming girlhood. But that was easily overlooked because Mildred's nature was open, sunny, uncomplicated. Nothing existed for Mildred until she herself had experienced or discovered it; the doings of others, unless they impinged on her directly, were outside her purview.

Mildred's world, it seemed to Penelope, had the benefit of simplicity in that it divided itself into only two classes: those who were good-

looking and those who weren't trying. The good-looking—among whom Mildred counted herself, and George—were a superior species to whom the latter, the not good-looking, owed duties of service and respect.

Mildred had always been favoured. Miss Stampede Queen—although plumper now, but still unbowed. Penelope, Mildred saw, didn't try, even though she had the basics, enviable thinness, nice skin; nevertheless Penelope was accorded a grudging wariness not usually bestowed on lesser mortals, because of George. A wariness that could and often did—although Penelope didn't know this—slide into fury.

Penelope had long ago accepted the jolly, easy-going, undemanding Mildred who was revealed to her as someone she quite liked; someone who, if not exactly a friend, evoked in her the warmth of long acquaintanceship. But now Mildred's cross, cranky responses, her penchant for martyrdom, her failure to even acknowledge the suggestions of others, the way she would forget or ignore the agreed-on meeting time for breakfast, her sudden, unexplained route changes, and when at the wheel, her reckless speeding over the narrow back roads, all of these were totally out of the character that Penelope thought she knew.

Mildred drove over slippery mountain passes at a speed that would have left the drivers on the freeway pulling over into the parking lane and gaping in wonderment—or so it seemed from the lurching discomfort of the back seat—and sometimes would wheel off the road without explanation. "Not yet—Christ!" George would shout, and Mildred would wave airily and glance (dangerously) at the map and explain brusquely that this was a shortcut, didn't George remember from last time? Twice they got lost.

By the end of the day Penelope would be exhausted, as though something like an invisible vacuum cleaner, or an erg-depleting vampire, were sucking off her energy. She began to have a spooky feeling that there was a fourth person in the car who wasn't Mildred but wore her clothes. Alone at night her mind would circle like a police dog sniffing for traces of Mildred, and when she would finally fall asleep she would waken and suffer a brief lapse, forgetting who Mildred was and having to search for the name of this woman she had known for

nearly forty years.

Penelope thinks there are modules in the brain, little cogs like the ones that make her sewing machine perform different stitch patterns. The cog by which she recognized Mildred, that had been built up over all those years, had gone awry. It no longer contained Mildred as she was then revealed; other modules would be better fits, Elspeth's at the Senior Centre for instance who carried her meanness with a sort of pride, once even bragging to Penelope that her Aunt Annie "was said to be the meanest woman in Ontario." Or Doris who had worked for Grover sometimes and whose propriety hid a devious nature, (and who once, briefly, caught Grover's eye).

No-name Mildred, as Penelope took to calling her (to herself) could just about as easily, with a little trimming here and stretching there, fit into Elspeth's mold or Doris' mold as into the one formerly reserved for her in Penelope's brain. Occasionally Penelope would even call Mildred by Elspeth's or Doris' name, Mildred's first hint of what she has come to believe—or pretends to—as Penelope's deterioration.

Then, in Sedona, Arizona, a place of light and dazzling red rock and a weightlessness that is perhaps the altitude, perhaps something else, Mildred as remembered and believed in returned. Mildred herself, agreeable, dismissable, laughing and spashing in the pool, exclaiming over the immensity and proximity of stars in the furry blackness of the night sky, marvelling at the brilliance of red rock and sunsets.

Penelope was disarmed, at least temporarily. Perhaps she'd over-reacted? Perhaps Mildred had truly had headaches, as she had claimed?

This went on for three days until they met a group of thirtyish young people, women in homespun cotton gowns, men sporting ponytails and ragged jeans, who urged them to pause and feel the energy, and told them that Sedona was at a conjunction of something they called ley-lines. Penelope breathed in rapidly, and felt light again, as though energy were indeed surging through the brilliant earth and up through the soles of her feet.

George grunted and called them "that bunch of hippes," and said maybe the thin air at this altitude was what was affecting their alleged

minds, or more likely some not-so-thin grass.

"Hippies are extinct," Penelope pointed out. "These are New Agers."

"Penelope believes in that stuff," Mildred said flatly, although this was news to Penelope.

In an Arizona motel Penelope dreamed of the young George for whom she had once longed and who had longed for her. At every attempted assignation Mildred would pounce, and Penelope woke with an ancient longing that belonged to youth and joy and forgotten despair and had no business lighting up her ageing body. Such yearnings had been expunged long ago, or so she thought; buried in the acceptance that creeps year by year over passion like a roving glacier, smothering desire under tonnes of translucent ice.

It occurs to her now that if the woman who had wanted George Summers is still able to evoke such a splendour of feeling in dreams, she may not be lost after all.

Yet in the hard light of an Arizona morning George metamorphosed instantly into his current stolid self, a man she no longer felt anything for except a basic goodwill and a sort of pity. By the time breakfast was finished Mildred too had disappeared, and they rode to Phoenix with the stranger.

On the flight home, which Penelope took suddenly and without dissembling ("No, I'm sorry, I just want to go home") she pondered the mystery of identity. Two personalities, one Mildred. Were they—the personalities, perhaps *döppelgangers*? Real and roaming about, awaiting the unguarded moment—a loss of attention, a momentary distraction—to slip into a living body? She shivered, and thought of the casting out of devils.

Penelope believes that the past is a great puzzle of interlocking events scattered through the reaches of earlier time, there for the solving. Once the sun burns off the mist she decides to go on her daily walk and think it through. As she walks she organizes the evidence, imagining it in neatly-printed rows on lined paper.

Fact One: she and George once had a mutual infatuation about thirty-five years ago.

Fact Two: they did little about it, not through nobility, entirely, but—let's be honest—because of lack of opportunity.

Fact Three: somehow Mildred figured it out.

Fact Four: the last thing George did, the hand he reached for, the person he called for as he fell, was "Penny."

Mildred will be unlikely to dismiss that final plea.

Yet George's death should have freed them both, from guilt, from lingering resentment, from obligation. Shouldn't it? George is, after all, gone. Where? Well, as Hamlet pointed out, that *is* the question. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy," Penelope declaims loudly, and a woman snipping the dead blossoms off a hydrangea peers along the street to see who on earth would be named Horatio in this day and age.

Who survives, who should feel guilt, who owes whom, where has that person gone? Weighty matters.

She sits on her "resting bench" and thinks of George. He filled a space, and when the affair ended she was no longer afraid of what might slip in. He'd been like a temporary skin placed over a bloody lesion to give it the time it needs to heal; a catalyst for the exclusion of raiding demons.

Through the thinning mist Penelope sees a woman climbing the hill, a brisk, youthful woman holding her unlined face to the emerging sun. She could be Penelope herself, a younger, sturdier Penelope, when her hair was dark and her step light.

She is still too far away for Penelope to make out her features, but as she approaches Penelope thinks, I wouldn't care if she turned out to be my *döppelgänger*. She wouldn't scare me one bit. I'd just hold out my hand and shake hers, and Penelope stands up and closes her eyes and sticks out her hand. (The woman is still half a block away.)

Penelope knows exactly what she will look like. Tall, with dark hair that swings around her shoulders in what was once called a "page-boy" bob, brown eyes that have not yet learned the art of concealment, clear skin, wearing a slightly-flared wool skirt and red blazer. The young woman has worked hard at looking like everyone else but believes she has fallen short of the mark, far short of it. She has no conception of her own power, of her strength, her vibrancy, her vitality, nor of the sexuality which, like a silent explosion, bespeaks the

magical fit of spirit and flesh.

"How are you?" Penelope will say. "Yes, isn't it a coincidence? No, I'm sorry, there's no room at the inn, as they say. Yes, perhaps we will meet again. So long!"

When she opens her eyes and checks the street the woman has disappeared.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

PIERRE COUPEY is currently in Tokyo for the installation and opening of his exhibition, *Notations 1994–1998*, at the Canadian Embassy Gallery. The work in this issue will be the focus of an exhibition at the Evergreen Cultural Centre in Coquitlam next summer. He will also be exhibiting *Work from the Notations Series* at Montgomery Fine Art in Vancouver this October. A founding co-editor of *The Georgia Straight* (1967) and the founding editor of *The Capilano Review* (1971), he has exhibited and published extensively since moving to Vancouver from Montreal in 1966. He teaches English and Creative Writing at Capilano College.

DON DRUICK'S plays have been produced throughout Canada, and in Europe, Japan, and the USA. In 1997, his play *Where Is Kabuki?* was the recipient of a Chalmers Canadian Play Award. His recent work includes the play *Julie Louise*, which will be workshopped at the Stratford Festival in the fall, and a translation of Goldoni's *Villeggiatura* trilogy, recently produced for the CBC.

MONA FERTIG began writing and publishing in her teens. Her new book of 30 prose poems; *Sex, Death & Travel* will be published by Oolichan Books in 1998. She has published 11 previous books and chapbooks, including *4722 Rue Berri* (Caitlin Press) and was the editor of *A Labour Of Love* (Polestar Press), an anthology of poetry on pregnancy and childbirth. She was the Founder and Director of the Literary Storefront in Vancouver 1978–1982. She presently runs (m)Öthêr Tønguè Press, a private press on Salt Spring Island with her husband. (m)Öthêr Tønguè Press publishes exquisite limited editions of poetry and book art and has a year-round Writer's Retreat. She has two children and is working on her 1st novel.

BLANCHE HOWARD lives in North Vancouver. Her latest novel, *A Celibate Season*, was written in collaboration with Carol Shields, and has just been re-issued by Random House. She has three other novels, a number of short stories, and two plays to her credit.

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RACHEL ROSE has been published most recently in *The Fiddlehead*, *Arc*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *This Magazine*. She is currently living in Montreal, working on a poetry manuscript and a collection of short stories, and hoping to win the lottery without ever buying a ticket.

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