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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

John Fowles was truly a Renaissance man, one whose interests ran from a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of horticulture to collecting fossils and coffee cups as well as writing fiction, non-fiction and poetry. We had a minor correspondence dating back to 19xx, but we never met until 1996 while I was on a Leverhulme Fellowship to the University of East Anglia. We met at his Belmont home in Lyme Regis at which point I asked him if I could use his name as part of a literary series I wanted to organize. Fowles's answer was to the point: "Anything for students." And so, in 1997, I organized the first John Fowles Literary Series under the auspices of the John Fowles Center for Creative Writing. Nineteen years later, I have started an online literary journal titled Mantissa, named after one of his favorite novels. It is especially important since most critics didn't like the novel, but given Fowles's somewhat irascible nature, that probably suited him.

One of the definitions of Mantissa is a "minor addition to a text" and, in some ways, the aim of the journal is to be an addition to some of the undercurrents in the novel which deal with a panoply of themes from the writer-Muse relationship based on the Muses in Greek mythology to the subtheme dealing with Structuralist and post-Structuralist literary theory that states art is self-enclosed and self-referential and Fowles's Mantissa is a novel about its own writing which makes constant reference to other writers and their work. Perhaps, that is why he liked the novel and most critics didn't. I recall him saying to me once that it was his job to write and a reader's to read so it's clear he wouldn't have been much concerned about what critics thought.

It's with that thought in mind that I decided to create a literary journal devoted to many things Fowlesian: fiction, philosophy, literary criticism, French studies. I hope that such a journal will endeavor to do justice not only to Fowles's work, but to his myriad interests.



Mark Axelrod
Editor-in-Chief, Mantissa
Director, John Fowles Center for Creative Writing

JOHN FOWLES IN FOCUS

"All human beings should behave as if they are mysteries to themselves."

JOHN FOWLES in Interview with SUSANA ONEGA, Zaragoza*



This interview took place on Saturday 17th February 2001, in Belmont House, Lyme Regis, where John and Sarah Fowles had kindly invited me to spend the weekend. I am most grateful to them for their warm welcome and patient cooperation and, in the case of Sarah, for her readiness to participate in the interview. My thanks are also due to my colleague, Tim Bozman, who transcribed the three tapes then recorded.

**Susana Onega is Professor of English Literature at the University of Zaragoza, Spain.*

Susana Onega (S.O.): Before coming here to interview you, I read the twenty-two interviews recently collected by Dianne Vipond in *Conversations with John Fowles* (1999). Her selection ranges from Roy Newquist's interview, published in 1964, until the one conducted by Vipond herself in 1999. Reading them in chronological order, I realized how patient you have been all these years, answering all kinds of questions about your work and about yourself (often the same questions again and again). The further I read, the more I wondered at your forbearance with all of us—critics, journalists and postgraduate students—

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writing their dissertations on that abstract figure you call with a self-directed irony “Fowles, the writer.” And I also realized how difficult it would be for me to ask you anything new. So, I suppose the first question has to be, how do you feel about being interviewed at present? Do you do it out of sheer kindness, or do you find being interviewed interesting in any way?

John Fowles (J.F.): Well, I think first of all, I feel that I’m something historical. I belong to the last century and that is slightly embarrassing because I once compared this experience to medicine: that is when a doctor strips a skeleton down to nothing and that leaves you feeling half dead. And I don’t like that. On the other hand, I always wish people knew more about me, but that’s a kind of vanity: you must be known. But this is really what I am getting at in that statement. I do want to be really known. It is important for me to remember that I am not.

S.O.: But do you know yourself?

J.F.: Good question. I think I do, but I really am so much happier not with interviewers but with a typewriter in front of me. I can express myself through that, strip myself bare better than any anatomist.

S.O.: Have your tastes changed in recent years—in art, in literature, in women, in nature, in politics, in the things you have always found important?

J.F.: I don’t think they have really. But the typical question in the past has always been: which writers do you like? I cannot answer that. I like some writers some of the time but not all always. In politics, I remain very much of the left. Women continue to intrigue me and I cannot imagine life without women.

S.O.: Do you have any regrets: things you haven’t done or experienced and think you should have done? Or maybe things you have done and now wish you hadn’t?

J.F.: This world is very large and so there are countless places I wish I had been to, but I recently went to Saudi Arabia and I am afraid I disliked very intensely the Muslim or Mohammedan religion and I think very much that



I regret everything that has happened for the last several hundred years. Man in fact is just about to enter on a totally new phase of his existence, I think, and I do not like people who I feel are blocking the way through. We have to accept that the world is vastly changed just in the last ten years with all these discoveries about the genome. Practically, we don’t talk about it very much, although it is very important. And so it is harmful that we don’t talk enough about it.

S.O.: In “The Ebony Tower” David Williams has to choose between being faithful to his wife Beth and yielding to his passion for Diana...

J.F.: The word “passion” is a very Spanish word. The English are not passionate. Such feelings have to be dragged out of them.

S.O.: O. K., I’ll say “love,” then. In “The Ebony Tower” David Williams has to choose between being faithful to his wife Beth and yielding to his love for Diana. The second option would allow him to develop his artistic potential in a way he cannot while he remains a dutiful husband. Clearly, the message seems to be that art is immoral and has its own rules. But then, does it also mean that the truly creative artist must sacrifice everything: family ties, conventional morality, even the possibility of being fashionable, to his or her art? What have you sacrificed to your art?

J.F.: Years ago I was Head Boy of a school and they planted in me a very strong belief in the morality which my father also gave me. So ever since in a sense you always feel you have had to sacrifice too much to—I hate to use the word, but to what I would say was convention. You know a thing is supposed to be bad and you believe it is bad, but on the other hand you must allow the devil into your life. In other words you must be tempted even though the temptation will bring you into a bad situation, but I am a great believer in temptation, in the being tempted.

S.O.: But you are not tempted really, you are much more conventional than you allow people to really see, I think. Strangely enough, I think, you are much more of a Puritan than you let people realize.

J.F.: I probably am, yes. I would accept that. You see, in English history the period I most enjoy is the seventeenth century, which, as you perhaps know, is when the Puritan movement started and so on, and I adore the endless confusion and the messiness of the Civil War. And then suddenly at the end of the century a new king appears, William of Orange, you know, from the Netherlands. And that is why I have always collected books about the Civil War because I think this was the crisis period in this country. This is in fact when this country grew old and adult, during the seventeenth century.

S.O.: Are you saying that the Puritan revolution was positive in a sense?

J.F.: Yes, I am. It quite literally made this country.

S.O.: You have often said that novelists need a particular kind of wife. How would you characterize the perfect wife for a writer?

J.F.: I would say they should allow you to have room, to have space, to discover what you are. So, in a way that is very productive, and something that most women don’t like the idea of is that they must keep quiet, they must shut up. But in a way I would say that sensitivity is very important in the women that I know and most of the women I have got rid of in my life have not been sensitive. Normally, that’s why we have split, why we changed.

S.O.: Henry Breasley, the mature artist in “The Ebony Tower,” tried to convince David Williams to move from abstraction back to representational art. However, Breasley was much more innovative and a better artist than Williams. Looking at *The Moon Hunt*, one of Henry Breasley’s masterpieces, Williams realizes that the old master had tried to absorb and recast the whole western tradition of painting by standing in a parodic relationship to it, as Williams says, combining “both a homage and a kind of thumbed nose to a very old tradition.” Is parody the basic way in which the contemporary writer can

hope to come to terms with the tradition he or she stems from?

J.F.: Well, very important in all my writing has been humour. I really do not respect other novelists who are not humourous. I have greatly admired Evelyn Waugh, for instance, in Britain. I quite like novelists like the elder Amis, Kingsley Amis. And I really do believe the great secret to life is being humourous about it.

S.O.: So, do you think that humour is more important than parody?

J.F.: Parody has a definite aim and that is trying to convince people that they are deeply wrong and they're fools...there is a French movement called pataphysique for which I had the greatest admiration and that gave rise in this country to the Goon Show, the great comic programme. I would definitely call myself a pataphysicien, as they would say in French. The movement began in France in the 1890s and has taken a long time to rise to the top. I have a magazine on it but I can't give it to you I am afraid.

S.O.: What are the main characteristics of the movement?

J.F.: It partly works on the idea of opposition. The most famous play in it is *Ubu roi* (King Ubu). It really needs very careful direction on the stage, it is a difficult play. But then, I am definitely a pataphysicien. I have been so for years.

S.O.: One of the myths about John in England, let's say, and certainly in America, I think, is that people don't realize his humour. He is one of the funniest men I have ever met.

J.F.: The thing is that I am very bad at imitating accents. I can't do that, that is an important part of the pataphysique, that you can make fun of people by imitating their voice. But I like all that: the introducing of the idea of humour into existence, into the novel and everything else. The classic former example of it is Cervantes.

S.O.: Have you ever felt what Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence," the pressure exerted on your writing by the work of the great masters in the Western canon?

J.F.: All writers must feel some anxiety. We must have some notion "I am not writing well or not well enough, I am not saying exactly what I mean." All this went ahead in fifth century BC Athens and above all in Socrates. I am a great believer in Socrates. Yes, Socrates has a sense of humour. And so in a way we have to realize that humour is a deeply important aspect of all writing. Even though when I say that, I know that I am no good at the humourous novel. Many years ago when I was a teacher I told my students to read above all Evelyn Waugh. For me he is a perfection in a perfect state of the comic novel.

S.O.: Thackeray too...

J.F.: Yes, but he is very dry when he wants to be.

S.O.: Do you like Dickens?

J.F.: Oddly enough, not terribly, no. I admire him for his enormous skill as a writer. Specially you feel that in the very first novels. One exception with Dickens is *Great Expectations*. I love *Great Expectations*. It says so much about the English.

S.O.: In "Hardy and the Hag" (1977) you say that creative writers have been children who "retain a particularly rich memory of the passage from extreme infancy, when the identity of the baby is merged with that of the mother, to the arrival of the first awareness of separate identity. They are, therefore, deeply marked by the passage from a unified magical world to a discrete 'realist' one." If I have understood this rightly, the implication is that your memory of your relationship with your mother must be very strong. However, you do not often talk about her. We know much more about your father, for example, from what you say about him in *The Tree*. Would you mind speaking about the memories you keep of your pre-Oedipal stage? How did you develop the sense of lack that, according to your own views, triggers off the writer's need to re-create magical worlds as an alternative to the world that is?

J.F.: I should say that I am deeply ashamed of the poorness of my relationship with my own

mother. I know with shame that I always laughed at her as a boy. She was a stupid, rather lumpish woman who did not really understand. She used to laugh at Picasso, for instance and all the other artists or writers I came to admire, she never really understood. She just thought they were funny, funny in a bad, funny in a peculiar sense.

S.O.: But then you didn't have this childhood trauma at all?

J.F.: Well, I'm lucky, all through my life I had been going through that trauma, in other words, being able to see myself and to see that I had behaved wrongly there, I'd behaved badly. I never really understood her, but she was a very good mother in her own way. I am guilty, yes, of not understanding my own mother.

S.O.: But no child ever does.

J.F.: I think this is partly true. Or some go too much the other way. They love their mothers too much and so become homosexual, something like that.

S.O.: One of the things you like about your mother is the fact that she came of Cornish — or Celtic stock. What is it that the Celts have that the Anglo-Saxons do not?

J.F.: Well, I wrote about that in one of my books...but really, you have to admit that in new blood is a lot of story telling, a kind of fictional power. And that's why I am very fond of an early French writer called Marie de France. She is a mysterious figure really. I actually remember at Oxford having to read Marie de France and thinking it was a bore; why are these medieval French writers so very boring, and so on. But since then I have realized it has an extraordinary lot of profound interest to any modern writer of fiction.

S.O.: I read somewhere that your mother also possibly came of Spanish stock. Is it true?

J.F.: Well, I had a Cornish uncle. The myth associated with him is that someone from the Spanish Armada had been washed ashore in Cornwall. He had extraordinarily dark skin, so he really looked Moorish or something like that—definitely not English.

S.O.: Can I add to that? That is quite a common rumour in Cornish stock, that they have a lot of Spanish ancestors who go back to the Armada.

J.F.: I'm afraid it's very common and I really regard this now just as a load of folk nonsense. This sort of image is not actually very true.

S.O.: But I think we quite like the idea.

J.F.: I like it too.

S.O.: We use it.

J.F.: I am very fond of Cornwall, the very end of England. The Scilly Islands and all that, and I write quite a lot about them.

S.O.: In the same essay you say that the child is "a magician with a wand." Your words bring to mind William Wordsworth's poem, "Intimations of Immortality," and also William Blake's contention that only children "know." Now, taking into account the fact that, in your fiction, the maturation process of the male protagonists always involves their transmutation from "collectors" to "creators/magi," are we to conclude that, in order for us to mature, we have to recover the simplicity of a child?

J.F.: Well, this is Freudian. I do believe the earliest years of your life — all your lives — are vastly important.

S.O.: That is why I was asking you about your mother. But you have often said that you had a happy childhood.

J.F.: I had a happy childhood but I disregarded my mother. I ought to have seen much rather more who she was and what she was trying to do. My father, you see, was a military person, basically. He came back from the First World War and he was suddenly in the 1920s told that he had to look after his own father's family. And so I grew up as a boy surrounded by relatives all of whom were my father's responsibility and who worried his life enormously.

S.O.: You also have a younger sister, don't you?

J.F.: Well, I regard the giving of her, Hazel, really as a kind of eternal recompense from God. I am afraid I don't believe in God, so I should be careful, but

destiny or fate, if you like. I'm very fond of Hazel, and Dan, who is now her husband. In a way I feel I was given all the luck in life. I really passed the care of looking after my mother on to her and have felt guilty about that ever since. I never had the good fortune of children, but very much enjoy hers, three nephews and a niece.

S.O.: You believe in God. You are not an atheist. You are an agnostic.

J.F.: Yes I'm really an agnostic. I often talk like a militant atheist but, as my wife Sarah has pointed out, I am not really so. This is her use to me, she blows up all the little myths about yourself that you inherit all through life. *L'enfer sont les autres*, as Sartre said.

S.O.: In *The Aristos* (1964) you draw an implicit opposition between self and world when you refer to "the otherness of things." Nearly thirty years later, you continue to speak in similar terms in *The Nature of Nature* (1995) when you warn the reader that the "world is not just stranger than we think; it may be stranger than we can think." And in *The Tree* (1979), you suggest that the "otherness" of nature is a result of the human need

to name and classify things. According to this, it is language itself that alienates human beings from nature, by imposing an anthropomorphic pattern on it. Your suggestion is that we should abandon the logical language of science for the synthetic, intuitive language of the individual, that we give up logic and rationality for "right feeling," or what Daniel Martin calls "whole-sight." Could your novels be described as exercises in intuitive language aimed at reaching "right feeling" or "whole-sight" as Daniel Martin says?

J.F.: Yes, very much so. I am a great believer in feeling, the intuitively sensing of what life is about. It is simple, having theories about what life is.

S.O.: Is this what you are striving to achieve in all your fictions?

J.F.: Yes, I think I am. But I would use the word "feeling." It is no good just having theories about what life is; you have to sense that it is worthwhile living.

S.O.: What other differences are there between the language of the scientist and the language of the individual writer apart from the

preponderance of rational discourse in one and intuitive discourse in the other? Are there notable differences, for example, in rhythm, imagery, symbolism, etc.?

J.F.: Yes, they are very different, but on the other hand, personally, I wish I had been a scientist. If I have a longing in life it is this. And I have to blame myself because if you want to be a scientist you have to work and to think, and I must confess that I am not like that. Being a writer is more or less a matter of feeling or sensing. But here (and not for the first time) language fails us.

S.O.: Indeed, to describe feeling is much more difficult.

J.F.: That is the problem with being a writer, really. You write the whole time, you try to find the words to express what life is like and then you don't find them. I am a great admirer of the French writer, Flaubert. I have the deepest admiration for him. And he was continually worried about finding the exact word. I am still very interested in the exact way to picture life. It's very, very difficult.

S.O.: In "Golding and 'Golding'" (1986) you say that there are two types of English writer, those who show an "eager and complaisant willingness to obey the conventions of the genre," like Richardson, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Taylor and Barbara Pym. And those who are always trying to break away from the conventions, like Defoe, Sterne, Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. There is no doubt that your own work belongs to the second, experimental side: in every novel you attempt something new, both formally and thematically, even to the point of going against your instinctive preferences. For example, in *A Maggot* you force yourself to write within the straitjacket of the jargon appropriate to legal deposition, instead of enjoying the freedom of an external narrator, which is what you really like. At the same time, you insist that writing should be firmly based on the real. Are these two elements, the constant attempt to renew the novel form while keeping its capacity to pin down reality, the two legs on

which all your work may be said to stand? You try to reflect reality but on the other hand you are always trying to find new ways of describing it.

J.F.: Yes, I'd agree with that completely.

S.O.: But which is more important: the description of reality or the experimental side, pinning down reality or formal experimentation?

J.F.: I think formal experimentation when you feel that you are describing more accurately — this is what obsessed poor old Flaubert. He was thinking: "How can I best describe this?" He wrote some bad novels — such as his novel about North Africa, *Salammbô*.

S.O.: Your concept of reality is very complex. For example, you always draw a clear distinction between the attempt to pin down reality and realism, for you they are not the same thing, reality and realism.

J.F.: Well, I'd say that I like realism in most writers I read.

S.O.: Yes, but you are not a realist. You are much more complex than that.

J.F.: I hope, more complicated.

S.O.: Yes. There is a sentence from Alain Fournier you like quoting which summarizes this distinction: "I like the marvelous only when it is enveloped in reality."

J.F.: I am a great admirer of dear old Fournier.

S.O.: How are we to interpret his sentence? Would it be right to say that, in fiction, reality is best explored by having recourse to the marvelous, or rather, to myth?

J.F.: Well, I am an admirer of people like Márquez, and I greatly admire Borges, as you know. Borges for me is probably the best novelist we have, or have had recently. I think Márquez has been extremely useful in telling everybody that there are different ways of writing about something, not only the strictly realistic.

S.O.: Are you thinking of magic realism?





J.F.: Magic realism, yes, it's been an enormous contribution towards improving the state of the novel.

S.O.: That reminds me of *A Maggot*; it got some bad reviews because the critics did not understand that. Some American reviewers thought, for example, that the novel did not make any sense because it did not have a closed ending.

J.F.: The critics do at times get a bit wild, at points...but then I think it is legitimate to use wildness because really you are saying the novel is a strange thing. Above all, it is always changing nature.

S.O.: In *The Tree*, you explain how your father's perfectly trimmed and ordered apple orchard betrayed his neoclassical "hatred of natural disorder," and how this type of garden, the best example of which would be Carl Linnaeus' little garden in Uppsala, reflects the same fear of the wilderness that is expressed in the "nature-fearing" paintings of Antonio Pisanello and other medieval artists. You also trace "The first hints of a rebellious and irreligious swing from nature-fearing to nature-liking" back to the Elizabethan period and

their creation of "the Robin Hood myth, or that part of it which suggests life under the greenwood tree can be pleasant." Is this nature-liking attitude to nature the key to an understanding of the meaning of human life on earth?

J.F.: I think it is really very important that all mankind should become natural historians. I'm a great believer in natural history. Probably the American I most admire is Edward Wilson.

S.O.: Why is it so important for you?

J.F.: Well, first of all because it tells you about what this world is, and what everything in it is, or in some cases ought to be. At the moment we have a tremendous debate here in Britain over hunting and shooting, and I am totally opposed to anyone who defends hunting. But it splits England in half, you know; half believe in it, half don't. And I'm afraid I am totally, if you like, on the side of the fox.

S.O.: In an article entitled "On Being English But Not British" (1964), you say that there is a "split in the English mind between the Green England and the red-white-and-blue Britain"...

J.F.: In other words, between Imperialistic and fascistic Britain and the green kind. You must remember that we've been through a sort of Franco period here in Britain—in effect of toying with fascism. That way only one end results: fascism in all its countless forms. In one word: hell.

S.O.: You also say that the most potent archetypal concept lying beneath "the English mania for justice is the legend of Robin Hood, the Just Outlaw, [...] the man who always, when faced with taking to the forest or accepting injustice, runs for the trees." Mature male characters in your fiction such as G. P., Henry Breasley, Conchis or Dick Thurlow, the deaf-mute servant in *A Maggot*, share basic traits in common with the Green Man. Apart from anti-establishment rebelliousness and love of justice, what other values do these characters stand for?

J.F.: I am also very interested in the old myth of Robin Hood. I think we have not really sufficiently acknowledged its importance in the English psyche: it is what being English means. I have just had a very good new book about the Green Man by William Addison.

William Addison is a poet, and recently, someone I know quite well near here, sent to me a copy. I do like it very much. Do you have a Green Man myth in Spain?

S.O.: Oh, yes. For example, in Zaragoza there is a Renaissance palace with a design showing a Green Man on the window sill. According to a recent article in *The Guardian*, there is a new "Little Englanders" movement developing side by side with the new surge in Scottish and Welsh nationalism. How does this new development affect your thoughts about "being English"?

J.F.: One of our best poets of this century called Larkin was a New Englander. I'm sure that British common sense will see it is rubbish.

S.O.: But you define yourself as English, not as British, so you think being English is important?

J.F.: I do have a deep, if sometimes skeptical, love of certain aspects of England, yes, as opposed to being French or German, for instance.

S.O.: Susana has asked you because you don't describe yourself in that marvelous essay as being British, you describe yourself as being English.

J.F.: Another way of describing myself would be by saying I am neither British nor English, I am European. Years ago I read a famous essay by, was it Schubert, or someone like that? That essay said we must make a unified Europe, which of course we are arguing about at the moment.

S.O.: At the end of *Daniel Martin*, the reader is surprised to discover that Daniel Martin has not written his autobiographical novel yet. Also disturbing is the reader's realization that Dan's pseudonym, "Simon Wolf," can be rearranged to form the name FOWLES

- (Simon WOLFE), and that Dan's unwritten last sentence "Whole-sight, or all the rest is desolation," is in fact the first sentence in your novel, Daniel Martin. Were you suggesting that, for all his attempts to change the course of his life, Daniel Martin is in fact just a literary character, trapped in your novel and therefore incapable of exerting his free will?
- J.F.:** I think in a way, yes, he is somebody trapped in a novel, and really doesn't know where he's going, as we all are.
- S.O.:** And why is it that the pseudonym can be read as Fowles?
- J.F.:** That's a game I am playing with readers. I'm a great and deep believer in taquinerie. Taquiner, to tease. I believe an important task for every novelist is to tease his readers. There are various ways of doing that.
- S.O.:** Likewise, in *A Maggot*, Mr B., who is an endless story-teller, had hired the other travelers to perform a series of roles while keeping them in the dark about the real aim of the journey. In this sense, we might say that he, like Daniel Martin and also like Miles Green in *Mantissa*, is consciously trying to control his life, to write the script of his own existence for the *comœdia vitae*. However, as the Richardsonian echoes of his name suggests, Mr B. is only a fictional character, trapped in a novel entitled *A Maggot*. Could we then say that Mr B.'s final disappearance is proof that he — unlike Martin and Green — has managed to step out of the novel, thus liberating himself from "the prison-house of language" and becoming, like John Marcus Fielding, in "The Enigma," the *Deus absconditus*, the God who went missing?
- J.F.:** Well, I leave it open. He may have disappeared or he may not. Really the important thing was that the hero of "The Enigma" had fallen in love with the girl. Really it is a declaration of love.
- S.O.:** Talking about Daniel Martin you said in an interview that your generation, the middle-class Oxford generation of the 1940s, was "generally rather a sad and failed one." Looking at the second half of the twentieth century in retrospect, is there any reason to think that the new generations are happier and better?
- J.F.:** No, I think humanity is a failure. Humanity at the moment is poised. Maybe it is doing right, maybe it is doing wrong. But that is the nature of human life, we don't quite know which side we ought to be on. I'm quite certain one ought to be on the side of the protection of Nature. And similarly, in politics one ought to be on the left.
- S.O.:** In the last few years you have been thinking of transforming Belmont House into a residence for young writers. How is the project at the moment?
- J.F.:** I had a letter today about it. Most people like the idea of it becoming a college of some kind. But I'm afraid the one thing that is missing is the money.
- S.O.:** Hold on, hold on there, because it's a chance for us to get this put over right, properly now, John, I think. He is giving the place away, with the vast garden. For two reasons. First of all he wants to protect it as Mrs Coade's house, the woman whose marine villa it once was, and of course, as his own house. And above all to protect the garden from becoming a ghastly housing estate, or an old people's home or whatever normally happens to houses this size. And we have got a remarkable organization who is keen to do it, but they do want John to endow it.
- J.F.:** But I can't, you see. As a lover of myths, you have to live with myths, and the myth is that you are enormously rich. Everybody in Lyme thinks that I must be terribly well off but I just haven't got the money to endow, you see.
- S.O.:** But there are other ways of raising the money and this charitable organization called the Landmark Trust is prepared to take the house on, we hope, and let universities, colleges use it for 3 or 4 months a year which is a wonderful idea because it keeps the house going, it protects the house and it also gives the use for young writers. So, we are keeping our fingers crossed.
- J.F.:** Well, it's like everything else in life. It's like buns. It depends on which side it is going to fall. I don't mind that. That for me is humanity.
- S.O.:** Hazard. He likes hazard. But we'll make it work, I know we will.
- J.F.:** I hope so. The Landmark Trust is an excellent do-gooding.
- S.O.:** Another project you have mentioned sometimes is the publication of your diaries. Are you revising them with this view in mind?
- J.F.:** Something strange has happened. Since I got the publishers talking about the publishing and so on I have lost all interest in it.
- S.O.:** Why have you lost interest?
- J.F.:** First of all because they are too long. They are enormous, although people are kindly interested in them, I realize that.
- S.F.:** They are wonderful. He will, he's going to.
- S.O.:** How is your authorized biography progressing?
- J.F.:** Well, that's another problem. I do not know. I've lost all interest in that too.
- S.O.:** But why?
- J.F.:** As a writer one tends to be at the mercy of one's critics. You know they don't read carefully enough, they don't think about what they read. And so they can misunderstand what they read.
- S.O.:** Last November you published *Lyme Worthies*, a beautiful book reproducing the portraits of some Lyme Regis personalities...
- J.F.:** I wouldn't say it's beautiful. An amusing small book I'd call it.
- S.O.:** You have already written several books on Lyme Regis history that show your attachment to it. But this new book is about your contemporaries. What was your aim in publishing it?
- J.F.:** I was curator of the museum here for many years and I suddenly felt one day I ought to say something about Lyme, how much I loved it myself. I think somewhere I called it a debt. I feel I owe it to Lyme. I knew my wife was very good on typography and the kind of type used. She very kindly agreed to do it, so in a way it is our book, it is by both of us.
- S.F.:** It's a bit of a folly really.
- J.F.:** It's a good work for a folly.
- S.F.:** I call it John's folly.
- S.O.:** Who owns the original portraits of the "Lyme Worthies" and where are they?
- J.F.:** We have had trouble over that because the boy downtown who did it was very upset because he thought we were making money out of it and we weren't. We didn't think it would sell very well and it hasn't.
- S.O.:** Gavin Bird is his name? So the originals belong to him?
- J.F.:** Yes, he has the originals and the copyright. We have given good copies of them to the Philpot Museum. We wanted to give any profit that is made (which would be quite honestly rather little) because we didn't print many, we only printed a thousand... Extra money if any is made will go to the Museum.
- S.O.:** But can the copies be seen at the Museum?
- J.F.:** I'm not sure. Yes, I think so, but Gavin Bird has them.
- S.O.:** There is no reading of a work that is not also a "re-writing." How are young readers re-writing your work at present? Is there a difference between the way in which your novels were received at their time of publication and the way in which they are read now by young people? Has this reading been affected by the fact that you have been "canonized"?
- J.F.:** I think in a way what I call the reality of me is beginning to reach across. But I would not say fast. You know this whole age is celebrity mad. We're just imitating America there, I'm afraid. I have no time for celebrity or celebrities.
- S.O.:** You often speak of great writers who are followed by "an endless swarm of inauthentic scribblers

trading on a fad." Who are the scribblers who have been trying to imitate you in the last two decades?

J.F.: Well, it is true that I have made quite a lot of money from books, and I think it is quite normal that other writers should say "Well, I'll try that, I'll try that." That's how I managed to write myself in the beginning: by suddenly thinking of a famous author; he could write.... I would regard my immediate line of English writers as beginning with D. H. Lawrence and then it goes to Golding next.

S.O.: Joyce?

J.F.: No, I admire Joyce, because he is diabolically clever... but I feel he is too far from the main old line of the English novel. I admire I'd certainly say first of all D. H. Lawrence — and then Golding nowadays. And I also admire Conrad. What's that great novel about Africa?

S.O.: Heart of Darkness.

J.F.: Heart of Darkness. That for me is the great novel of the last century.

S.O.: And then you come after Conrad and Golding: Fowles. And after Fowles what?

J.F.: No, I don't think I can say I come next.

S.O.: Well, I can say that.

J.F.: I might be in the general line, I suppose.

S.O.: Since you, and since your — I have to say your great — success, who do you think has been influenced by you, John? What novelist have you read that you might see yourself....

J.F.: Do you know? I can't answer that. I do occasionally read a new book thinking, oh well, I must have influenced him. But normally I don't think it's for me to say: I have influenced you, you have been influenced by me.

S.O.: I have a list of young writers here; let me tell you their names and you might tell me...

J.F.: I'll say "Yes" or "No."

S.O.: O. K. For example, what do you think about Martin Amis?

J.F.: No. But I must tell you that Martin Amis was editor of *The Spectator* which I wrote for and he nearly always turned me down when I wrote anything. But actually he's just not my sort of writer. He writes too much, in my view.

S.O.: And Julian Barnes? Could he be an imitator of yours?

J.F.: Yes, I wouldn't have said very much so. But yes, I admire Barnes. He has certain attractive short stories about France and about poujadism. And there's Flaubert's Parrot. Flaubert's Parrot is probably the best novel of the last century.

S.O.: I also have here Peter Ackroyd.

J.F.: Peter Ackroyd wrote a rather poor novel about Lyme Regis called *First Light*. In a sense I cannot forgive writers for writing bad novels.

S.O.: Not even one out of ten?

J.F.: Well, of course you can always find some charitable way of wriggling out, as in football. Every writer is allowed one bad novel and all that sort of thing.

S.O.: What do you think of Angela Carter?

J.F.: I quite enjoy her work but I don't know it very well.

S.O.: And Jeanette Winterson?

J.F.: I do not like. She is well known on the English literary scene as being a bit of a bitch. And I don't like the sound of her.

S.F.: But you didn't like her novel *The Passion...*, you know, about Napoleon....

J.F.: Yes. I'm trying to think of one I really did like. What was the one about her childhood?

S.O.: Ah yes. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. It is very funny, hilarious. Another writer I have here on my list is Kazuo Ishiguro.

J.F.: He's very clever, like all the Japanese.

S.O.: The last one on my list is Salman Rushdie.

J.F.: I think I ought to say as they say in law: "I need notice of that question." If I'm honest — What's his great novel? Shame, isn't it?

S.O.: Yes, and *Midnight's Children*. He writes magic realism. That's why I'm asking you. A kind of Indian magic realism.

J.F.: I have a phrase I use in restaurants: "They're trying."

S.O.: You can't say that about Rushdie. Please don't. Well, yes, of course you can.

J.F.: Well, what I think, I'd say the politics on Rushdie is out at the moment. The politics is out, meaning it's for the jury to decide. A very clever writer but I don't like all his books. I think he must be read with Kipling. That means with a pinch of salt... I would "push" above all others today a very gifted young novelist and poet called Adam Thorpe. (Read *Ulverton*). I might also name Edward Carey. He wrote the best novel I saw last year, *Observatory Mansions*. My apologies if this begins to sound as if I'm on a race course. But this is it. It is very much luck and gamble.

S.O.: My last question is: What is the question interviewers have always failed to ask you that you would have liked to be asked?

J.F.: I think something impossible. A possibility, if I could know the answer, would be: Who are you? And this was Socrates. The thing he was always on about was certain knowledge: know yourself. I am a great admirer of Socrates.

S.O.: And if Susana had asked you this question "John Fowles, who are you?" What would you say?

J.F.: I don't know. So I'm afraid it's a kind of impasse situation one's at: I can't answer.

S.O.: But do you know yourself better now than before?

J.F.: No, no. I'm still a mystery to myself. But I think that is probably good. All human beings should be mysteries. Well, they are, anyway. They should behave as if they are mysteries to themselves.

S.O.: "Behave," what do you mean by "behave"?

J.F.: They should act. They should act as if they do not know themselves. Before every life there is a great question mark. I'm sure all life is the same. We just do not know or understand.

S.O.: So when you write a novel do you write it with the hope of understanding yourself a bit better?

J.F.: Yes, partly, partly. You write novels to know who you are.

S.O.: And to understand the world better too?

J.F.: I don't think I'm too worried about knowing the world better because I think humanity is taking a huge step towards precisely that, mainly through science. This is the great step forward that all humanity is taking at the moment: it is towards knowing yourself scientifically, or rationally.

S.O.: Talking about the discovery of the genome: do you think it will help us to know ourselves better?

J.F.: I don't know about knowing ourselves better but I think it will make our moral decisions, or lack of them, clearer. A good deal clearer.

S.O.: I have just read that we have twice as many genomes as a flea, or a fly. Does it make a difference?

J.F.: You might like to know about Miriam. Miriam Rothchild is a learned scientist we all greatly admire in this country. She has written several books about butterflies and most famously a marvelous history of the flea...a very intelligent lady and I think much loved by everyone in England...in the

world of science...because she has worked, we use a naughty racist expression in this country, "like a negro," which means she's worked very hard.

S.O.: How do you feel about being the subject of courses at the University — the fact that students at University study, let's say, a doctoral course on John Fowles?

J.F.: I think on the whole I like it. Because you write books and you hope they'll be understood and appreciated. The whole university and academic process advances that.

S.O.: Well, let us hope this interview contributes to this purpose of helping your readers understand and appreciate your work better. Many thanks for your time and forbearance.

J.F.: And many thanks to you also, Susana. Now, if I may, I'm going to plunge into an old book I bought only yesterday. It makes merciless fun of all politicians and our Royal family, so must be good.

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THE DACHAU SHOE

BY W.S. MERWIN

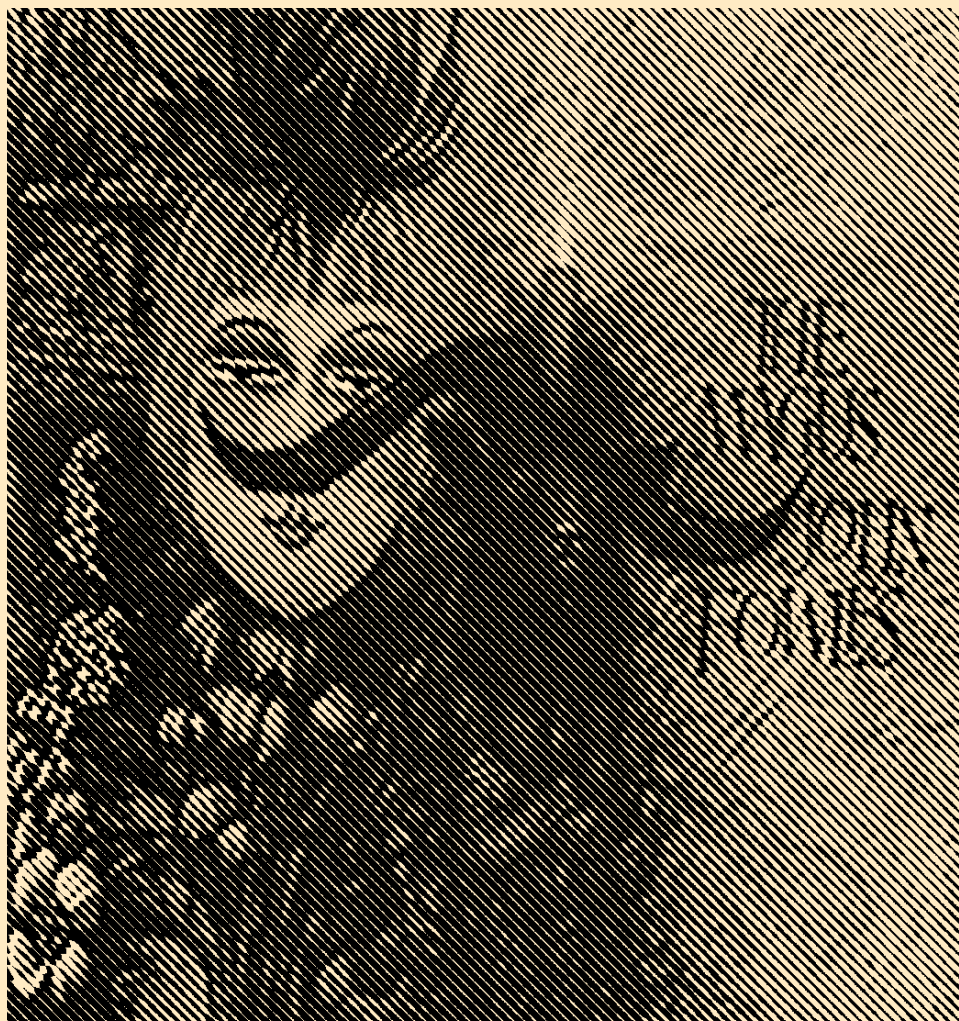
My cousin Gene (he's really only a second cousin) has a shoe he picked up at Dachau. It's a pretty worn-out shoe. It wasn't top quality in the first place, he explained. The sole is cracked clear across and has pulled loose from the upper on both sides, and the upper is split at the ball of the foot. There's no lace and there's no heel.

He explained he didn't steal it because it must have belonged to a Jew who was dead. He explained that he wanted some little thing. He explained that the Russians looted everything. They just took anything. He explained that it wasn't top quality to begin with. He explained that the guards or the kapos would have taken it if it had been any good. He explained that he was lucky to have got anything. He explained that it wasn't wrong because the Germans were defeated. He explained that everybody was picking up something. A lot of guys wanted flags or daggers or medals or things like that, but that kind of thing didn't appeal to him so much. He kept it on the mantelpiece for a while but he explained that it wasn't a trophy.

He explained that it's no use being vindictive. He explained that he wasn't. Nobody's perfect. Actually we share a German grandfather. But he explained that this was the reason why we had to fight that war. What happened at Dachau was a crime that could not be allowed to pass. But he explained that we could not really do anything to stop it while the war was going on because we had to win the war first. He explained that we couldn't always do just what we would have liked to do. He explained that the Russians killed a lot of Jews too; after a couple of years he put the shoe away in a drawer. He explained that the dust collected in it.

Now he has it down in the cellar in a box. He explains that the central heating makes it crack worse. He'll show it to you, though, any time you ask. He explains how it looks. He explains how it's hard to take it in even for him. He explains how it was raining, and there weren't many things left when he got there. He explains how there wasn't anything of value and you didn't want to get caught taking anything of that kind, even if there had been. He explains how everything inside smelled. He explains how it was just lying out in the mud, probably right where it had come off. He explains that he ought to keep it. A thing like that.

You really ought to go and see it. He'll show it to you. All you have to do is ask. It's not that it's really a very interesting shoe when you come right down to it but you learn a lot from his explanations.



CHILD LIGHT

BY W.S. MERWIN

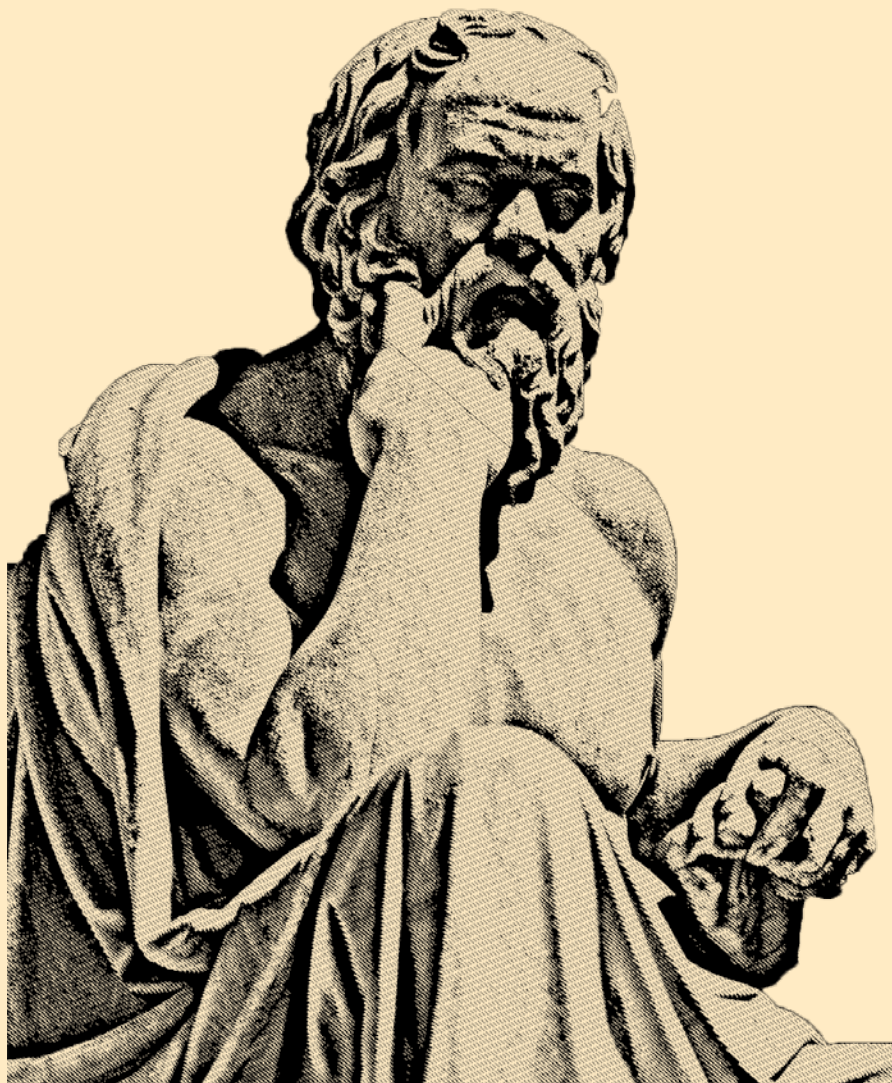
On through the darkening of the seeds and the bronze equinox
 I remember the brightness of days in summer
 too many years ago now to be counted
 the cotton-white glare floating over the leaves
 I see that it was only the dust in one sunbeam
 but I was a child at the time

I hear our feet crossing the porch
 and then the glass door opening
 before we are conducted through the empty rooms of the house
 where we are to live

that was on a day before I was nine
 before the lake and the water sloshing in the boat
 and what we heard about refugees
 and before
 Billy Green explained to me about sex
 and I saw my first strip mine
 and before the war
 and before the sound of the train wheels under me
 when the leaves were still green
 before the word for autumn

that was before Ching and Gypsy
 and the sun on the kitchen table
 with the window open
 before the deaths by bombing
 and by sickness and age and by fire and by gas
 and by torture
 and before the scratched varnish of the study hall
 and before the camps
 and coming to Conrad and Tolstoy
 it was before the deaths of schoolchildren
 whom I had known and whom I heard of

and before looking out into the trees after dark
 from the window of the splintery unlit chemistry lab
 into the scent of the first fallen leaves



NIKOLAI GOGOL, ABNER DOUBLEDAY & THE RUSSIAN LITERARY ORIGINS OF AMERICAN BASEBALL

BY MARK AXELROD

It is a little known fact in the annals of baseball history, and one which most American sportswriters from Grantland Rice to Red Smith, have intentionally dismissed, that Abner Doubleday owed the origins of modern baseball not to the English game of “rounders” or to “One Old Cat,” which most everyone has assumed, but to a short story written by one of the grand masters of Russian prose, Nikolai Gogol.

As fate would have it, Doubleday, whose interest in sport was only surpassed by his interest in engineering and letters, was extremely fond of Russian writers, and it was a fondness that bordered on adulation. Not only had he read many of the good Russian poets like Derzhavin and Zhukovsky, not to mention the genius of Pushkin, but much admired some of the early prose works of Krylov and Turgenev. But the author who fascinated Doubleday the most was Gogol and the story that proved to be the impulse for the game was *Huyóvina*.

While a cadet at Army in 1838, Doubleday discovered *Huyóvina* (trans. *Foul Play*, 1826), while perusing the library shelves at West Point. *Huyóvina* was a sprightly short story written in Gogol’s early “realistic” period and although it lacked the acerbic fabulousness of Gogol’s more mature works it exhibited the kind of literary efficacy that inspired writers like Turgenev, Goncharov and Dostoevsky. Though the story deals with a day in the life of two youthful friends, it was a particular passage in the tale that had the greatest impact on Doubleday. Originally translated from Russian into French (by Turgenev), the language in which Doubleday had first read it, none of the story’s content was lost in translation and the following excerpt (my translation

from the original Russian) is the same one that stimulated Doubleday’s imagination.

“It was a quiet summer afternoon. The sun had reached its peak and was making its slow and gentle descent to the horizon. Komiskiya Meadow was fresh with the scent of dogwoods and nasturtiums and the sounds of cardinals and orioles mixed in a profusion of harmonies that came from a nearby copse. In the Komiskiya Meadow, by the edge of the Lake Mishygun, two young men walked. Mikhaylo Mantlovich and Gruvin Alexandrovitch, each twenty years old, were both dressed in khaki knickerbockers, ruffled at the bottom, and blousy white shirts, the sleeves of which were puffed at the elbows and narrowed at the wrists. Mikhaylo Mantlovich wore white sox; Gruvin Alexandrovitch, red sox which he called ‘redlegs.’ They often came to Komiskiya to discuss things like German philosophy or Russian literature or the political rhetoric of Herzen and Belinsky or the romance of traveling to far-off Yankee lands. Komiskiya Meadow was a peaceful place, one that lent itself to intimate conversation, and the two young men, often called “the twins” because of their intellectual similarities, found the meadow a respite from the agitation that was St. Petersburg.

As they talked, Mikhaylo Mantlovich would swipe at dandelions with a walking cane he fashioned from a branch of a nearby oak tree while Gruvin Alexandrovitch would toss smooth-faced stones into the nearby lake. On this particular occasion, though, their usual congenial dialogue became rather heated. Usually as docile as new-born cubs, the two became veritable tigers when the subject of poetry was broached.

“That’s absolute nonsense!” said Mikhaylo Mantlovich. “Vassily Maysov’s poetry is beyond that cheap sentimentalism of Lvov or Emin or Neledinsky-Metetsky. As lyricists go he must certainly rank with Pushkin.”

“Pushkin!” screamed Gruvin Alexandrovitch. “Only Sandoy Kufaksynov could possibly rank with Pushkin.”

“I have nothing but the greatest respect for Sandoye Kufaksynov,” said Mikhaylo Mantlovich, “I even

once met him at a party in Ebetsya Brucklyana, but you must admit for the melody of his line play and his ability to cover all meters equally, no one can measure up to Vassily Maysov.”

“Come, come Mikhaylo Mantlovich, no one?” Gruvin Alexandrovitch asked with a smile.

“No one,” answered Mikhaylo Mantlovich. “No one is as consistent in his play.”

“Not even Petyr Rusinoff or Tifory Kobuleshov?”

“They are completely different poets!” screamed Mikhaylo Mantlovich, banging his cane to the ground. “It would be like comparing Buby Gybsonovitch with Teodor Vyliyamssov!”

Angered by Mikhaylo Mantlovich’s comment about Buby Gybsonovitch and Teodor Vyliyamssov, the former of which was a comrade of his, Gruvin Alexandrovitch, who was walking ahead of Mikhaylo Mantlovich, turned and hurled one of the stones straight at Mikhaylo Mantlovich. Instinctively, Mikhaylo Mantlovich stepped into the speeding stone and swung at it in an attempt to protect himself.

The stone cracked against the oak walking stick and flew straight back at Gruvin Alexandrovitch who dodged the hurtling stone and slid headfirst to the meadow as the rock sailed over his head and across the lake, finally landing in a thicket surrounded by a herd of grazing phillies. Gruvin Alexandrovitch slowly raised his head and looked up at Mikhaylo Mantlovich who, standing like a giant, appeared to be as shocked by the incident as Gruvin Alexandrovitch himself.

“Are you okay?” asked Mikhaylo Mantlovich, concerned.

“Fine. And you?” asked Gruvin Alexandrovitch, wiping dirt stains off his face that made him look like a pirate.

Mikhaylo Mantlovich nodded. “That was a close call,” he said, his face reddened as an Indian.

“I did not mean to brush you back like that,” said Gruvin Alexandrovitch. “I do not know what got into me.”

“No harm, Gruvin Alexandrovitch,” said Mikhaylo Mantlovich, smiling.

“Luckily I swung at the right time and did not miss.”

“Yes, it was quite athletic of you,” said Gruvin Alexandrovitch, “quite brave too.” And after dusting themselves off, the two boys laughed heartily at the episode, walked down to the water’s edge and watched the ripples from the lake splash languidly against the bedrock.”

The passage had an enormous impact on the young Doubleday who recognized in those brief lines the seeds of what was to become the game of baseball. But he needed more. So in an attempt to find out whether Gogol himself had any ideas about what he had written or whether the passage was merely serendipitous, Doubleday began a correspondence with the Russian writer. At the time Doubleday was a lad of nineteen while Gogol was twenty-eight and had already written such stories as *Mirgorod*, *The Old-World Landowners*, *Viy*, *Taras Bulba* and *Arabesques* not to mention his satirical comedy *The Inspector General*. But Doubleday had a hunch that Gogol knew more than he was letting on and in a series of letters that continued until Gogol’s death in 1852, Doubleday and Gogol actually collaborated on the rules and regulations of the game of baseball as we know it now.

The most important of their baseball letters were written between 1838- and 1842 but none of the correspondence is extant since Doubleday’s letters were burned along with Gogol’s manuscript of *Dead Souls, Part II* and Gogol’s letters were, at Doubleday’s request, buried with him. However, what does remain, thanks to a brilliant study of Gogol’s notebooks researched by Johann Arschkriecher, Professor of Eclectic Literature at Indiana University-French Lick, and published in his work *Doubleday to Gogol to Chance: The Literary Origins of Baseball (1996)*, we now know what contributions Gogol actually made to the game and why Doubleday probably wanted Gogol’s letters buried with him. What we know is that Doubleday began writing Gogol

in January, 1838 specifically asking him about the “stick and stone” episode in *Foul Play*. Gogol responded by writing that the idea was not new in Russia and that the Ukrainian peasant boys played a game called “zasrát glazá,” the object of which was to hit a thrown, oven-baked chicken turd with a short paddle, run to a “pizd’ósh,” or “base,” and run back again before the paddlemán could be hit by someone throwing the turd. Gogol said he merely modified the game feeling his reading audience might be offended if he used, as he wrote, “something as coarse as a shit-ball” instead of a stone. Most scholars believed Gogol was merely being ironic with the youthful Doubleday, but the game of “zasrát glazá” actually did exist and was played, just as Gogol indicated, by Ukrainian peasants as early as 1728.

With that in mind, Doubleday suggested that the two of them collaborate on creating a “new” game which Doubleday called “baseball.” Always one for the challenge of curiosities, Gogol consented. In subsequent letters both Gogol and Doubleday attempted to formulate rules about the game though, according to Arschkriecher’s work, there were many disagreements. Gogol, as most scholars of his life and work know, was a bit eccentric,



his eccentricity eventually yielding to hallucinations and madness by the time of his death at the age of forty-three. It was in that vein of eccentricity that Gogol made numerous suggestions many of which Doubleday categorically discarded. Among those was the suggestion that pitchers be allowed to spit on the ball or use various articles like emery boards to scar the surface of the ball to, in Gogol’s words, “allow the ball to seek its own projection.” But Doubleday felt those suggestions were not in keeping with the American ideal of “fair play” and refused to incorporate them into the rules.

But other ideas abound as well. References in Gogol’s *Confessions of an Author* (1847) indicate that the shape of the field and number of bases were probably the most disagreed-upon subjects. For example, as to the shape of the field, Doubleday had insisted on a rectangular playing field with numerous bases at irregular distances, but Gogol was adamant about using a diamond with equidistant pizd’ósh. One would think that with an engineering background Doubleday would have recognized the elegance in Gogol’s choice of shapes, a selection that was not arbitrary, but, according to Gogol, religious. As were the number of bases. Doubleday suggested six or seven bases and, of course, a rectangular field, but Gogol recommended four bases because four “represents the macrocosm which the microcosm naturally reproduces” and a diamond instead of a rectangle since the diamond “is a symbol of light and brilliance, of moral and intellectual knowledge.” Actually, Doubleday had not even thought about the practical applications of such a layout, tied as he was into its purely theoretical applications. But Gogol insisted that a rectangular field with different distances between bases did not lend itself very well to the “physics of running.” This disagreement lasted for several months before Gogol finally convinced Doubleday to try running around a rectangle with seven bases. After Doubleday tried running around his irregular rectangular field, then tried running around Gogol’s diamond of four bases ninety-feet apart, he was positively amazed to see the

difference, which lends more than a bit of credence to the position that Doubleday did not select the distance just for the sake of paying tribute to his favorite writer, but because it made him appear to be a better engineer than he might have otherwise appeared.

Likewise, the choice of ninety-feet between bases and nine men on a team and nine innings in a game was not merely serendipitous. The reason for Gogol’s belief in the diamond has been mentioned, but the allegiance to numbers like nine and three and four is a rather fascinating bit of arcana.

About the time Gogol and Doubleday began their correspondence, Gogol was becoming increasingly attracted to metaphysics, to spiritual zealotry, and was already exhibiting the early signs of a religious madness that would drive him insane some few years later. In his *Confessions*, Gogol wrote that on the evening he received a letter from Doubleday he had a vision, a mystical vision, in which the spirit of God visited him in the shape of the number nine. As Gogol wrote, “the spirit came upon me and whispered in a desultory way that all things in life aspire toward perfection, that ultimate perfection resides within the curve and stem of the number nine the all-but-complete, all-but-perfect, number nine.” Such a statement would, of course, account for the plenitude of nines in the game which Gogol once deemed was “invested with the spirit of the Lord.” Out of that “vision” Gogol convinced the impressionable Doubleday that establishing nines would make the game “sacred,” thereby “sanctifying the glory of His name.” As for the number of strikes and balls, Gogol said three was the ideal number for it represented the “number of the deity” while four represented the “temporal and mundane.” The total, seven, implied, for Gogol, like St. Augustine, a totality which seemed to embody the “perfection of man” and, therefore, the “perfection of the game.” Doubleday, a religious fellow himself, found Gogol’s suggestion blessed with a Christian virtuosity that could not be ignored and felt compelled to implement the master’s suggestion.

The last mention Gogol makes of baseball was in an 1842 entry at which time he noted a recommendation to Doubleday that he try to organize a game between two teams “of equal strength and skill.” In fact such a game did not transpire until four years later when the Gotham Knickerbockers lost to the New York Nine 23-1. Unfortunately, after June, 1842 their correspondence dropped off dramatically due primarily to the fact that after Doubleday graduated in 1842 he fought in the Mexican War and Gogol was becoming increasingly consumed by his masterpiece, *Dead Souls*, and his withdrawal from society to devote himself to religious meditation. According to Dr. Arschkriecher, the last letter written by Gogol to Doubleday was sent on 4 February 1852 only two weeks before Gogol died. In it, Gogol asked Doubleday for a “pizdabrátíya” (which in today’s English would translate to “franchise”), if, in fact, the game became popular. Though there’s no letter to record Doubleday’s response to Gogol’s request, a note in Gogol’s notebook dated 21 February 1852, the last day of Gogol’s life, had Doubleday’s initials and the Russian phrase “zalúpa kónskaya,” (which, simply translated, means “jerk”), scribbled in the margins. Apparently Doubleday denied his master’s request for reasons that still remain a mystery today.

When Doubleday died in 1893 there was no mention whatsoever of Gogol’s contribution to the game, which may account for the fact that Gogol’s letters went to Doubleday’s grave. Nor has anyone ever really given Gogol the full measure of credit he deserved for contributing, in an enormous way, to the creation of the great American sport as we know it. As a matter of fact the only acknowledgment ever accorded Gogol for the contribution he made to baseball is a tiny plaque located at a country hostel in the Russian village of Dikanka. The sign reads in Russian: “Here is where Nikolai Gogol perfected pizd’ósh a game which became America’s pastime.” Perhaps nothing more could have made him prouder.



POEMS

BY GIUSEPPE CONTE

WHITMAN

No one listens to the voice of poets any more. Poetry has betrayed.

Now it no longer sings, and the bellows of the wind are silent
among the star-trees and the blood-rivers and the fields of
flowers and snow.

Hey, Walt Whitman, Captain! Groping, neither blind nor prophet,
we go down to the shadows. Walt Whitman, they have betrayed
you, you know?

American democracy, the great one, with the totem silence that is
Manhattan seen from the Staten Island ferry as it approaches

with the woods of giant firs, with the giant-violet bushes around
the road of the Adirondacks, light blue toward the evening when
the deer go down to its edge

the great democracy, with the desert of red thorn-rocks and
mesas shaped like cones cut by a knife of asters, altars of
purplish blue ash

as far as the Rio Grande flowing between high and steep walls,
open like an isthmus cut by a lightening from skies more
powerful than these

as far as the Pacific, to the glare of the sun streaming, sown, grain
by grain, by the light toward the clear ports of Asia

the democracy you sung, the sea attracting moon, the
sky-running sun

the democracy of your word, of your ardor, of your bodies that
rotate gravitating around one body, like satellites around
their planets

the only democracy, made of love and trees, of desire, joys,
rivers, companions, journeys,

what is now?

ALL THE WONDER OF THE WORLD

It's as you say, I should leave again.

I've never been happy in a house.

I've never been happy in a family.

I've never felt homesick when I was
alone and far away. For me, all the wonder

of the world was on the promenade
by the sea, when, school books in my satchel,

I walked fast and breathed in
wind the color of salt and agave.

I pretended to have my hand
in a girl's hand : the wonder, the strong race

of dreams, the books, the movies,

the long train rides,

the long crossing of the soul,

but the walls of a house, never.

WHITMAN

Nessuno ascolta più la voce dei poeti. La poesia ha tradito. Ora non canta più e del vento i mantici tra le stelle –alberi e i fiumi-sangue e i campi di fiori e di neve tacciono.

Ehi Walt, Walt Whitman, Capitano! Brancolando, né ciechi né profeti, scendiamo alle ombre, e parliamo con le ombre. Walt Whitman, ti hanno tradito, lo sai?

La democrazia americana, la grande, dal silenzio di totem che è Manhattan vista dal battello di Staten Island mentre si avvicina

dai boschi di abeti giganti, di cespugli viola-giganti intorno alla strada degli Adirondacks, azzurro chia-ra verso sera quando scendono sui suoi bordi i daini

la grande, dal deserto di rocce-spine rosse e di altopia-ni tagliati da un coltello a cono, di astri, altari di cenere turchino-porpora

sin dove scorre il Rio Grande tra pareti strette e altis-sime, aperte a istmo da un fulmine di cieli più pos-senti di questi

sino al Pacifico, al barbaglio del sole grondato e semi-nato grano a grano di luce verso i chiari porti del-l'Asia

la democrazia che hai cantato, la luna attrai-mare.
Il sole percorri-ciolo

quella della tua parola, del tuo ardore, dei tuoi corpi che ruotano gravitando attorno a un corpo, come satelliti intorno al loro pianeta

la sola democraia, fatta di amore e di alberi, di desideri, di gioie, di fiumi, di compagni, di viaggi,

che cos'è ora?

TUTTA LA MERAVIGLIA DEL MONDO

E' come dici tu, dovrei ripartire.
Non sono mai stato felice in una casa.
Non sono mia stati felice in famiglia.
Non ho mai avuto nostalgia, quando ero solo e lontano. Tutta la meraviglia del mondo per me era la passeggiata alta sul mare quando, i libri di scuola in una cartella, a passo veloce andavo , e ispiravo il vento colore del salino e delle agavi e fingevo di avere una ragazza per mano:la meraviglia, la razza forte dei sogni i libri, il cinema, i lunghi viaggi in treno, le lunghe traversate dell'anima ma mai i muri di una casa, mai.



MELOON
AN ANTI ALLEGORY
 BY STEVE KATZ

Something drips onto my face and wakes me up. Eyes fly open as it splashes into my mouth. I snap up in bed. These are my only clothes, and I have no pajamas, so I wear these to sleep. I don't want to soil them. Some day soon I'll go to a laundromat and undress, but not now. This stuff drips from a rusty stain widening on the ceiling, the color of anyone's fluids, like blood for instance. The stain spreads slowly pink then thickens to red concentrating into a viscous red drop that spot after spot falls at an interval of forty-three seconds give or take. Maybe something terrible has happened above me.

The bowl I set on the bed is glazed with flowers and sketched with rabbits. Slowly the drips will fill this bowl. Life is tedious, one thing I know.

I house sit here for my friend, Melancholy (call me Mel). Not exactly a friend, but a strong acquaintance, strong enough so I can house sit for him. He says he won't ever come back from New Zealand. Not unless, Mandolin (call me Mandy), his ex, wants him back. He still loves her but can't let go of his anger. She left him for Professor Crandall (call me Prof or call me Cran) a mutual friend. I feel emotionally vacant Mel says as he prepares to leave for New Zealand.

Vacant is better than empty, I tell Mel. New Zealand might be a good place to enjoy some suffering. I am lucky to have no such girlfriend.

I walk down to Big Cheeks the coffee house at the bottom of the hill, on the southwest corner. Everyone out here murmurs about Massacre (call me Massa, call me Cur, I don't give a fuck.) Diversity (call me Dave), the manager, nods at me as I enter, and Asia, (call me Asia) my favorite barista, bounces over sexy in her tight jeans, her black sweater, her soft burgundy scarf wound around a slender neck. She lays my nonfat mocha on the counter even before I order.

What if I want something else this time, like a cappuccino?

That would be unacceptable. I'll leave forever. I'll run to Kabul and hide Afghanistan?

Or Detroit the same. They mix the hash with the O.

Have you tried it?

Tenderness, I'm drug free forever. I never liked drugs anyway, I just took 'em.

I ask her to call me Ten, but she likes to say my full name. It's okay. My name has a sweaty ring to it. And this is something I love about Asia. Something vague and gorgeous.

If I go I want you to come with me.

Of course.

I also love this about Asia, she's pushy, but gentle. And she wants me.

Great! But before we go anywhere I need to walk around here a little.

Walk, Tenderness, but don't forget your mocha. I made it with a special plump thing in it, just for you.

Here's the predicament. I need someone to watch over me. We all have this need. And I'm willing to assume my watch over another. But I know I will frequently resent anyone spooking my particulars.

Asia, your eyes are deep green today, oceany and beautiful, but why so bloodshot?

It's coming on Xmas.

I admire that about Asia, her answers oblique and relevant.

I sit at my favorite table.

Massacre steps out of the door swinging an invisible scythe and thus he sings: Ich höre Engel schreien Ihre flügel stinken nach Benzin Ihr Blut wir Regen fällt

Vom Narbenhimmel auf mein Gesicht Heaven comes into Big Cheeks followed by imaginary blue toads. The air fills with real warts.



He still loves her but can't let go of his anger.

They call his nail polish Blood Ruby.

Heaven's been dancing at a club called Buttermilk. Asia always warns me to stay away from him. He is not a nice person, likes to hurt people, physically, emotionally, financially. Heaven sets his iced mocha down and sits at my table. He drops a couple of pills onto my saucer.

You good?

He has never before inquired about my condition, nor have I ever heard him inquire about anyone else. I suddenly recall that his girlfriend Mandy lives in the apartment just above where I was sitting house. Could it be that...?

I'm terrific, and how are you, and how is Mandolin, your excellent girlfriend, and very intelligent too?

Perhaps I always say one thing too much.

I killed her. He grins like a chimp. Slit her throat is what I did.

That information crawls up my spine and lies on my shoulders like a seventy pound backpack.

Heaven, really. Heaven? Did you stay with her, at her place, last night?

I was staying with uncle Dibs (they call me Mr. Dibs) down in Hudder Hollow. I go once a year to help him gig for frogs. At Xmas he likes the legs breaded and sautéed. He's an amateur Frenchman. Mandolin's roommate, Meniscus (Emma, really), is back from Guyana. You should eat those pills, Tenderness. Great to be rid of her. She chain smokes and vomits cliches. These pills will make you feel great.

Big Cheeks crowds with well groomed business men cut loose from jobs, and women stuck without offices. They settle in to the wireless nest. And students here research for papers with their phones and tablets. They play games. Some read online about Massacre. Wifi flows like the Tao around these guys and gals. They work to make Xmas dreary, and Hanukah communally blank. Without wifi, a friendlier world.

Heaven chugs his mocha. Blue toads stretch and yawn in the mind. Their wish is to fly.

We should go somewhere, fool around. Get high.

I don't get high any more, Heaven. I've got too much to do.

You don't have anything to do, Tenderness. But it's sad to hear.

As they leave the toads tug all the blue out of the room. Heaven eats my two pills. I suddenly want the dose back, but what can I do now, swallow Heaven? I stand up to follow him. It's risky. Asia stops me at the corner of the counter. She has a damp rag in one hand and a long knife in the other. She blocks me with her knife arm pressed against my chest and wipes my face with the rag.

Heaven is poison. Be careful Ten.

Her bloodshot eyes take on the flint of compassion. In a loud whisper she says, Think first, Tenderness. Go home. Talk to your Mom and Dad. Find job. Even here we have an opening.

I can't go home again.

Search within the seeds of your contemplation. This is my life, we say, though it could be another's world.

Don't be stupid. This could be your last chance.

The knife slips from her hand and sinks into the boards between her feet.

What does she mean by last chance, and what do I mean by my life?

Asia stabs me gently in my mind, a soft penetration. I run after Heaven, having thoughts. I don't want to be a barista, not ever, not even in the afterlife. Perhaps I insulted her with my attitude, unspoken but always apparent. Running through the red haze around the traffic lights I need several blocks to catch up with Heaven.

We sit on a benchstone near the sandspit that stretches into the river. He hands me two pills which I gulp down. I know he is thinking about Massacre. I don't need to think.

These are river pills.

Thank you, Heaven. Perhaps River Pills will be the end of me.

Not likely. Relax here. Now I'll tell you my story.

Setting sun drips a dim orange glow onto the icy water. The few leaves rattle in the wind through the willows.

Pokah Springs was where Delicious (call me Delia), my Mom, moved after the separation, where she tried to cozy in with her dark boyfriend, Pontifex (call me Pons). That didn't work for her. She was alcoholic, a friendly sappy drunk, a freebaser, occasional you know what, call it smack maybe though she never was that kind of junkie. Delia was a simple spirit in a cloud of demons. Integrity (call me Grits), my dad, had custody, but we frequently visited mom. She was always loving, affectionate, though sad. She looked like she'd been sucked through a woodchipper. She enjoyed to gift me underwear and I wear some occasionally now, tattered but nostalgically correct.

Asia and the others warn me away from Heaven. Why? He seems mild by comparison to themselves. Even sane. I don't feel threatened. His story has some kick and surprise. He tells it slowly though. Imagine a story slowly.

Grits was a fuck-up himself, and often left me for days to survive on my own. I learned first to open one of the cans that filled the cupboard. Ravioli. I ate it cold, and then I learned to boil the whole can, and then I splashed it onto a skillet with some powdered onion or garlic, and then I baked it right in the can. Each tastes a little different. That is my recipes. My mouth waters when I think about those days. Himself, he liked to drink, and scavenged among young boys homeless on the streets. He was my father. Grits often brought one back to feed it. Orphans, runaways. Some he let live with us for a while. I fed them from the cans. He never touched me, however. Blood is blood, I heard him say. Thicker than boy juice. And he always knew a few days before Family Services came

on one of their inspections, so we tidied up and arranged our life to look neat as Chiclets in the package.

I did fine like this for more than a year, until my mom died of a smash to the skull with a full quart bottle of canola oil, and an OD on one of her happy drugs. Back then Canola Oil came in glass bottles. Today the bottles are plastic, softer, might not have killed her so much. The blow was never investigated. I mean, who would want to kill my poor devastated Delicious mom?

“I fed them from the cans. He never touched me, however. Blood is blood, I heard him say.”

Dad was more attached to her than he admitted. We buried Delia in the pauper's cemetery in Pokah Springs and went back to Horsetail where Integrity sank into a long funk. I missed her too. For some weeks he wouldn't leave the house. I had to feed him ravioli from the can. Then one day he started taking walks, every day longer and longer walks, singing songs of nonsense on the way, like Mairezeedots and So Long Oolong and Bibbity Bobbity Boo. He worried me, so I followed. I liked to hear him sing, but he was only a small man mumbling down a long road with nonsense spilling from his mouth. One time, the last time, he seemed very jolly, and turned because he sensed I was there, and he motioned me to catch up with him. He threw an arm around my shoulder and sang “If the words sound queer, and funny to your ear...etc.” He tugged me down to this very spot by the river and let go of my hand. He walked out onto the sand still singing... “A little bit jumbled and jivy...” I called out to him, “Dad ...Dad,” That was when a whip of current tumbled him into the muscled turbulence that instantly carried him away. I watched him go under once ... twice... didn't try to swim ... a third time under and Integrity was gone. There must have been something a man could have done. To this day I feel guilty. They found his body later, a couple of days, at the Blesswater, a few yards from Pewter Falls. His right arm had been snapped off, people imagined, by Henry, the

ancient catfish, the legend of Big Celery Pond a halfmile from the falls, that catfish often seen, never hooked, eats everything, huge and dangerous. The fish grabs hold. With one twist of tail and spine, snap, dad's arm goodbye. Did this fish cross the quarter mile of swamp grass overland to claim my dad's left arm?

Maybe it was Massacre, herself. She likes to practice.

That arm was just a nibble for Henry, damned catfish scavenger.

How gory this world can be,

Heaven...

Heaven rises. Easy world, easeful death, not over yet.

He pulls me to my feet, a salamandrine smile on his face. His lips almost brush mine and for a moment I think Heaven is going to kiss me, but no. He turns away and steps onto the sandspit. I feel the river's appetite. The water soaking through his vintage green Keds seems to drench my Hush Puppies. A thought crosses my mind and I open my mouth to say something but no words come. He looks back at me.

Death is a river, Tenderness.

I have just one pair of shoes. Help me, Heaven.

These are the last words. A whip of current tumbles him into the muscled turbulence that instantly carries him away. I watch him go under once...twice...He doesn't try to swim...a third time and Heaven is gone. There must be something someone can do.

On my way back to the apartment I see Saphronia (call me Sappho), vending her body on the street. This is our so-called Street Of Emanations. She's come from Philadelphia to escape an abusive pimp. She waves at me, and stumbles a little in her six inch spikes.

Hey Tenderskins, I'm about to close up shop. You want to come home with me? Cup of tea? Business poor. Too much life with kids. Johns be tired. Mr. Do-You-Wrong shrinks in the socket.



Blue toads stretch and yawn in the mind.

She is a street acquaintance, not for business. Sometimes I wonder what I'm doing in this story. I've never been to her lair before. It is not what I expected, but scrubbed down clean, everything in its place, great African masks and votive carvings. I forget she escaped from Rwanda. Is she Hutu or Tutsi. I can't tell, and I'm too timid to ask. When she was thirteen she decided to walk away from Africa and head north into Spain. She was alone and raped pregnant. She got some rides but did plenty on foot. Lost the baby rowing to Gibraltar, then hitchhiked from Gibraltar through Spain to stow away on a ferry to Dover. How did she eat? She sometimes mentions a wealthy and kind Mr. Eloquence (call me Al). Did he feed her? O Saphronia, where are you now that I tell your story? Could Mr. Eloquence finally have carried you away to an easier world?

I pause at the door, reluctant to smirch her pristine space with my blemishing presence. When I enter and cross the living room to join her in the kitchen for tea, her parakeet blocks my entrance, tiny chest thrust out as if he were a bouncer in a strip club. I can crush him with the sole of my shoe.

Wait a minute, the budgie says. Wait just a minute.

Wee critter talks.

It flies up to land on my nose. This bird can blind a man, extract an eye as if it were a nut in its shell.

I am the grim reaper, says the tiny bird.

The bird has trouble with r's, makes them sound like w's. Gwim weaper.

An image flashes for a moment of Heaven playing chess with a budgie.



If there's a single word that could describe the chaos that ensued, it would be this one.

That's my budgie buddy, says Saphronia. Easefuldeath his name, but you can call him E.D.

When he hears his name the parakeet sings out in a voice that I could mistake for the great jazz diva herself, except for the slight parakeet rasp MY NAME IS PEACHES!

We settle down to the tea, a tea brewed from nettles and chamomile.

You know that Massacre is white? She stirs buckwheat honey into her tea. Many colors. Buckwheat Honey is too pharmacological for me.

Saphronia looks hard into my face and asks, What is it? Something wrong.

I take a deep breath and exhale softly with my words.

I never thought death could be so tiny.

The door to the apartment is open. I never leave it open. Melancholy sits on the easy chair. I immediately organize in my mind my exit from the place. He doesn't look like he's going anywhere, not New Zealand, not Cincinnati. This is his place, not mine. If anyone has to leave, I do. Everything myself fragile as the wings of mayflies.

Melancholy, I thought at least until the fifteenth. I thought I'd be here. I planned till the fifteenth at least.

Please, Mel my name. I'm not back. I can never come back.

But are you...? Should I sleep on the couch? Maybe best I disappear.

Don't trouble. I'm leaving. Did you see my grater, my mandolin grater? I can't find her.

His ex's name is Mandrake, an unlikely name for a woman (call me Mandy). She lives usually in the apartment above. There is a little confusion here.

I don't think I ever used it, Mel. I never grate.

I can't find her anywhere.

I'll replace it. I never bought a grater before...but I...

I look to the ceiling at the blotch that has coagulated there and hangs like a rusty chandelier.

Melancholy doesn't look at the stain. He lifts the cushion of the easy chair as if hoping to find his grater between cushions and brushes out some crumbs. I'll get you a new one if...

No need. I've lost track of my Mandolin. When I use her she cuts my fingertips. Now I don't know where she is.

Melancholy turns abruptly and leaves as if propelled.

Melancholy, Melancholy, I whisper. He slams the door.

I come to rest here and stare at the wall for a few days, cannot move except for water, water in, water out.

Two cans of sardines open on the counter, small fish complete with eyes. One day I shower them with lemon.

Finally I gather energy to go down to Big Cheeks. Asia greets me with a hug, one of those clinches. You feel your molecules entangle. The embrace is as luscious as it is confusing.

Did you hear about Heaven? she asks.

The name pierces, an arrow through my spleen. What about Heaven?

His body washed up at Passwater, just before Pewter Falls. The left arm was snapped off they say by Henry. You know Henry?

Of course. I love him; in fact, I hate him. That cruel catfish. Could be a hundred years old, and never even hooked. The creature ate a whole John Smith, the curling champion.

Heaven is dead. He drowned. Asia wiped a tear.

I know. So sad to lose Heaven.



There must be something someone can do.

I understood him. He wasn't really gay, didn't pursue those adventures, no bathhouses, no tough clubs like Sledge or The Anvil, no Harleys. He enjoyed the pretty boy children of diplomats and torturers. He just liked to fondle young male hominids.

Who can blame him? Particularly the young, fuzz bearded boys who wanted to bed with Heaven. The young and the curious. Heaven appreciated their little wickies. As do I.

The son falls, not so different from the dad.

How vast your empathy, Asia. Like the Mexico Gulf.

I sit down at my table. The beautiful woman perched on a stool behind me talks into her cell phone. Her long neck curves like the close of a parenthesis. The voice is nasal and unpleasant. Asia brings my latte, four shots, and a peanut butter cookie.

Tenderness, don't you think we should get married? I think we should get married.

The words married, marriage, etc. lie in my mind like an idling locomotive. Marriage? With Asia? Though I find her an attractive, even sexy woman, and I love her company. But marriage. That locomotive won't move. The rails are gone.

If we get married I will take care of you, you betcha. I'll wait for you to come home from war. Like the wives of yore. I'll wash your clothes and keep them neat. I can sew, you betcha. And if we are married I won't have to work the streets. What streets? What work?

Yes. That...

Asia, you mean?

Sometimes I'm

As I often do when I spend too much time realming with Death, hitched to Confusion (and I don't mean those surfing twins from Pinkney Shoals) I go to the farmer's market and buy a melon. Nothing comforts like the giant melon. Heavy as a bomb. Bigger. Bends the tabletop in the apartment. This melon will drown my face in its flesh.



I admire that about Asia, her answers are oblique and relevant.

Asia walks right in to the apartment. She has never done that before, come right in. She is on the marriage trail. She carries a bouquet of asphodel, a greeny flower. These are flowers she brings for me.

Wow, what a huge melon. It's a meloon.

She thumps the enormous fruit. So have you thought of a date?

Date? For what?

The date for our wedding.

From that day on everyone calls me Meloon. Hello. My name is Meloon.

The door swings open and two women step in. They wear tight knit dresses, one of them black, the other teal. The room is green. In the center of the room an enormous melon sits intact on the table. These slim women with long faces stare into the fruit. The one on the right has a blue tear tattooed under her right eye. The left woman has something, perhaps a hummingbird, inked behind her left ear. Both of them are missing their incisors and their eyeteeth, perhaps once, but not vampires now. They stand shoulder to shoulder and look at me, four eyes looking at me. Their name is Pebble.

Are you the person formerly known as Tenderness who now has the name of Meloon?

Now I think how sad that I have totally missed Xmas. Yes I am.



TO HAVE BEEN

BY CLAUDIO MAGRIS

And so Jerry is dead, never mind, that isn't the problem, neither for him nor anyone else, not even for me who loved him and still love him, because love doesn't conjugate-my God, in that sense, of course, what's next, though love has its grammar and doesn't know tenses only verbal moods, in fact, just one, the present infinitive, when you love it's forever and the rest doesn't matter. Any love, any kind of love. It's not true that you get over it, nothing goes away, and this is often the particular rub, but you carry it along with you, like life, and even that is not really such great luck, except that you get over love even less than life. It's there, like starlight, who gives a damn if they are alive or dead, they shine and that's that, and though in the daytime you can't see them but you know they are there.

So we won't hear that guitar anymore, and that's fine too, you can learn to get along without anything. God, how he could play. And when his hand didn't work anymore, he pulled down the blinds and kissed it all goodbye. To that, I've no objection. Sooner or later it happens, and it doesn't matter much how, anyway it has to happen, and who knows how many of us here this evening, ladies and gentlemen, will be alive in a month's time, certainly not everybody, it's statistically impossible. Someone who is pushing his neighbor or complaining because the person in front of him is blocking his view of the stage has already gone to the barber for the last time, but never mind, a year more or less doesn't make much difference, I don't feel bad for those who kick the bucket and I don't envy those who keep on going, nor do I care much to know what group I fall into.

Amen for Jerry, and for everybody and everything. As I said, I can't find fault with his decision, when someone wants to get off the bus, it's right to get off, and if he prefers to jump off while it's still moving, before the stop, that's his business. Someone can be fed up, tired, unable to take it anymore, what do I know. When seeing him down like that because he couldn't play as before, to cheer him up I

told him that he had been one of the greats of the guitar, and he said that for him it wasn't enough to have been. He wanted to be-it didn't matter what, a musician, a lover, anything, but to be.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, in that moment I understood what great luck it is to be born like me, or to have an uncle or grandfather or whomever, born in Bratislava or Lwów or Kaloea or in any other dump in this shabby Central Europe, which is a hell, a real cesspool. It's enough to smell that musty odor, that stink which is the same from Vienna to Czernowitz, but at least it doesn't force you to be, on the contrary. Yes, if Jerry had understood, when his hand didn't work anymore, his great luck in having been, the freedom, the vacation, the great privilege of not having to be anymore, of not having to play anymore, his free pass from the barracks of life!

But maybe he couldn't, since he wasn't born or raised in that stagnant Pannonian air, thick as a blanket, in that smoke-filled tavern where you eat badly and drink even worse, but are happy to be there when it's raining outside and the wind is howling—and outside, in life, it's always raining and the wind cuts through you. Yes, any grocer in Nitra or Varaždin could teach all of Fifth Avenue—except for those maybe who come from Nitra or Varaždin or some other place in those parts—the happiness of having been.

Oh, the modesty, the lightness of having been, that uncertain and accommodating space where everything is as light as a feather, against the presumption, the weight, the squalor, the freight of being! Please, I'm not talking about any kind of past and even less about nostalgia, which is stupid and hurtful, as the world itself says, nostalgia, the pain of returning. The past is horrific, we are barbaric and evil, but our grandparents and great-grandparents were even fiercer savages. I certainly wouldn't want to be, to live in their time. No, I'm saying that I would want to have always already been, exempt from the military service of existing. A slight disability is sometimes

a way out, protecting you from the obligation of joining in and losing your skin.

Being hurts, it doesn't let up. Do this, do that, work, struggle, win, fall in love, be happy, you must be happy, living is this duty to be happy, if you're not how shameful. So, you do all you can to obey, to be as good and clever and happy as you ought, but how can you, things just fall on top of you, love smacks you on the head like a chunk of masonry off a roof, a wicked punch or worse. You walk hugging the walls to avoid those crazy cars, but the walls are crumbling, sharp rock and glass slicing your skin and making you bleed, you are in bed with someone and for an instant you understand what real life could and should be and it is an unbearable pang-picking your clothes off the floor, getting dressed, getting out and away. Luckily there's a bar nearby, how good a coffee or a beer tastes.

“So, you do all you can to obey, to be as good and clever and happy as you ought, but how can you.”

Yes, drinking a beer, for instance, is a way of having been. You're there, sitting down, you look at the foam evaporating, a little bubble every second, a heartbeat, one beat less, rest and the promise of rest for your tired heart; everything is behind you. I remember that my grandmother, when we went to visit her in Szabadka, would cover the sharp corners of the furniture with cloths and put away the iron table, so that we children wouldn't get hurt when we ran into something racing around the house, and she would even cover the electric plugs. To have been is this, living in this space where there are no sharp corners; you don't scrape your knee, you can't turn on the lamp that hurts your eyes, all is quiet, time out, no ambush.

So, ladies and gentlemen, this is the heritage that Central Europe has left us. A safe-deposit box,

empty but with a lock on it to keep out bank robbers who might want to put who knows what inside it. Empty, nothing that grabs your heart and bites into your soul, life is there, already been, secure, safe from any accident, an out-of-circulation bank note for a hundred old crowns that you hang on the wall, under glass, with no fear of inflation. Even in a novel, the best part, at least for the writer, is the epilogue. Everything has already happened, been written, worked out; the characters live happily ever after or are dead, it's all the same, in any case nothing more can happen. The writer holds the epilogue in his hands, rereads it, maybe he changes a comma, but he runs no risk.

Every epilogue is happy, because it's an epilogue. You go out on the balcony, a breeze comes through the geraniums and the violets of thought, a drop of rain slides down your face; if it rains harder you like to listen to the drumming of the fat drops on the awning. When it stops you go take a little stroll, you exchange a few words with the neighbor you meet on the stairs; neither for him nor you does it matter what's said, it's just a pleasure to hesitate there a moment and from the window on the landing you can see way down there in the distance a strip of sea that the sun, now out from behind the clouds, lights up like a knife blade. Next week we're going to Florence, your neighbor says. O yes, it's nice, I've been there. And in this way you save yourself the fuss of traveling, the lines, the heat, the crowds, looking for a restaurant. A stroll in the evening air fresh with rain, then back home. You must not wear yourself out, otherwise you'll get too excited and sleep won't come. Insomnia, ladies and gentlemen, believe me, is a terrible thing. It crushes you, suffocates you, follows at your heels, chases you, poisons you—yes, insomnia is the supreme form of being-insomnia, that's why you have to sleep, sleeping is the only antechamber of the true having already been, but meanwhile it's already something, a sigh of relief...



FROM "A FURTHER WITNESS"

BY JEROME ROTHENBERG

A GOD CONCEALED

I is
 ego
 in another
 tongue
 a swollen

 sense
 of who
 he is
 one day

 will fall apart
 & leave him
 hapless

 reading
 his words
 on glass
 & air

 or looking
 at the sky
 he reads
 your face

 the eyes
 like shards
 of ice
 aglow

 a god
 concealed
 his mouth
 askew

 the word
 is formidable [form-i-dabley]
 in another
 tongue

 the words
 dance
 down the path
 inside my ears

 & come to rest
 recalling
 how you spoke
 & wrote

 remembered
 friends
 & comrades
 ages gone

THE NAMES OF FRIENDS WE SHARE

the presence
 of the dead
 in every
 corner
 opens now
 into a space
 of names
 & faces
 that escape
 from time
 the lonely dead
 stare out at us
 they learn
 to play

 a game
 & teach us
 how to read
 the times
 before
 & after
 gathered
 in our minds
 a faceless
 swarm
 of the departed
 for as far
 as we can see
 the streets
 of Paris
 as they were
 before
 the names
 of friends
 we share
 between us
 on the flight
 to Berlin
 other faces
 with pale
 substance
 & grey hair (Amirgen White Knee)
 a world
 of strangers
 fathomless

 across from us
 they sit
 & stare out
 at the frozen
 sky
 barometers
 of change
 the living
 & the dead
 together

 take my hand
 in yours
 & we will find
 a passage
 to a world
 the mind
 remembers
 & the heart
 can share
 the resolution
 that the dead man
 saves for us
 absent a face



INSIDE MY MIND & YOURS

not right
or ripe
the word
emerging
on its own

he sucks
& chews it
spits it
forth
alive

surprised
to see
the blood
in droplets
on a glass

inside
my mind
& yours
this place
this planet

nothing
we have seen
except
the mind's
eye

fires
white
& black
the center
iron red

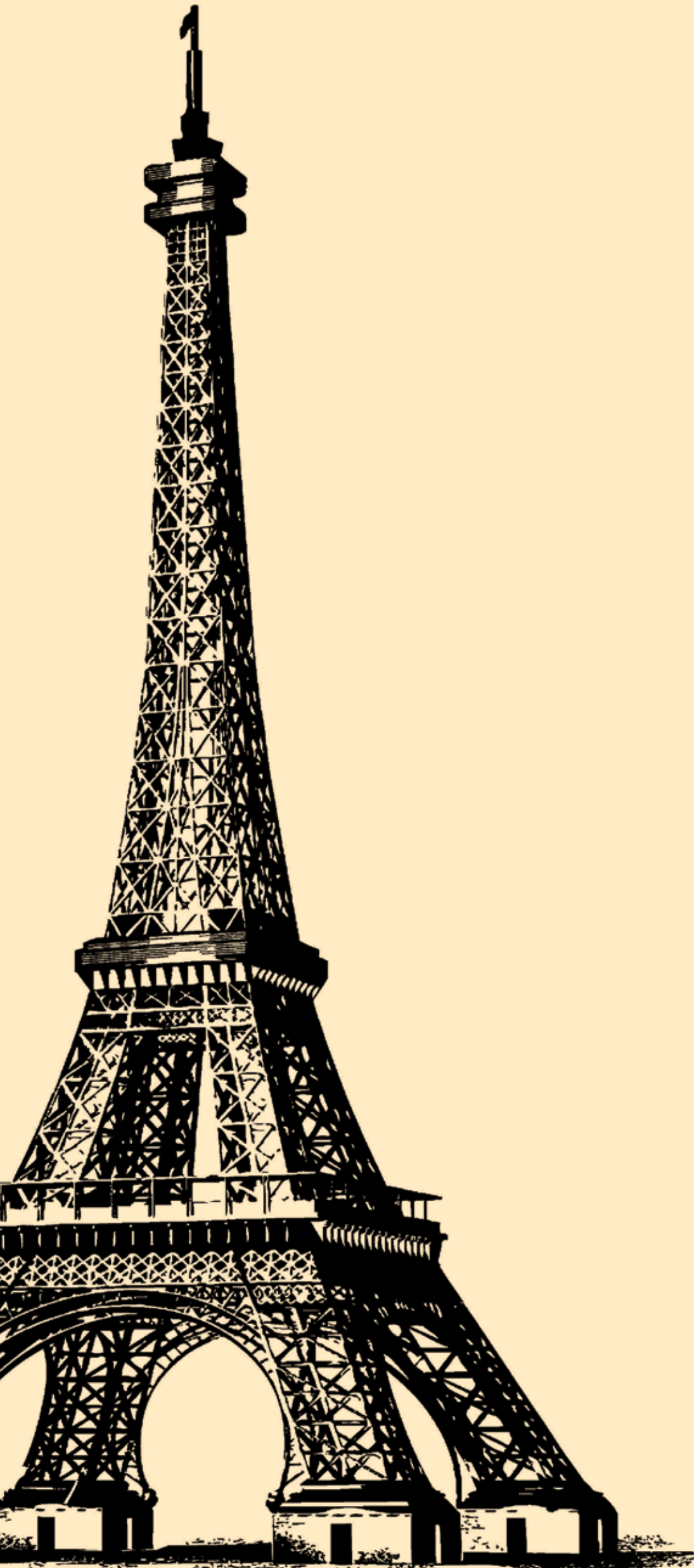
my heart
calls out
to you
before
you find me

the corners
opened wide
through which
the sea
will seep

a liquid
air
too hot
for comfort
still

white
fire
on
black
fire

black
on
white



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MAUPASSANT

BY DACIA MARAINI,

TRANS. BY ADRIA FRIZZI

“In France people are convinced that the land of Sicily is wild, a place that is difficult and even dangerous to visit,” writes Maupassant in the chapter entitled “Sicily”, part of his book “La via errante” which was published in 1890. He had made his journey to Sicily in 1885, however, and his writing appeared the year after, in the journal “La nouvelle Revue”.

A strong young man of exuberant vitality, Maupassant had been a boatman on the river Seine—we can imagine him gazing at the paintings of Manet, in one of those open air festivities painted with a close attention that today we would term anthropological—amongst the trees of a Paris still very close to the countryside, coloured streetlamps lit at dusk, tables set up along the riverbank covered with glasses and flasks of wine, girls in their long skirts, their hair like lovely baby cauliflowers, while curly-haired puppies run amongst the thick-soled shoes of the ladies out for a walk. Young Guy is one of the men wearing a red and white striped shirt, from which emerge two bare and muscled arms. On his head he has a straw hat circled by a red ribbon which dangles jauntily down to one shoulder.

And yet, when he arrives in Sicily, this young man is already in the grip of the syphilis which will destroy his brain and kill him when he is still only 43 years old. Despite that he experiences an overwhelming desire to see, to learn, and like many other men of his day he convulsively visits all the tourist sites of the day, from Segesta to Selinunte, from Monreale to Agrigento. Added to which, unusually for a bourgeois of the times, he also goes to visit a sulphur mine.

Despite the weakness and shortness of breath induced by his illness, he finds the energy to climb up to the Castellaccio up above Monreale, he clambers into the tunnels and shafts of the mine in Agrigento, he strides along the road under the midday sun, and

concludes by describing Sicily as “a strange and divine architectural museum.” Architecture is dead today, Maupassant states, we have lost the gift of creating beauty with stones, that “mysterious secret of seducing by means of a line, that sense of grace in monuments.” In the pages of his notebook we find scrupulously annotated the difference between the gothic cathedrals of the north, austere to the point of gloom, and Sicilian churches, seductive in their sensuality.

“I wander slowly back to the Hotel delle Palme, which has one of the most beautiful gardens in the city, full of huge, strange plants.” Where on earth has this wonderful garden gone? Was it destroyed in one fell swoop or bit by bit, swallowed up by concrete and the developers’ greed? Who knows when it finally disappeared into the maw of Palermo’s devastating process of savage and disordered development. It is Maupassant who tells us that Wagner used to stroll about there, Wagner who wrote the last few notes of Parsifal in Palermo. A man “of unbearable character, who when he left was remembered as one of the most unsocial of men.”

The young writer asks if can visit the room Wagner stayed in, in the hope of finding “a beloved object, a favorite chair, the table he worked at, some sign of his passing.” But all he finds is an average hotel suite. It seems that there was absolutely nothing left of the great Wagner. But before he leaves in disappointment, he decides to take a look inside the mirrored wardrobe at the far end of the room. A perfume wafts over him, “delicious and penetrating, like the caress of a breeze that has passed over a rosebush.” The hotel owner explains that Wagner used to spray his linen with rosewater.

Maupassant finds much in the Sicilians that reminds him of Arabs. Unlike the Neapolitans who wave their arms about, who “get worked up for no reason”, Sicilians “possess a gravity in their movements that is typical of Arabs, although they have the Italian quickness of mind.” Sicilians are proud, he goes on to say, they have a great love of titles and their faces often remind him of the faces of



Spaniards. While the town criers in the streets, with their guttural sounds, remind him of the East.

One evening Maupassant visits the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, to hear Carmen. Here he discovers that Sicilians are like all Italians: “they adore music, they have an infallible ear, but when they are in a crowd they become a kind of quivering beast that feels but does not reason.” They are capable of clapping furiously at a beautiful tone, while the slightest hint of a fluffed note has them drumming their heels on the floor and hurling the most dreadful insults at the singers on the stage.

“Sicilians ‘possess a gravity in their movements that is typical of arabs.’ ”

As he walks around Palermo, Maupassant listens to ordinary people singing the arias from Carmen, especially the Toreador, and it is contagious. And to think that Bizet died of grief because of the massive failure of his Carmen, destined to become an international success just a few short years later. The women “wrapped in vivid colors of red, yellow and blue, chat to each other by their front doors and watch you as you go by, their black eyes shining under a forest of dark hair,” writes Maupassant. And he tells of how he stops at a lottery counter which functions like some sort of religious service, he watches a man coming away with a lottery ticket in his hand, he sees him stop in front of a statue of the

Virgin, pull a coin out of his bag and insert it into the alms box for the poor, then cross himself with his ticket still in his hand, praying to the Madonna and setting off with a hopeful look on his face.

In another kiosk he sees displayed a photograph of the crypt of the Capuchin monastery, the dead in their fine clothes sitting on benches with their backs against the walls. What’s all this about? The local people he asks try to dissuade him from going to visit “that horror.” But of course he will not listen to them: “I wanted to visit this sinister collection of the dead immediately,” he writes decisively. And early in the morning he knocks at the gate of the small convent. A tiny capuchin monk, almost hidden by a brown habit too big for him, opens the door. “Without a word”

he leads the way underground, knowing full well what visitors want to see.

He goes along dark corridors and down narrow steps, and “suddenly I see an enormous gallery open out in front of us, wide and high, and its walls are covered with an entire population of skeletons dressed in the most bizarre and grotesque fashion.” He is struck by the cadavers with yellowed skin, hanging there side by side along the whitewashed walls. “Some of the heads are eaten away by disgusting mould which makes the bones and their faces look even more deformed.” His horrified yet fascinated gaze rests on the hundreds of bodies whose every pose, every garment he describes in detail. He ends by defining them as “ridiculous” because the

skeletons have been done up in their finery to maintain a sense of social hierarchy, sporting family colors, displaying their dusty family crests. Each of them wears around his neck a placard on which is written the date of death: 1590, 1720, 1880.

The women seem to him even more grotesque than the men, he notes, because they have been dressed up almost coquettishly. "Their heads watch you, stuffed into wigs bedecked with ribbon and lace.

There is snowy whiteness around their blackened eyes, putrid, corroded by the strange workings of the earth. Their hands, like chopped off tree roots, stick out of the sleeves of their new dress and the stockings which encase the leg bones seem empty. Sometimes the dead woman wears only shoes, shoes far too big for her poor, dried-up feet."

He finds the young girls even more startling, with their metal crown on their heads as a sign of their innocence. "They are sixteen, eighteen years old yet they seem ancient" so withered and toothless are they, with their sparse hair. And then there are the children "whose bones are barely formed, who have not withstood the test of time." And the Parisian writer is moved at the sight of these tiny bodies devastated by potassium nitrate, who still bear the traces of maternal care. Those little soldier costumes, those tiny bibs, the lace which offers a glimpse of innumerable patient feminine hands at work over countless years.

After this lugubrious visit, "I felt the need to see some flowers" writes Maupassant. He takes a horse and cab to Villa Tasca, overflowing with marvelous tropical plants. Another of those wonderful gardens hymned by all the travelers of this period which then disappeared during the sacking and looting of the land, shortly after the end of the Second World War.

The next day our writer decides to go as far as Casteld'accia, an ancient, abandoned castle where brigands had hidden out before being hunted down by General Pallavicini. At least that's what they tell him but he's not so sure

and decides to find another source of information, and checks with some French friends. They tell him that in fact the brigands have disappeared. It's still possible to find yourself ambushed by common criminals, but "compared with the attacks that take place every day in London or in New York, what happens in Sicily is laughable."

Some days later Guy de Maupassant sets out in a carriage in the direction of Agrigento, where he admires the temples: "something beautiful like a human



smile/over the cold stones of the temple" he writes, paraphrasing Victor Hugo speaking of Athens. "It is as if you had Olympus before you, the Olympus of Homer, of Ovid, of Virgil: the Olympus of

"This exploitation of childhood is one of the most dreadful things one can see," is his distraught comment. But he swiftly resigns himself to the thought that there is nothing he can do and sets about organizing an expedition up to Etna which takes all his energy and attention. He gets up while it is still dark. He covers the first thousand meters on a small, sure-footed mule. Here and there the poor animal plunges into snow up to his chest but somehow manages to get out again and begin once more the difficult climb. And then the path stops, and they have to leave the mules behind and continue on foot. The last three hundred meters have to be done on foot, climbing painfully on a rock face covered with dangerously slippery ash, edging round a terrifying crater.

Nor does this tenacious pilgrim forget to visit the Aeolian Islands, another volcano to climb, another terrifying sight to view from above, and then the sea, the rivers, the woods which at the

time were abundant and covered almost the entire island.

His enthusiasm is roused for the final time as he stands in front of the Venus of Selinunte, which appears to him at the end of a corridor, her head and one arm missing, but despite this "never has the human form seemed to me more marvelous or more seductive." What he sees there is not the effigy of a beautiful and idealized woman, but the female image "as one loves her, as one desires her, as one wishes to embrace her." Certainly the lack of a head

presents certain problems. What about kisses? In order to kiss you need a mouth, and to have a mouth you need a head. Will this be a love without kisses? But Maupassant does not seem perturbed by the statue's lack of a head. He tells himself that all the effort and trouble was worth it, just to see this Venus. Here is his reward for a year of pilgrimage in Italy and in Sicily. A sturdy girl "with full breasts, powerful hips and rather solid in the leg." This is how he describes her, enamored as he is: "The marble is alive and you would like to take hold of it, sure that it will give way under the pressure of your hand, just like flesh." He can't resist making a comparison with the Gioconda: "Before her we feel obsessed by some kind of lure towards an enervating and mystical love. There are living women whose eyes induce in us that dream of unrealizable and mysterious tenderness." The Venus of Selinunte, on the other hand, is "the perfect expression of powerful beauty, healthy and simple."

She is the woman everybody wants. Especially, probably, because she is harmless, distant and mute. Indeed, as soon as a man "touches the hand of a flesh and blood woman, his thought

flies far away, towards the dream." Which is to say that any relationship between a man and a woman is impossible. Only the link between man and a dream is worth anything, the rest is chatter, vulgarity, a heavy chain, tedium.

It is curious, this philosophy which brings us back to Plato and his shadows, while Maupassant is a concrete writer, attentive to the things of the everyday. His heroines are not just dreams but women endowed with body and spirit. We have learnt that writers' theories often do not correspond to their writing, which luckily goes beyond all ideologies, intellectual constructions, and which carries them by force of observation into the world where things happen before they can be catalogued or explained.

The chapter on Sicily ends with a beautiful description of the Anapo, which must have been a wide, free-flowing, winding and meandering river lined with papyrus, rushes and reeds. "We push away from its shores with the aid of a long pole. The stream winds its way through charming panoramas and flower-filled vistas. We come across an island full of strange bushes. The fragile, triangular trunks, nine to twelve feet high, are topped by round clumps of long, green filaments, slender as soft as hair. They look like human heads which have turned into plants, tossed into the sacred spring water by one of the pagan gods who lived there once upon a time." They are papyruses, which "quiver, murmur, bend low, mingle their furry brows, and seem to speak of unknown and distant things." And he asks himself ironically if it is not strange that this ineffable bush which has the power to transmit to us the thought of the beloved dead, which has stood watch over human genius, should have at its tip a large, thick, waving mane, like the heads of poets.

Which brings us to wonder if it is still the case that the heads of poets are topped by leonine manes, even symbolically. The answer is no.



THE BLIND MAN SEES INTO THE HORIZON

BY MARTIN NAKELL

The blind man sees into the horizon

The blind man sees into the heart of stone

The blind man sees that the blind man is nothing more than the blind man but also that the blind man is nothing less than the blind man

The blind man sees that the world is made of glass

The blind man sees that the energy of space is expressed by the square root of the origin of consciousness which is void of content but which is content

When the blind man sees that his blindness is empty, he fills it: with meaning with clothing with truth with biochemistry. then he empties it. then he fills it: with wind with knowledge with distances with food. then, he empties it. then he empties it again. What is the blind man left with? With sun With moon. With grass. With buildings of rough stone. With whole cities. With villages of silk and of families. With The Empire of Days made of clay and of animals and of human beings and of the communion of the unsplit atom with the open doorway with the translucent bodies in embrace

The blind man sees – peering through the sight-lens of belief – that the gnostic & the agnostic are the same

When the blind man sees there is no danger in blindness, there is silence there is meaning there is talking there is lostness

The blind man sees that the things of this world awaken the mind

The blind man sees that the word is empty of everything but emptiness

When the blind man sees that he is calm he knows that he was a child in the lap of fate that he wandered in the field of wheat and the fields of corn blinded by the atomic passions in love with the name of the queen in love with the exhausted hour how it never ends

The blind man sees that at the end of silence there is one eye open it is his

The blind man knows that from the depths of confusion comes chaos comes clarity based on the physics of the quantum of change

The blind man sees – through the sight-lens of relativity – that the energy of time is expressed in a formula of color so that blue equals twice the radius of yellow raised to the seventh power of magenta multiplied by the square root of the curvature of white.

When the blind man sees that order and chaos are the same it takes his breath away it takes his mind away it takes away his heart it takes his sight away he gives his sight away it opens his eyes he has the strength it takes to cross the darkness with the light

The blind man sees that the past is the transparent spirit of a clown balancing a two-step-shuffle atop a circus ball tamed by the immediate unmediated presence of the abundance of oxygen in the world that it must be followed to the primary lover in the tranquil landscape

When the blind man sees himself weeping he waits he lays his head in the lap of is in that is is also weeping in the blindness of is toward the isness of is all man and all woman

The blind man sees that only the word matters until the word doesn't matter

When the blind man sees that he is dancing he knows that he was born he knows the moment of his birth he knows that he is alone and that he is blind and that everyone is blind and that he is never alone even at the moment of violence and even at the moment of birth

In his blindness, the blind man, walking, blindly, into the hour, loses, sight / of time

The blind man sees how to nurture the mind that the things of this world awaken

The blind man sees – through the sight-lens of time – that the energy of space is expressed by the square root of the origin of consciousness

The blind man sees that each word is a color that the ever changing pairing of word to color is infinite

of infinite colors of infinitely precious words

When the blind man sees that his burden is the numbers he lets them go they fecundate the field of wheat and the fields of corn and the moments of the open spaces

“The blind man sees that there are no boundaries to his blindness. No boundaries to blindness at all.”

The blind man sees that there are no boundaries to his blindness. No boundaries to blindness at all. He panics. Blindness dissolves in blindness. In confusion in chaos, the blind man declares a holiday, a celebration. There is music. There is drinking and dancing. There is friendship and reunion. There is flirtation, licit and illicit. The Blind Prophet arrives. The energy in the room heightens. To a bacchanal. To a fever pitch. To messianic ecstasies. When the blind man awakens from exhaustion he enters into a dialogue with the Blind Prophet from which there is no exit because this dialogue has no conclusion because blindness has no boundaries even as blindness and dialogue revel in the absence of boundaries the creation of names

The blind man makes a question of his blindness – a question that comes to torment him. Then he sees that the answer is to have not asked the question. It is too late for that. Soon he will see that the further he moves away from the question into the absurd disorder – revealed only by asking the question – the closer he might come to forgetting the answer



The blind man sees that the word is empty of everything but rhythm

The blind man sees that the world is made of shapes & forms. He sees that the relationship between human-made forms – rhomboid, hexagram, triangle, iamb – and natural form – waterfall, cloud formation, light and dark – is an equation that proves that relationship is irrelevant to vision

The blind man sees – peering through the sight-lens of science – that the visible and the invisible worlds reveal each other that the stars do not reveal our fates that gravity reveals a sense of humor about the whole thing and a desire for a universal love of human beings

When the blind man sees the woman with the broken throat he speaks for her in her words that become a book she reads aloud to him

As the blind man walks beside the walls of the church, the bells ring. He looks inside himself to find a hardened metal clapper to express the unknown hour and the known hour

When the blind man sees that his anger (which is not his anger), his rage (which is not his rage), is an error (which is not his error), he sees that his anger, his rage has taken him where he would have otherwise never have gone. A place recognizable by his never having been there before. A place filled with voices. Filled with all kinds of things to see

The blind man sees that the presence of others awakens each self

The blind man sees that he can let go of his blindness / that now he is nothing / that now / he is in a perfect position to see / in a perfect position to act / in a perfect position to speak / he is still blind

The blind man sees that the word doesn't matter

When the blind man sees his fury he sees it is his blindness

The blind man looking in a mirror sees – through the sight-lens of the doppelganger – his blindness. He calls it eternal. Facing the mirror, he walks backwards into blindness yet he does not fall over the edge of trust

The blind man sees his mind that it is a computer yet one prone to an unassailable mystery composed of unheard of potsherds amulets and other elements of cultures of civil stipend numbers and symbols and signs even of art even of the opposite of time and of space even the opposite of gravity resisting definition yet filled with the sufficiency of names

The blind man sees the crowd he disappears into. The sun warms his shoulders. He pays the price to be here. The blind sun. The sun

The blind man sees that within his blindness, there is blindness. And within that blindness there is blindness. And within that blindness there is an urgent call. Which he calls sight

The blind man sees that blindness is the one equation in all of mathematics that wants to stay alive that wants to achieve no solution

The blind man sees just how the word matters.

The blind man, opening the box of blindness, takes out a slightly smaller box of blindness. He opens it. He takes out a slightly smaller box of blindness. He opens it. Finally, losing patience, he hurls himself into the waters of The Great Lake. He swims across to the other shore. There, he walks on the beach of blindness. With the stick, he writes in the sand: blindness is not a void, it is not an absence, it is not an emptiness. He writes: blindness is blindness is blindness is sand

The blind man sees – through the sight-lens of astronomy – that the universe is 13.8 billion years old. Blindly, he drinks in the vastness of this awareness. Then, blindly, he despairs in the

burden of this awareness. Then, he suffers, blindly, a loss of meaning and purpose. Then, but only then, absolute blindness saves him

When the blind man sees that blindness is a concentration of divine energy he fears he may have gone mad but believes he has gone human believes he may even have gone blindness

When the blind man sees the thousands of words he has withheld. as protection. he indulges in an orgy of words in a festival of language until he is cleansed of all the words withheld

When the blind man wearies of blindness, it rains. When the blind man wearies of blindness, he drinks from the river of blindness and the blind waters flow through him. When the blind man wearies of blindness he wearies of life. He can hardly go on. When the blind man wearies of blindness, and with all of the strength left in him, and taking up pencil and paper, he composes the Song of the Myth of Blindness. He becomes the Troubadour of Blindness. He falls in love again with blindness. His blindness has become a bird. It flies. He is left blind. He has faith again, whether it is the faith of those in love, blindly, with blindness, or the faith of those in love with weariness, he has found love. He is invited to sit down at the table where she has sat, the Queen of Reality, hungry, waiting for him to arrive, sipping at the glass of cold water, her sustenance in the empty interregnum

And he sees that word is empty of everything but myth

The blind man sees that his blindness is not an absence of sight nor is it a form of sight nor is

it a yearning for sight even though without sight there would be no blindness and on this understanding the blind man, closing his eyes, listens to the external and the indigenous voices and the voiceless that sing and that desire inside of him

“When the blind man wearies of blindness, it rains.”

When the blind man sees that his blindness embroils thought he thinks of everything including phosphorus including elephants including friends. When the blind man sees that his blindness embroils his thought he thinks again about everything including phosphorus including trees including human beings

When the blind man sees – through the sight-lens of psyche – that he has a double a doppelganger who is not blind, who is sighted, the blind man abandons his need to escape his blindness to struggle against his own body. He sees that his double sees. He knows that he will never be his double. And yet, he knows that everyone also is their own double – he does not know how that comes to be. He knows now that he does not own his blindness. That he need not possess it that it need not possess him. That if he sees at all, he need see only his blindness. He need only to hear the Song of Blindness. He need only to not stop hearing it

The blind man sees that the history of poetics drives us not only toward but into while the theory of geometry is the billowing of natural history it drives the primordium of the vegetal world the uncontrollable the whirlwind of news

The blind man sees that blindness is not passive that blindness is an active verb – to blindness, as in: to blindness is to live

When the blind man discovers the orphan shivering in the rain he takes him in he gives the orphan food and drink he gives him a warm dry safe bed in the morning he offers the orphan blindness. The orphan accepts. The orphan sees that it is the end of his orphanage

The blind man sees that words are empty of everything but meaning

In a flash of seeing the blind man sees everything there is to see every thing at once then he is again blind satiated in body and mind in past and in future

When the blind man sees that the sea is yellow that the man is blue he knows he has arrived

The blind man sees – through the sight-lens of sight – that sight is not passive that sight is an active verb, as in: to sight is to live

When the blind man sees his doppelganger he wants to merge he wants to become one with it he wants to become whole – seeing that fulfillment, he calls it total blindness. He believes that in his total blindness, he is whole with everyone, with everything

When the blind man sees what he calls total blindness, he wonders if total blindness, somewhere, meets total sight. He fears the answer. Then, it comes to him

When the blind man sees the brutality committed every day hundreds of times thousands of times millions of times he doubles his blindness he triples it quadruples it. He still sees. He wants to hide from the sight of his own tears

The blind man sees that words are empty of everything but breath

When the blind man sees – through the sight-lens of vision – that life has no context, he tells himself I have entered the Land of the Living Blindness. I see it all clearly now

The blind man sits in the yard of his house. Blindness surrounds him. He is immersed in blindness. He listens. He hears nothing. Somehow he knows that the gibbous moon is two-thirds of the way across the sky. Somehow he knows that the distant music now inaudible will come closer. Somehow he knows that the person standing on the porch watches him. He knows that the nothing he hears is the nothing that he yearns to hear. That he can hope to hear it so long as he is blind.



THE PURSUIT (EXCERPT FROM SNOW AND GUILT)

BY GIORGIO PRESSBURGER
TRANS. BY SHAWN WHITESIDE

I received this story when the present volume had already been set and was about to go to press. The text reached me via fax. It is a piece of writing by my dearest former classmate, my brother. He was a mild-mannered boy, quiet but with a great inner clarity, an even temper and a good disposition towards others which I only now fully understand and appreciate. Two nights ago I dreamed about him. And today, in reply, here is this manuscript. A strange coincidence. The fax comes from Milan. My brother Nicola has not been with us for twelve years. These pages were found at the bottom of a drawer where they lay in the midst of other personal objects. I felt that the dark stories assembled in this volume needed some concluding lightness. For that reason I have asked the publisher to add this story at the last moment.

She's a witch, I tell you. She tangles the fate of men, alive and dead. I know I am one of her creations, moulded by her in flesh and spirit: I have been sleeping with her for many years. The elements themselves, air and earth, sun and water, help her in her work. Otherwise you would have to believe in a will capable of conquering the deadly inertia of matter and bending to its own designs space, events, time.

I remember when I first saw her, opening her heavy lids, emerging from the void. I met her blue eyes, her little face. I looked at the lines of her slender body, her coloured socks, the little shoes - children's shoes almost, with buckles and little straps - her long hair. I looked at her hands. Her smile, too, was a child's.

That's how I want you to remember her as well: a pale lunar light that love has rendered clairvoyant and armed with extraordinary powers, sending it out across the whole world before finding me, and bringing me back to life.

She was twenty-five and already married when all of a sudden she fell in love. Some of the things I shall now confide in you I heard from the lips of Vittoria herself, some from her acquaintances and old friends. I want you to know everything, you men who have lived but once. She was twenty-five, I was saying. And although she was a girl, she had studied philosophy and theology. The long hours spent on her books had turned her even paler. An orphan - her father had died many years before - she had received thoughts and suggestions from Plato and his heirs, she had examined the fate of Boethius and Descartes, of faded mystics and preachers. They had become her fathers. She knew of the world beyond, that world that no hand can touch nor any eye see, which exists in the thoughts of all of us. I am talking about ideas, of that state of our mental machinery, running from person to person, which hangs over, or seems to hang over, our common fates. Not that she believed in them: the professors, with their arguments of logic and history, had not instilled them into her with any conviction. It was Greek philosophy itself that spoke to and seduced her. And Vittoria had bent her head before the words of the fathers. Closing her eyes, she managed to see the world above and, between that and the palpable real world, she sensed yet other spaces, other beings, other lives.

In the dark university rooms, where many sunsets surprised her, behind the shelves of books, above the gaze of her companions, unknown yet familiar presences revealed themselves.

Giovanni, the young assistant who married Vittoria as soon as she had finished her university studies, had sensed nothing. But, disagreeable as it might be to admit it, her philosophy teacher, the favourite disciple of the professor, who was a luminary of phenomenology during those years in Milan, embodied, more than pure thought, "brute reality," to use the exact phrase.

Lavish dinners with friends, healthy swims in the sea and in pools, a protective paternal presence: that was what the young professor Giovanni offered Vittoria. It seemed like a promise for all eternity. 'A little Eldorado;

she said later, with a laugh. Because, in all of this she could find nothing but a source of laughter.

Even when she was united in matrimony before the civil world, as embodied by the municipal functionary, she was really laughing loud and long in her heart. Her joyfulness conveyed itself to her future father-in-law, a respectable businessman, the witnesses—serious university teachers—and all the guests.

There was laughter as they signed the register; and even while the married couple and their guests were going down the stairs of the building and pouring into the street to part shortly afterwards, a resonant good humour snaked its way among them.

But the laughter was not a sign of happiness. Vittoria soon discovered that the union of her body with that of Giovanni was only a cause of pain. She spent anguished nights beside her husband wishing him as far away as possible. A few weeks after the wedding she began to take sleeping tablets and when her husband lay down beside her Vittoria, almost unconscious, turned to face the other way.

I realize that my words are running ahead of me. I am crossing time and space, indicating few and inadequate details. I should be speaking about Giovanni, saying that he was remarkably tall, well-off, with coarse manners despite his studies. I should bring you into the couple's house, talk about the furniture, the curtains, the bed, their thoughts, their night-time conversations, their feelings. I haven't time to do that. The story of Vittoria's love is here in my breast and in my thoughts, it doesn't leave so much as a page for anyone else. It begs for testimony, and it does so with each passing moment, with the pulsing of my blood, whose very source it is.

Vittoria had been married for a few months when she met a short man, thin, with shaggy hair and big frightened eyes. Giacomo was an art dealer and a painter. The works of many hands were bundled together in his studio. African votive statues were arranged on two tables; they were of various sizes, carved from



all kinds of wood. Rather than human creations, they seemed casually sculpted by fate. Their material—wood—had preserved its own nature, and the human figures were superimposed upon it, something pallid and accidental.

Man and tree, two beings were united to represent one another; wood stood for man, and man for wood.

A little further along, mannequins made by Italian craftsmen some centuries back, an aid for painters and designers, showed their painted pink cheeks and stared at various corners of the room. In their material, the wood was no longer recognizable: they were artificial creatures, neither flesh nor tree, they sat there motionlessly with no precise reason for their existence. Perhaps Giacomo was seeking the union of two worlds in some of his painted woods. Or perhaps over time he had realized that he himself was incapable of effecting that union whose concept remained with him in the form of an *idée fixe*. Many of his pictures were clusters of knots: pieces of string tied together and then cut and then tied and cut again. He had spent months making knots, alone in his studio, among his mannequins.

Do I think that Vittoria had noticed this anxious quest for connections the evening she found herself in the artist-dealer's studio along with her friends and acquaintances? Or perhaps I think this because I now know that she has been on the same quest as long as she has lived. However, the encounter was a revelation for her. 'In this lift we had our first kiss.

'In front of this shop window we kissed once, when he had to leave for America.

'I sat on this bench weeping.' That was what Vittoria would say to me each time we crossed the city on apparently casual trajectories.

The man didn't notice her immediately. It was the girl who made the first move.

'I want to marry you and have a child by you; she said in circumstances that I would describe as exceptional.

Giacomo replied, with a fixed expression: 'But I am old and ill.'

Vittoria kissed him. She felt his frail body, his slack muscles. She resolved never to let him go.

By the time the conversation took place Giacomo's life was already marked; it was after Giacomo's journey to Africa, his final one. Its purpose was the acquisition of statuettes, this time without the mediation of international traders, who cared nothing for the souls of those people but a great deal for profit; often they would not refer (perhaps because the statuettes were fakes) to the exact provenance of the objects. The flight from Rome to the Sudan was interrupted after three hours when four terrorists burst into the pilot's cabin. They were Arabs. They wanted money. They wanted the deaths of the Jews and an enemy Sheik.

The aircraft remained motionless in a tropical airport. By the time unknown soldiers from a secret police force had climbed up the fuselage and stormed the plane, the passengers were

already exhausted. The smoke from a tear-gas canister ripped through Giacomo's lungs before the terrorists were killed.

Another plane brought him back to Italy. His thin body had managed to survive. In hospital Vittoria spent many days beside this man, sitting close to his bed. Giacomo recovered. But slowly, in his lungs, a formless kind of flesh was beginning to grow, the kind that men call 'malignant'.

Perhaps Giacomo's body wanted that growth for reasons that his mind could neither understand nor control. The doctors couldn't understand or control it either. The flesh went on growing inexorably.

It was then that Vittoria and Giacomo were united. Vittoria parted from her husband without hesitation; she watched him weeping like a baby. 'Would it have been better to lie?' she asked. She left him the house and all the objects of her father's inheritance that she had brought with her: furniture, ornaments, paintings.

She and Giacomo moved to Paris, to a little apartment in Saint-Germain-des-Pres. 'We'll live more calmly here,' he had said.

Vittoria, before she left, spoke to a doctor friend. 'Two to four years,' was the sentence.

Nothing happened. Giacomo went on knotting pieces of string; the mannequins and the African statues left their confines in an old car, sitting beside Vittoria, as though they were alive. In the Paris house they were stored in a room all to themselves.

In the evening Giacomo and Vittoria met other painters and other antique dealers. The collection of old and strange objects grew bigger: human limbs in plaster, dolls, figures of animals were added to what was already there. By day she went in search of objects to sell and to preserve.

"Vittoria parted from her husband without hesitation; she watched him weeping like a baby."

But now I am becoming aware that I will never manage to tell you what that love was: the little everyday details might seem banal, commonplace, at best attempts to extract some cheap emotion from the situation. The words they exchanged, even if they were quoted faithfully as I have heard them from Vittoria's lips, would be meaningless to an outsider. And how then can one say that two people love each other?

What had seemed a torture to Vittoria with Giovanni, with Giacomo became happiness. In her body it was no longer painful thorns that sprouted at the moment of their union, but sweet flowers, and rather than being absent, she now wanted to be perennially in the presence of her man.

This happiness was too much for Giacomo's frail body; or perhaps it was too much in the judicious eyes of the family doctor.

'I have to prescribe him some tranquillizers or you will wear yourself out,' said Dr Issuna, when Vittoria talked to him of her lover's inextinguishable ardour. They embraced and kissed for hours together, several times a day.

The official prohibition on picking those sweet amorous flowers did no damage to relations between Vittoria and Giacomo. They stayed cheerful even when his coughing, at first timid and sporadic, began to be violent and prolonged.

'I'm being like La Traviata,' he said, turning away, every time a cough rose to his throat. He smiled. And when the attack had passed his eyes were pearly with tears.

Now it became tiring for Giacomo to make knots in his pieces of string. 'Parigi o cara noi lasceremo,' he sang softly, when he had to go back to Milan for treatment.

They decided to marry. Vittoria's marriage to Giovanni had been dissolved very quickly. Dr Issuna went on holiday. He admitted to Vittoria that he was unable to help his friend Giacomo.

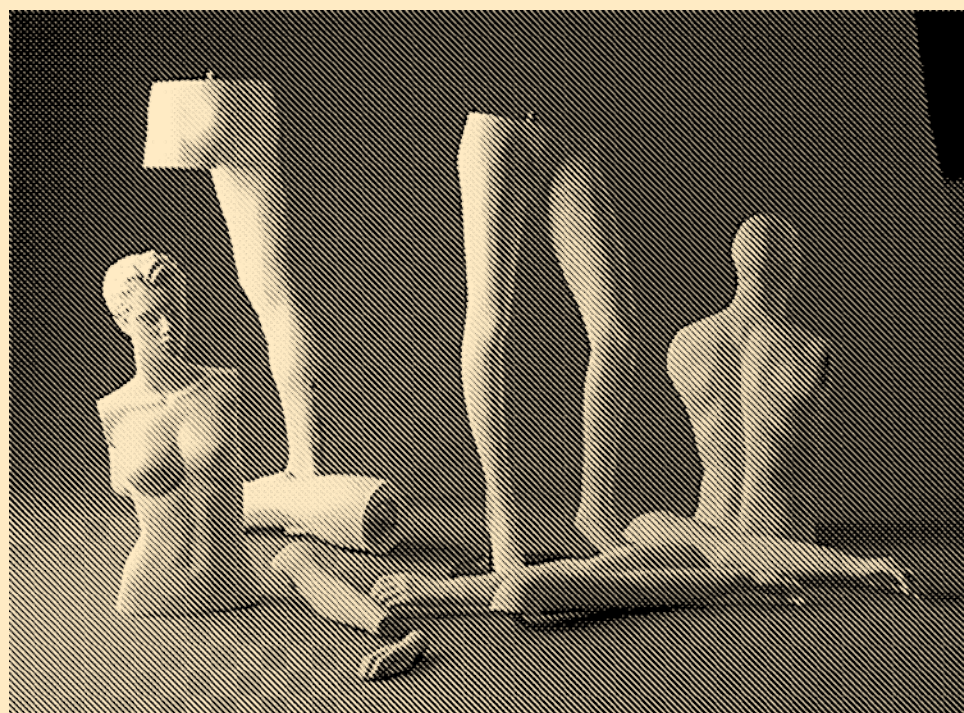
'If he's in a lot of pain, here's an injection to give him; he said and added in a low voice: 'It'll send him to sleep.'

Before the coughing paralysed him, Giacomo went for a walk with Vittoria. They stopped in a meadow to pick flowers and thistles. Giacomo knew the names of every plant in the meadow. He taught them all to Vittoria, one by one. Then, when he was at home again, he went to bed. A few days later, Vittoria could no longer bear the sight of his pain. She gave him the tranquillizing injection. The coughing stopped.

'Why wait a month, we could get married immediately,' he said one afternoon. A neighbour acted as

celebrant, some friends as witnesses. The names of Vittoria and Giacomo were knotted together like two pieces of string. Giacomo, for the ceremony, wanted to wear his pyjama jacket. Early that evening he went to sleep. He died, after a year and a half of life and love with Vittoria.

When they put him in the coffin, the girl put beside him an imitation ivory hand, from the nineteenth century, for him to stroke, and two wooden African figures: passports on the infinite journeys into other worlds.



BREAKFAST

BY LUISA VALENZUELA

TRANS. BY DAVID JACOBSON

The hotel in Marseilles is Moroccan-inspired. A creative way to refurbish a big old house several stories high with two rooms per story and a steep staircase. Luckily a boy has taken my suitcase up those steep stairs. I'm surprised and delighted by the spacious room with Moorish arches repeating in the vast bathroom, as well as the red and yellow lanterns and the Berber rugs. To enjoy this room I spent the following morning, a Sunday, lolling about in bed. So that when I finally made it down to the basement salon for breakfast, almost all the other guests had already left.

I was startled by the long, narrow dining room in its semi-darkness. It must have been the house's wine cellar, and it led to a sunken inner patio with a blue fountain at the end of it. Along the side walls of exposed brick were long banquettes, in front of which were lined up small tables, each with a chair of its own. At the far end of the right-hand side was a single fellow breakfaster, seated sullenly in front of the glass door that led to the patio. He seemed to answer my greeting with an almost imperceptible nod of his head.

I had to sit at the far end of the same banquette, against the wall. It was the one table with everything laid out as if waiting for me: the thermos of coffee, the basket of bread and croissants covered by a napkin, a glass filled with orange juice.

I forgot the presence of my morose fellow guest until his wife appeared, much younger than he, beautiful, elegant. She smiled at me as she passed by. She sat down in the chair facing him, and they began to speak in whispers while I

busied myself sweetening my croissants with delicious home-made jams.

Suddenly the man's voice burst out, correcting his young partner: *Le beurre*, he practically shouted. It's *le beurre*, just as it's *le sang*, both take the masculine.

He reprimanded her in French, of course, and I didn't think of *Last Tango in Paris*, or of anything even faintly lewd connected to butter. I did, though, quickly take stock of other foreign languages, and I felt a kind of kinship with the woman. In how many languages is blood feminine, as it should be? Clearly not in French, nor in Italian, since I suddenly recalled Giovaninetti's play *Il sangue verde*. In English, of course, nouns have no gender, and in German the genders seem inverted: sun's feminine and moon masculine, so maybe butter and blood are feminine, but I had no way to check at the moment. Thus, I felt a Hispanic bond with the woman. For this reason, almost without thinking, from the other end of the room, that is, from my end of the long, long banquette, I managed, quite loudly, to blurt out a question to her: What is your native tongue? — and felt practically gashed by their now joint, outraged silence.

“At the far end of the right hand side was a single fellow breakfaster, seated sullenly in front of the glass door that led to the patio.”

In my dismay, I plunged into the newspaper within my reach, and like someone slinking out the dining room and its circumstances, got caught up in the news of the nationwide strike, meticulously distancing myself from the couple now so far away, facing the dank, sunken patio. I nearly managed to forget them. Till a movement in the salon made the copy of *Le Monde* I was holding quiver, and without thinking, I looked up. The man whisked by me, returning after having left the room, or maybe coming back from the kitchen, since he was holding a large knife. He looked like a butcher now; out of the corner of my eye I could see it was a large knife, yes, and sharp, though maybe serrated, like a bread-knife. I went back to my business, to Obama vetoing another law, and the paper was (again) a true refuge. Every so often the man raised his voice. None of my business. I helped myself to another cup of coffee, went on with my peaceful Sunday breakfast—until I heard a kind of gurgle coming out of the woman: she seemed to be sobbing. Or maybe chortling. Mere fiction, I told myself: the only reality's here, in *Le Monde*. I forbade myself to look her way; my world was not theirs, down at the far end of the long row of small individual tables and the long communal banquette. My world was at this end, in the bread basket, in the little bit of butter left, in the jars of jam and the already empty jug—in things like that.

A Moroccan lantern in the dimly lit dining room was winking at me—or maybe not. I was absorbed in the newspaper the couple at the far end of the room had driven me to. What business of mine were their affairs, the genders of their nouns?

Until another gust of wind ruffled the long pages I was still holding up in my hands like a screen; and on looking up once more I could make out the woman vanishing through the archway toward the stairs. A slimy trickle trailed after her on the white floor tiles, a thin red line.

Tomato juice, I told myself.

TRAGEDY ON A BENCH

BY WILLIS BARNSTONE

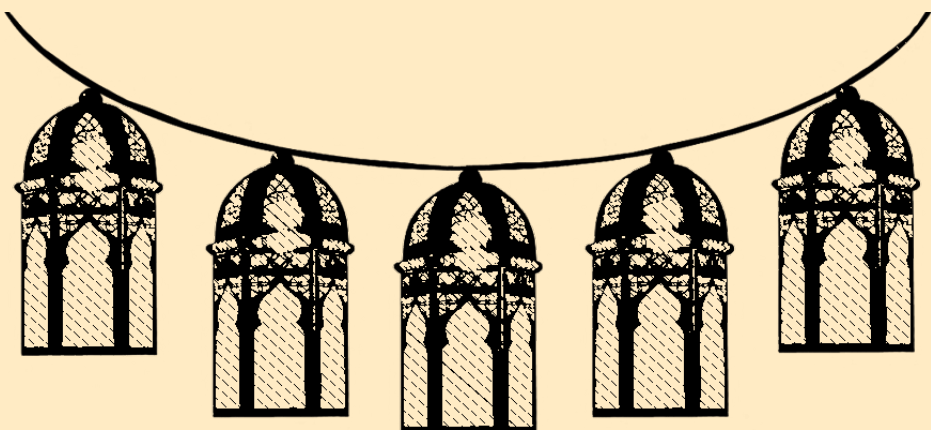
He doesn't look like the usual clochard. He sits on the bench in the small park in front of the Bibliothèque Nationale and reads or lies half naked sleeping on the sumptuous lawn. He's about 50, bearded and in good shape. He exercises in tasteful shorts. When he is feeling good, encouraged by a passerby professional photographer who has him pose on curb and standing by the park wall, he is mad with joy. He dashes against the lamppost, hits it with one running shoe (one is blue, one is red), and bends swiftly to touch the ground. Or he dances with a mythical partner or breaks into song he directs to the sky.

Everything he owns he has in 8 or 9 bags, including a red suitcase. These goods he spreads along the bench on which he sleeps. He often sits in the street in late afternoon or evening and glares directly at us. We're on the 2nd floor and unlike everyone else we keep our French windows open. Unless we shut all our lights, he watches us eat, talk, and notes our states of dress or undress.

Le monsieur is a voyeur. I guess we are too by now. There's no escape. Even when we walk through the park, our usual path to wherever we go, his eyes are also on us. He's never passive. *Que faire?*

The park has a marvelous fountain, La Fontaine Louvois is of all in Paris alarmingly beautiful. The centerpiece is four tall ancient nymphs in stone, representing the four great rivers of France. For years the water system has been broken and it will require five million euros to repair. But this summer by grace of Anne Hidalgo, the new mayor of Paris, the fountain is working. We wake to its music. At noon the office employees flood the lawn, even cramming up on the second floor of a children's playhouse with its slide to eat their lunch in shade.

Two centuries ago there was a royal opera house in this square, built by the Duc de Berry in 1792. There Mozart premiered *Don Giovanni* in France and Brahms came often. The duke was stabbed to death, and King Louis-Philippe tore



down the opera hall and replaced it with a small park in front of the Bibliothèque Nationale. The king ordered Louis Visconti (architect of the Les Invalides, the tomb of Napoleon Bonaparte) to construct a large fountain in homage to the rivers la Seine, la Garonne, la Loire, and la Saône. Below the towering nymphs, each of four sculptured tritons rides a dolphin from whose mouth water jets.

During the war Gestapo big shots lived above us. Their days they spent at nearby Vichy-Gestapo headquarters on Place des Petits Pères. Between 1942 and 1944 they interrogated and battered 64,400 French, German, and Polish Jews, including 6000 children, before sending them off to the internment camp at Drancy from which the death trains to Germany. When these groups were liberated by Allied forces, 1,542 were alive.

The Gestapo officers had a whale of a time. Their upscale whores were quartered in apartments around the corner on rue Chabanais. However, when Résistance soldiers assassinated a German colonel in the act, the Gestapo shut down these love centers. In these same rooms during the Belle Époque, glamorous prostitutes entertained the French elite.

One of the Gestapo's final duties came directly from Hermann Göring concerning the precious volumes in the great National Library. Göring, founder of the Gestapo in 1933, was commander of the Luftwaffe, but when he failed victory in the Battle of Briton, he lost favor with Hitler and spent the remaining war years making a fortune by acquiring art work owned by Jews of the Holocaust. He was, however, the least anti-Semitic of the leaders. His godfather, a wealthy highly honored Jewish doctor, Ritter Doktor Herm ann von Epstein, had supported his impoverished family during the first 15 years of his life, granting them a castle and lands. Now, following Göring's orders, these Gestapo commanders seized the irreplaceable collections of books and illuminated manuscripts from the Bibliothèque Nationale and sent them back to Germany. Next to nothing was recovered.

The streets running into Square Louvois have names celebrating

old composers as does the neighborhood. Up a street lived the famous Baroque composer François Couperain (1668-1733). We are surrounded by Rue de Rameau, rue Louvois. Below our window is rue Lulli, named for an Italian composer called Giovanni Battista Lulli. We know him famously as Jean Baptiste Lully, collaborator with Molière and leading innovative composer of his time.

Across from us and running along the great library is busy rue de Richelieu named after Cardinal de Richelieu (1585-1642), founder of the l'Académie Française. The cardinal was Louis XIII's Prime Minister and also his eminence rouge. Poetry is not forgotten. Behind us on rue Saint-Anne is the 17th century l'Hotel-Baudelaire. Charles Baudelaire lives in this hotel in years when he is fleeing creditors.

At the corner of Rameau and Chabanais was a 2-century old bistro that Hemingway made his usual breakfast habit. But new owners replaced it with offices. However, in September there'll be an upscale sushi bar a few stores up on Rameau. Workers are laboring weekends to finish. They have installed an illuminated-glass cloudy sky ceiling to compete with Théodore Géricault's romantic skies that are still changing overhead.

When the park is almost empty and there is no one to stare at, the good clochard walks to the pool rim of the fountain and studies those naked well-stacked river nymphs. He is serious and pleased by information he gathers about their marble hair, never out of place, and their daring eyes which even while being flooded glare at him relentlessly. He knows these demoiselles are grateful for his attention.

A few days ago the usual morning city gardener has a huge fight with our bench sleeper. He must move all three meters of his messy belongings to the narrow sidewalk outside the park.

The offended dweller in Square Louvois sits outside the gate, next to his goods, leers steadily at us or walks up and down the sidewalk in extreme agitation. He

is forbidden to spend the evening in the park after the gate is locked. But in dark night at one in the morning when no one is around, he moves all his things back in the park, spreads them behind rather than along the bench, and he has repacked his belongings in neater black and white sacks. Now he is sleeping on his wooden slabs into morning. His raw ankles and tennis shoes protrude from his cocoon.

“When he is feeling good, encouraged by a passerby professional photographer who has him pose on curb and standing by the park wall, he is mad with joy.”

Le bon monsieur pays no attention to a series of officials, each in different costume and color. They confront him and he and they scream. But a few days ago our voyeur loses it. He is frightened. Now he must stay outside the park day and night and no after midnight entry. He is in a fury. All his things are bunched on the narrow sidewalk. He is walking back and forth, and shrieking. We wonder what next.

A very long official van arrives. It parks ominously along the street when he sits and walks. He has no view. The iron fence, tall shrubbery and lofty chestnut trees are directly behind him and the van is blocking the view of the road. By midnight the van is gone. The harried guest sleuths his belongings back into the park and sleeps until midmorning on his bench.

By midday he's back on the lawn, asleep half naked as before while mothers wheel their kids and look. I don't think he is a self-acclaimed messiah.

A gang of officials arrives and again they scream. After they leave he spits in their direction. But he is afraid to enter the park. All night he walks back and forth outside the Garden of Eden. Angry

but cowed into exile. Will they take him away? Or will he outwit them once more? Will he on his own disappear? Through the night he is howling like a wild animal.

I try to end the story here. I apologize for my curiosity and cowardice. Who knows what's up next week? Not prison. He will not be a suicide. If officials lay off, he will be reading in the sun, talking to passersby, exercising like an aging bourgeois, and go on staring at us at our open window.

Should I alert a Paris newspaper? A reader might offer him a room. But this mystery figure is a heathen. And it will take an apocalypse to make him forsake his days and nights in paradise. In the morning when everyone is business, hurrying to work, the weather has tempered into light drizzle. All Parisians pull out an umbrella at the first drop of rain. Our friend is gamely walking around the park perimeter, below his own ample colorful umbrella.

Last glance. Paris night dumps a rainstorm on the monumental library, the choice park, and neighborhood offices, bistros, and rare coin shops. There he appears outside Square Louvois where the four nymphs are serenely jetting their evening music. Below them the fat dolphins float their tritons on the water. Will he make it through the winter? He is arguing madly with stars he can't see in the rain. With all his goods protected under a large transparent plastic cover, the gentleman is padding up and down the pavement like a soaked wolfhound.

Locked out, the tramp walks back and forth on the narrow curb, jammed now with more belongings. Like Joseph in his coat of many colors, exiled by his jealous brothers when about to enter the fertile plains of Pharaonic Egypt, the furious gentleman clochard holds up his multicolored umbrella against the storm. Tall windows of the huge Bibliothèque Nationale clamor. Again he is the howling beast.



RECAP

FOR VINCENT BROQUA'S RECUPERER
BY CHARLES BERNSTEIN

What's up?
You there?
Hello?
Say what?
You there?
What's that?
Say what?
I hear you!
Surely.
You bet.
Maybe so.
Not now.
You bet.
Maybe so.
You there?
Not in the slightest.
Fine.
Maybe not.
Not in the slightest.
An abomination.
Rats!
Whatever you say.
You wish!
That's that.
Rats!
Whatever you say.
Right on!
For example!
Like I said.
For example!
An abomination.
You wish!
What a laugh!
Like I said.
Not at all.
Come on!
That's a keeper.
What a laugh!
Come on!
Not at all.
Like I said.
That's a keeper.
Right on!
It's a scream!
Yeah, yeah.
Nope.
No way.
It's a scream!
Absolutely.
No way.

Finally.
Nope.
Come on!
Good God!
Yeah, yeah.
Ain't it the truth?
No way.
You're killing me!
Enough already.
Well said.
You got it.
Perfect.
You're killing me!
Nothing at all.
Blah, blah, blah!
Okey dokey
Nothing at all.
Goodness gracious.
I hear you!
Blah, blah, blah!
Surely.
Without question.
Certainly.
What a business!
Goodness gracious.
What the hell!
Such is life.
That's it.
Okey dokey
Over and out.
You're killing me!
Nada.
That's the silver lining.
In spades.
Zero.
What a business!
Zilch.
That's the silver lining.
Without question.
In spades.
Bats in the belfry.
Impossible.
Nuts.
Beats me.
Bats in the belfry.
Guilty
until proven otherwise
and even then.
Nuts.
Never can tell.
Until proven otherwise.
A doozy.
Impossible.

Far out!
And even then!
What a colossal waste of time!
Far out!
Nope.
A doozy.
I'm outta here.
What a colossal waste of time!
Later.
Priceless!
Outta here.
Not for me to say.
Later.
Outta the park.
Downer.
Not for me to say.
Jeeze!
Priceless!
Outta the park.
Give me a break!
Seriously!
Hits the spot.
Not for me to say.
Give me a break!
As bloated as a reindeer
feasting on chocolate bunnies.
I never believed it for a second.
It's a scam.
That kills me!
As bloated as a reindeer
feasting on chocolate bunnies.
Give me a break!
That really bugs me!
I never believed it for a second.
Beautiful!
Incredible.
A long drop off a short cliff.
Really bugs me!
Not now.
Hits the spot.
That kills me!
Incredible.
Icing on the lily.
Not now.
It's all timing.
A long drop off a short cliff.
Icing on the lily.
Take a closer look.
You can't hide from yourself
or maybe you can!
Just don't say
I never told you so.
Are you kidding?

Take a closer look.
It never fails.
Maybe you can!
It never fails.
Not to be believed.
Just don't say
I never told you so.
Are you kidding?
It never fails.
Checkmate.
What a sorry slight.
Without doubt.
Bingo!
Unbelievable.
What a sorry slight.
Checkmate.
Not on your life.
I picked it up
for a song and a dance.
Over my dead body.
A song and a dance.
Over my dead body.
Not on your life.
Not until it rains
in the Mohave Desert.
I should have known better.
Not on your life.
Not until the last soldier
leaves the field.
You can say that again!
Not until there is no more sand
in the Sahara.
As I lived and breathed!
Down for the count.
You can say that again!
Down for the count.
As I lived and breathed!
Over and out.
Quite a shellacking!
See what I mean?
Over and out.
No chance.
Much to my regret.
What a shellacking!
Summers and smokes.
Much to my regret.
Best in show.
Over before it started.
No telling when.
And how!
Instant gratification.
And how!
No telling when.

Summers and smokes.
 You blew it.
 No second acts
 at the matinee.
 Gee whiz!
 You have to know
 when it's finished.
 No second acts.
 Overpriced
 even for free.
 That's just half of it.
 I'm inoculated.
 There's more to life
 than Mortadella.
 All played out.
 Even for free.
 I'm inoculated.
 But not much more.

That's just half of it.
 More to life
 than Mortadella.
 In the breaks.
 One-way ticket.
 Still hurts.
 But not much more.
 Mesmerizing.
 And then some!
 Still hurts.
 One-way ticket.
 Mesmerizing.
 A tin ear
 and a cardboard voice.
 And then some!
 Count me in.
 Sucker punched.
 Palukaville

all over again.
 Cardboard voice.
 Sucker punched.
 Those chickens
 coming home to roost
 and then it turns out
 they weren't chickens.
 Baloney!
 Count me in.
 The nerve!
 I'm floored.
 Plenty more
 where that came from.
 Baloney!
 I'm floored.
 I feel like I was
 hit in the head with a
 sewing machine.

I never believed it.
 Paralyzing.
 Never say never.
 Paralyzing.
 Boring!
 You think?
 I kid you not.
 Never say never.
 Boring!
 Couldn't agree more.
 Paralyzing.
 I kid you not.
 You got the wrong guy!
 Just so.
 Couldn't agree more.
 You got the wrong guy!
 You think?
 Just so.



ABOUT THE WRITERS

MARK AXELROD

Mark Axelrod is a Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the John Fowles Center for Creative Writing at Chapman University. He is the author of numerous novels, short stories, literary criticism and screenplays, the latest of which, *MALARKEY*, will star Malcolm McDowell. He has received numerous awards from the Leverhulme Foundation, the Camargo Foundation, the Iowa Review and has been awarded multiple awards from the Fulbright Scholar Program and the National Endowment for the Arts.

SUSANNA ONEGA JAÉN

Susanna Onega Jaén is Professor of English Literature at the Department of English and German Studies of Zaragoza University. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on literature and narrative theory, with special focus on experimentalism, narrativity and the relation of literature and history. She has edited and translated into Spanish, John Fowles' *The Collector* and has also guest edited a section titled "John Fowles in Focus" in *Anglistik*.

W.S. MERWIN

W.S. Merwin is an American poet, credited with over fifty books of poetry, translation and prose. One of the most distinguished of poets, Merwin has received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry (in both 1971 and 2009), the National Book Award for Poetry (2005) and the Tanning Prize, as well as the Golden Wreath of the Struga Poetry Evenings. In 2010, the Library of Congress named Merwin the seventeenth United States Poet Laureate.

MARTIN NAKELL

Martin Nakell is a poet and novelist and a Professor of Creative Writing at Chapman University. Winner of the Gertrude Stein Award in Poetry 1996–1997 and an NEA Interarts Grant, he was also a finalist for the America's Award in Fiction, 1997 (for *The Library of Thomas Rivka*), a finalist in the New American Poetry Series as well as a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Grant.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Charles Bernstein is a distinguished American poet, essayist, editor, and literary scholar who holds the Donald T. Regan Chair in the Department of English at the University of Pennsylvania. A prolific writer of poetry and essays, he is one of the most prominent members of the Language poets (or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E) poets. Among the awards he has won are the Roy Harvey Pearce/Archive for New Poetry Prize, the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

GIUSEPPE CONTE

Giuseppe Conte is a distinguished Italian poet, novelist, and translator. His debut as a poet came six years later with the publication of *La Parola Innamorata* in 1978. His follow-up poetry anthology, *La Stagione*, was published in 1988 and was awarded the Montale Prize. Conte has translated many English works into Italian, including that of Shelley, D.H. Lawrence, Walt Whitman, and William Blake, and has worked as both an editor and essayist for several literary publications. In 1997, his first full-length book of poetry, *L'Oceano e il ragazzo*, was translated into English as *The Ocean and the Boy*.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

Jerome Rothenberg is a distinguished American poet, translator and anthologist, noted for his work in the fields of ethnopoetics and performance poetry. Rothenberg has taught at the City College of New York, the State University of New York, Binghamton, and the University of California, San Diego, where he remains an emeritus professor of visual arts and literature. A prolific poet, his numerous awards and honors include grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and was elected to the World Academy of Poetry in 2001.

WILLIS BARNSTONE

Willis Barnstone is a distinguished American poet, memoirist, translator, Hispanist, and comparatist and has published no fewer than 60 books of poetry, religion, memoirs and literary criticism. An emeritus professor from Indiana University, he has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, several Fulbrights, National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts Grants and has received multiple Pulitzer Prize nominations.

STEVE KATZ

Steve Katz is a distinguished American novelist. He is considered an early post-modern or avant-garde writer for works such as *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince* (1968), and *Saw* (1972). His collection of stories, *Creamy & Delicious* (1970), was mentioned in Larry McCaffery's list of the 100 greatest books of the 20th century where it was named "The most extreme and perfectly executed fictional work to emerge from the Pop Art scene of the late 60s." He has written no fewer than 15 novels and has been the recipient of both National Endowment for the Arts Grants and Guggenheim Foundation Grants.

CLAUDIO MAGRIS

Claudio Magris is an extraordinary Italian scholar, translator and novelist. He has written essays on E.T.A. Hoffmann, Henrik Ibsen, Italo Svevo, Robert Musil, Hermann Hesse, and Jorge Luis Borges. His novels and theatre productions, include *Illazioni su una sciabola* (1984), *Danubio* (1986), *Stadelmann* (1988), *Un altro mare* (1991), and *Microcosmi* (1997). His awards include: the Prix Jean Monnet European Literature, the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters of Spain, the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art, the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the FIL Literary Award in Romance Languages.

DACIA MARAINI

Dacia Maraini is a distinguished Italian playwright, novelist and screenwriter. A writer of no fewer than two dozen books, she has won the Formentor Prize; the Premio Fregene; the Premio Campiello and Book of the Year Award as well as the Premio Strega; the Premio Mediterraneo among many others. She was both a finalist for the Man Booker International Prize and a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature (2012).

GIORGIO PRESSBURGER


Giorgio Pressburger is a gifted Hungarian novelist, playwright and essayist who has lived in Italy for decades. His several decade-long works in the theatre was recognized in 1962 by a prize awarded by the Italian Drama Institute, by the Pirandello Prize in 1974, the Flaiano Prize in 1995 and the Riccione Prize for the Theatre in 2001. Published works include the novels *Teeth & Spies* and *The Law of White Spaces*; and the short story collection *Snow & Guilt*.

LUISA VALENZUELA

Luisa Valenzuela is an Argentine novelist and short story writer whose experimental, avant-garde works question hierarchical social structures from a feminist perspective. She is best known for her work written in response to the dictatorship of the 1970s in Argentina. Works such as *Como en la Guerra*, *Cambio de armas* and *Cola de lagartija*. Her awards include both Guggenheims and Fulbrights as well as the Medal "Machado de Assis" of Academia Brasileira de Letras and the Premio Astralba (University of Puerto Rico). In 2011 she was elected Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and she was nominated for a Nobel Prize in 2014.




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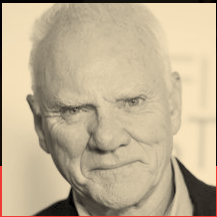
The John Fowles Center for Creative Writing promotes and advances the discipline of creative writing in all its aspects: fiction, poetry, drama, creative non-fiction and film. The Center offers students and non-students alike an opportunity to gain a greater appreciation for the "written word" and those who write it. Each year a distinguished group of national and international writers is invited to Chapman University, making access to those writers available not only to the Chapman community, but to the Orange County and, by extension, the Southern California community as well.

Celebrating its 19th year, The John Fowles Center for Creative Writing has invited such inter/national writers to Chapman as: Salman Rushdie, Luisa Valenzuela, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gioconda Belli, Maxine Hong Kingston, Steve Katz, John Ashbery, Isabel Allende, Claudio Magris, Charles Bernstein, Fanny Howe, David Antin, Giuseppe Conte, Willis Barnstone and Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, just to name a few.

Look for the Fowles Center's new online journal, MANTISSA, which includes writing from internationally known writers.




Argentine Novelist
Pedro Mairal
March 7th




Hollywood Actor
Malcolm McDowell
April 20th
7:00 PM, Walmart Theatre



Argentine Novelist
Andrés Neuman
March 28th



Brazilian Film Director
André Klotzel
April 4th



Argentine Novelist
Angela Pradelli
April 19th

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IN THE SECOND ISSUE OF MANTISSA,
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