

Spring 4-1982

The Carroll Quarterly, April 1982

John Carroll University

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carroll quarterly

april 1982

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THE CARROLL QUARTERLY was conceived to be a birth-place of creativity. It manifests life in process: poetry, short stories, essays, and artwork. We feel at this time that the merging of the Fall 1981 and the Spring 1982 issues has been instrumental in furthering the artistic purpose of THE CARROLL QUARTERLY. The new form fully respects the essence of individual creations while maintaining the integrity of the book as a whole. We are happy to have the opportunity to publish more undergraduate works and to elucidate their value with more professional techniques.

Special thanks to Mr. Irving Feldman for the December poetry reading and for the generous gift of "Resurrection."

Cover photograph by Robert Fletcher

The CARROLL QUARTERLY is a literary magazine produced by an undergraduate staff. Submissions should follow conventional manuscript form, and include a short biographical note. Address all correspondence to: THE CARROLL QUARTERLY, c/o The English Dept., John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio 44118.

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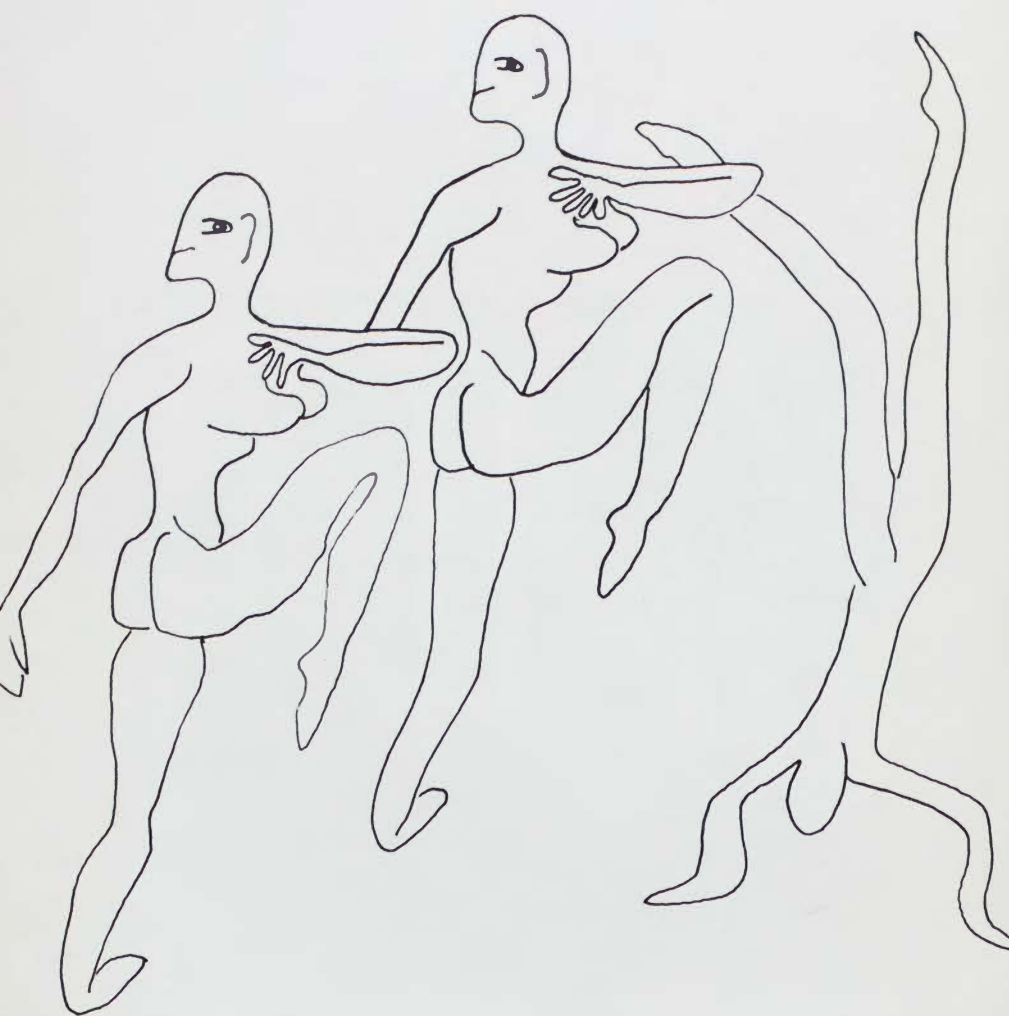
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THE RESURRECTION

After the immense uplifting
and falling away of heavy death,
he appeared to the three and the throng.
Now will you follow me? he asked.
Yes, yes! keen as hounds cried the host
of reporters, whose editors
had worked out the logistics.



CUYAHOGA

Like the backwash of some desecrate dream
you roll upon the mind
with the driftwood of remembrance;
your soiled tun
lolls in the wash of April's sun, Cuyahoga.

Impervious as the black stacks
whose belchings blear your waters,
whose shadows bleed your veins,
O dark river you persist
beneath protean figures of the sky.

Day was not shaped for you;
you are wedded to night,
lonely woman of dark hours.
The rippling quilt of your womb
nestles dreams of Cleveland's dispossessed,
who turn, in finality, to your arms.

From somnolent Erie you flow
into the city's troubled sleep,
embrace electric corpus of a wounded animal.
In the waters of your soul
where constellations bathe
you cleanse the welts of a writhing creature.

You take upon your heart
regurgitation of mills,
the offal and the swill
in silent witness to the foul maw of machine,
scorching tongues of steel.

Alone I come to you,
solemn to your martyrdom,
to whisper the kinghom shall never be yours,
but to attest there are orphans
who move in the night
unclaimed by God,
unpossessed by soil
who pass like shadows across the river's womb.

COLD, GRAY COLUMNS

Cold, gray columns of stone and glass
Soar skyward, towering
High above diminutive forms
Of men in business suits.
Symbols of progress,
These mammoth towers stand
Like modern pyramids boasting
Twentieth century precision.

Lifeless masses displaying
Architectural genius
Block nature's light;
Deep within the bowels of the city
A tree is cut, ground is broken;
Designs are set for another
Concrete testimony.



LOST AMONG THE TREES

Trees — magnificent trees —
most sensational of lovers —
huge head of a ramrod thrusting into the open sun,
balls buried deep in the earth —
One of God's simplest forms of expression . . .

And after I spoke these words
sitting alone on a dark ridge
in a dark forest with all these sensational lovers,
I got dreamy for the sun going down &
lost my head among the trees &
came across a silty stream
and got buried deep up to my knees —

1969

In arranged hallucinations
with no controlling purpose
primal pleas for social reform
expressed an anger distorted by reality.
The pilgrimage to sacrifice materialism
held a dream-like fantasy
to search for allegory
in bloody long wide-eyed weekends;
the issues of mankind all
such simple plights
easily answered by lofty ideals,
but no quest for wisdom
survived the bleak insights
of twisted minds;
of the lost wandering
in deserted stretches of time.
In those landscapes
any answer seemed profound,
but the world is too big and busy
to be bothered by twisted children's dreams,
so the Monday morning of their prime
dawned in the summer of '69.
No one's dreams had foreseen
the crushing reality of returning;
crawling home smashed and shattered
in wearied realization
that the society they had forsaken
would cradle them in the end.



WOLF-BOYS

Hailstone fathers, in the white fenced lair
Of savage scolding, bred in boys an itch
For cold predation like Alaskan bitch-
whelped wolves, whose arid and grey-irised glare
(Reflecting in pupilar black the care-
less fawn) resists those lustral waters which
Christ-light betokens in the slightest twitch
Of eyelids touched by iridescent prayer.

In haunting eyes a sun dance melts the chill
Of iced indifference, and the tear-proof
Demeanor falters as wolf-boys in slow
Emotion weep: storm-water trickling still
Along white gutters on a gable roof
When smoked-glass skies have shattered to rainbow.

FOR JOHN HERR

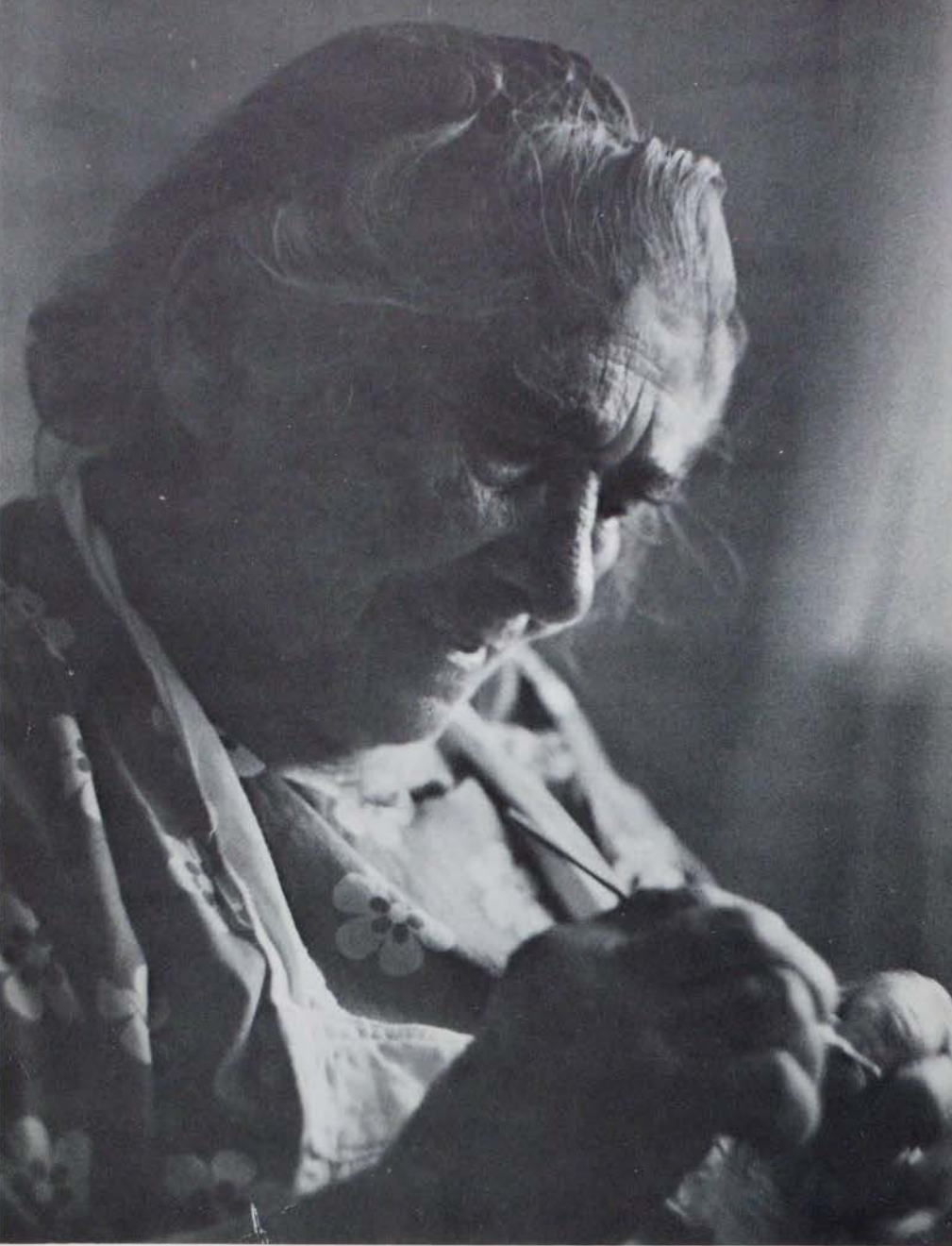
Who put down eastern stone and steel
And returned to Iowa's brown earth,
To drop seed and tend with his hands,
And like Roethke, danced among the sprouts, melons
and squashes,
Whose love with eyes of warm grapes, closed and clung in a
single meeting,
And fired young men to joy of the greening task.
Mystic, who one day climbed an Arizona peak
In piercing morning sun,
And saw God,
And left us.

SUMMER'S FAREWELL

Dusk, and the colors of your sweater against my skin
diffuse into warmth.

You breathe slowly, deeply, drinking the sweet air of sleep
as your mind races you through its dreams

Creating images as fleeting as this final shimmering of
summer-night sun that transfixes my thought as deftly
as a madman's stare.



OLD AGE IN DECEMBER

A solitary old woman
Shuffles across the common
Along an unshovelled walk,
Issuing complaints which go unheard,
About the depth of the snow.
“It gets in my boots and freezes my toes,
Causing my arthritis to flare.”
Onward she trudges, cold and alone
On her way home from the store.

She shivers and sighs
As she reaches the gate,
Stopping as a plow
Makes a pass down the street.
Stepping from the curb, she crosses the road
And starts up the stairs.

Old age in December...
When the wind and the snow come...
And the cold air pierces the heart.

STAIRS
by
Barb Perrino

Stairs—a flight of steps; a staircase

Steps—a rest for the foot in ascending or descending

I am old, and stairs are a battle. I don't like stairs. If they came one at a time I might not mind, but they usually come in groups. They gang up on me.

They stand there—wherever—and stare down at me as I approach. They laugh because they know that I think I can beat them, but they know I won't. The toughest ones are always at the top. They laugh the longest. As I lift my weary legs to confront the first ones, the ones on top just wait.

The first ones aren't too bad. As I move up and up, they get tougher. I can hear them laughing. I'm gaining strength as I force my rhythmic steps. I can feel them at my feet. They're reaching and grabbing. They want to stop me. They want to keep me from reaching the top.

The ones on the top are just waiting for me. They think I won't make it. They think that even if the ones below won't drain me, they will.

They are pulling at my feet, my ankles, my knees. Weighing every movement, they're dragging me to a halt.

They win—again. I must stop and rest, and try again. I must re-group and resume the battle. I am old and I am used to it.

I am a child and stairs are a game. I can jump up two at a time, and on a good day, I can jump down four.

Stairs are sometimes my playmate. I can throw my ball, and if it hits just right—in the crack—it bounces back to me.

I am a child and the stairs in my house are a ride. All I have to do is first climb all the way to the top. Then, when I'm at the very top, I lean over the railing—long ways—so my feet are heading down. I hold the railing real tight, under my stomach. I just hold on until it's time to let go. When I do, I can slide all the way down to the last step, then I can jump off and land at the bottom. I am a child and stairs are fun.

I am a dreamer and stairs are my celebration. Stairs are kindling in the flames of my dreams. I dream about what awaits me at the top of unfamiliar stairs. My life is a set of unfamiliar stairs, and each dream is a step. Stairs don't have to be going up, though—I know. Sometimes dreams carry me down the stairs. Sometimes the stairs carry my dreams down.

I am a dreamer and stairs offer hope. Stairs never look the same at the top, once I've seen them from the bottom. I keep traveling the stairs so I can see how they look at the top, because I am at the bottom. I am a dreamer and dreams are stairs that never end.



FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND'S FATHER

Solemn prayers rebounded off
the concrete walls
as all looked for the box
that was not there.
So sat the silent,
Centuries of majesty
transformed into the vernacular
caught the eye, but not the ear
vainly fighting the greatest fear
with such positive prophecies —

And then stood a son
a child and a man
who spoke of how with one came
seven, to ten, to twelve...
His immortality moves on.
Then he repeated
his father's favorite phrase
"You don't know
and I can't tell you."

Funny how often it applied.
Left with only his children
as our chance to measure
his heaven or hell.

WHALERS

Struggling in the rush of great waters, we
Went down like hubris-strung harpooners, gaunt
Dank guests of Davy Jones. Therefore, go taunt
Pubescent boys wet-dreaming girlward se-
men (white desire illumined cloudlessly),
For you, Leviathan, shall never daunt
Us shipwrecked poets when the firebolts flaunt
The sky-God's male force on a scarlet sea.

Complected pale, then hectic red, man fraps
His fury's mainstay at the dipping prow.
Who knows if costly blood-hued coral wraps
Itself around drowned whalers' bones, or how
Redemption comes? Once tuned to thunderclaps
Our heartstring's pitch is keyed to sea breeze now.

A MUFFLED THUNDER

A muffled thunder
Sings my soul to sleep,
Casting pleasant echoes
Of salty lullabies.

Peacefully I rest
To the rushing hum of the sea,
Safe within the walls
Of my Cape Cod bungalow.

Can this seductive singer
Of these rolling strains
Be that same beast whose mighty jaws
So often crush the retreating coast?

Wretched deceiver, Atlantic!
Lulling men to sleep in June
And turning, robbing them
Of life in mid-December.

LIFE AS THE GREAT ART AND END

by
James Magner

"And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog."

I read these lines in the midst of Alfred Kazin's fine and stimulating book, *A New York Jew*, and I believe Lawrence to be right, in the artistic sense, if the novelist can rise in his language to the level of verbal concentration which is Melville's in *Moby Dick*, Conrad's in "Youth," and Wolfe's in *Look Homeward, Angel*, thus, paradoxically making what is known as a novel, the long fictional narrative, into what is a poem, a unified and concentrated body of words, no matter what the length. Thus, we have in *Moby Dick*, for example, the salient character of fiction, that is, *inclusiveness* (and the resulting *immersion* of the reader into a significant human reality) joined with the salient character of poetry, that is, *concentration* (and the resulting *penetration* of the reader by a significant human reality).

So, I believe Lawrence to be right, if the novelist is also a poet. Then, indeed, he has the "whole hog": *richness distilled or inclusion concentrated*.

But, in another sense, and the most significant sense, I think Lawrence to be wrong. For the act of creating in words or tones or paint is only one aspect of man's creative power. The end of person (*end* as meaning "that for the sake of which something is done") is to be creative as he finds himself as person, as he senses his contextual and existential responsibility: as mother, as father, as brother, as sister, as artist, as teacher. It is to person, which includes himself, that he should give his life and, implicitly and pervasively, to *that Life in virtue of which all life is*. His end is to foster life, which is the other face of love. And I believe he must be willing to sacrifice his hours of creative silence for the love of Person and the love of God (the most ambiguous of all terms) — *That in virtue of which* creation is, *That in virtue of which* beauty, light, life, trees, the mother's care of child, and the entirety of the cosmos is: The Love of love, the Life of life, "The Ground of Being." The end of person is the act of love, the fostering of life in whatever flower, whatever child, whatever spouse, whatever person, through all trial and darkness and light. We are the gardeners of our vast or small gardens and they are our responsibility.

I will not sacrifice person for my art, deny my children, students, friends for art. Art is an aspect of my creativity, and, hopefully, it will—at times—coincide with my interest and my concern for person and *That in virtue of which* person is. Love has its priorities and the face of the child is always at the center. The growth of my fellows, of which I am one, the growth of person in the process of life is the center to which my art is related and to which I give my life, my blood, my words.

The history of aesthetic criticism is filled with the inadequacy of distinction and, thus, in the process of aesthetical and existential discovery, critics have not apprehended forks in the road and have been led into cul-de-sacs. In this brief paper, I cannot elaborate on all the needed distinctions of ends as related to art (e.g., the end of the *artist as artist*; the end of *the artist as person*, what it ought to be and what it is; the *end of the audience*, what it ought to be and what it is; the *end of the artifact as it is*, existing as correlative to both its creator and its audience and, lastly, the *effect of art* as distinguished from its end). I can only briefly attend, in this context, to the distinction that is most related to my subject,

namely, the end of *artist as artist*, as distinguished from the end of the *artist as person*. The last arm of this last distinction is my ultimate concern, here, today. For implied in the last arm of this last distinction is the reality which I am trying to reveal, here, today: that the great art and the great end of "man alive," when "man alive" has what Lawrence calls "the whole hog," is not novel or poem or any specific enterprise, but Life itself as we find it in context of our lives.

The end of the *artist as artist* is to shape what he is and, if what he is is significant and the form be deft and concentrated, his art will be significant: "Such as the life is, such is the form." But the end of the *artist as person*—in the vast and free choice of his life—can be whatever he determines it to be. For me, it is Life—from snails to stars. I give no prescription; I simply offer you, I share with you what seems to have been productive in my life from my own experience, namely my end as artist who is person. And that end is Person and God and all in between—the service of all my powers for these according to whatever my expertise, my interest, my knowledge, whatever my courage and judicious choice: this is my End and for which I live, and for this, hopefully, I will die into life. And not, in my experience, for the sake of individual immortality, but simply for Love itself, simply for Life itself, with which I will be, in some time and in no time, one.

But you might say to me, as the great early Melville might, "Do you give yourself, ultimately, to that ambiguous principle which is responsible for both life and death, dark and light, suffering and joy?" I would answer, simply. Love is caught in its overflow. Life is caught in its process. God is not deliberative as man projects him to be. God suffers Himself in his own process, in His own members. In His simplicity is He unutterably Himself; in His love is He caught and made vulnerable. "Bonum diffusivum Sui est." God is life with the face of Man. God is personed in Man. And we are the arms of the armless God. Matter is the cause of complication and is the outreaches, the wondrous and ragged shores of spirit on which both Man and God-in-process are impaled. And we are our own saviors, through the act of love in the process of creation. We are redeemed by the available power to love and grow and serve, as garbage man, as postman, as two-job, three-job father; as lonely priest, as mour-

ning Rabbi. All being has its mythology for which we should be grateful and in which we should participate according to our needs and lights.

As the body takes unto itself what is productive and excretes the rest, so should we. So with what I share with you today. Take unto yourselves what makes you live and leave the rest. You are free. And if you are not, then grow into freedom. Then you will be truly Jew, truly Christian, truly Atheist, truly Agnostic, truly yourselves. Who shall prescribe the forms that love shall take, that life shall take? If a person consider life as sacred and person as Thou, he is lover and the beloved of God. We will not be ultimately judged (that is, measured, related or unrelated, contributive or irrelevant in the organic process of things) by the content of consciousness, however significant, but by the disposition of our hearts. I am disposed to share with you today, to give you what I can out of my ultimate concern, my ultimate need to love, to be creative in the context in which I find myself.

The poet is of ultimate value to our civilization—because it is he, more than anyone else, that speaks beautifully from the well of his experience. And it is from the ultimate wells of experience that scripture is written, that myth is born, that sight is given, and that person is nurtured.

I wish you Life; I love you; I hope for you; I have great joy in you; my life is to be in community with you and to let my silence and solitude serve you. Creation cannot be thwarted and we will reign, ultimately, in virtue of our Lover.

Address delivered at the Ohio Poetry Day luncheon on the occasion of receiving the 1981 Ohio Poet's Award — October 17, 1981.

Brooding thunderheads,
weary of watching the quick with their dead,
Lash out with fierce outbursts of fire and angry remarks.
Smoke-coated pigeons caper in wet winds,
pinioned on moted rays of bloody light
slashing wounds through clouds.

Profaning the province of vanquished clay,
a narrow procession wheels along
mud-rutted curbs of November:
car windows streaked with hollow eyes.

In straggler cars,
nervous relatives keep their distance and
strict surveillance over personal timepieces.
Amid the blatting trumpets of trucks
and the staunch sentry boxwoods,
veiled passengers disembark into the squall.

Bones of leaves cling to scuffling boots;
Flowering umbrellas
die to the virginal wet kisses of winter.
A silent, gentle avalanche buries each and all.

Oh, but the small dark vehicle,
the brassy berth,
rests under its tiny station while,
behind her ebony mask,
A barren mother weeps for the
fertile secret reposing within.

UNTITLED

From somewhere far in my childhood
I have been preparing;
Gazing past the laced windows
Into a glow of what looked like home,
trying to create a memory I never had
so that someday I could reproduce those images
an instinct for detail, and only a vague sense
of my purpose,
domestic minutia carefully catalogued and filed;
the soft folds of gingham in the kitchen,
a meditation of cooking and ancient lullabies.

Day after day I listened to the old women,
memorized their myths, their cures,
(an onion under your bed will break a fever,
can I make you love me?)
sought their wisdom like a poultice,
gathered grape leaves with the gypsy, and dandelion.
I heard their songs at the cradle
and the groaning board,
and when they told me about men and love,
I knew they spoke the truth.

Having not one teacher, I chose them all in everything.
To be ready for you.

Now, I have grown like a tree,
slow and strong,
I add my own cures to the list,
my voice grows deep with truth.

Here, in the peace that I carry,
Here in my arms,
Here, in my calloused hands, and
here in my woman's soul, and in the quiet endurance
of my love,
let me make this home.





AUTUMN EPIPHANIES

1

The swift passing
of seasons resembles
an early winter
snowflake as it
lands on a stream
and melts.

2

Five sparrows
scratch at sodden crumbs
and chew dried crusts
until a golden retriever
bounds from his screened porch.
Brazen, boisterous crows
cling to shrubs and
speckle elms,
yelling in the crisp morning.

3

No grass grows
on the pressed trail
around the pond
in the park
by the cemetery.

4

The dark surface
of the pond
is always
broken by circles
from gulping fish,
air bubbles, fallen leaves,
stones, raindrops,
birds' alighting talons.

5

One broken branch,
dead,
dropped into the river,
following the current
like an obedient dog.

6

Just between the water's falls,
the colors in the river are
light
green, yellow, orange,
red, and brown
leaves
a stain.
One headless trunk
juts out above its
naked body,
lying stiff on the river bed.

7

An old climber's
empty hands
clench: fists
cold from a rinse
in whitewater.
Then, they unclench,
open to the gorge,
dripping,
empty.

8

Quiet falconer stands
in the meadow
like a fisherman,
soaked, up to his thighs
in green.

9

Amid a stand
of pines,
an aged gage tree
lurches in charging
autumn currents.
Its fruits feed
only the earth.

10

A silver dress of ice
slips over
the plum tree
while beside its trunk,
a welsh terrier
freezes in his stance,
mud dripping from
his front paw.

11

Round moon perched
amidst clusters of leaves
in a giant
maple.
The child,
thinking it a bird
or a squirrel,
quietly listened
to a leaf
fall.

12

In the fall
of an egg
lies the death
of a fine,
young
life.

THEIR HOME
by
Mary Rose Coburn

The shaft of morning light stabbed through the window, illuminating treasures that had been amassed over several generations. The parlor was cluttered with war mementos, yellowed portraits and the memorabilia to which all families cling: the deformed ashtray crafted by a child's hands and the ceramic figurine which more than once had been accidentally decapitated and then glued with a surgeon's care. Furniture was covered with blankets to disguise the stains of daily living. In the area over the mantle, which most houses reserve for a special painting or a mirror to reflect ever-shifting faces, hung a large marble crucifix. No matter where one stood or sat, one could not escape the gaze of the agonized Christ which watched over the room. Throughout the house was a musty, foul smell, an aroma newcomers would find offensive but to the inhabitants was the scent of life itself. It was their home, a place to live and a place to die.

Myrtle began the day clad in her usual attire. The dress, much like herself, a remnant of some forgotten time, hung loosely on her thin frame. The gray and soiled sweater had belonged to her long dead father. A small sparrow determined to rule her small world. This day she was up early, much earlier than her older sister Isabelle or her younger brother George. So much

to do! So many letters to write! For Myrtle's mission was to write to various convents, requesting the nuns to pray for special intentions. Each order of nuns had an assigned petition for which they were to pray. One order was to ask for divine intervention so that the gutters, damaged through the long winter, be successfully repaired with minimal effort and cost. Another was to request the removal of the enormous oak whose roots placed the plumbing in constant peril. The third, a cloistered sect and therefore the most important, was to pray for the health and longevity of the three remaining Sullivans.

The sun was high in the heavens when Isabelle joined the diligent Myrtle.

"Good morning, Sister. You know you shouldn't be up so early. Dr. Kelly wouldn't approve."

Isabelle's voice was not in the least indicative of her eighty four years. Instead, its vibrancy and high pitch made her sound like an adolescent girl.

Myrtle responded with her usual tone of authority.

"He doesn't know anything. He just wants to get me into the hospital to run a lot of expensive tests which are only going to tell him one thing. I'm old."

Most elderly women are either too fat or too thin. Both women were painful examples of the latter condition. If either woman had been a beauty at an earlier age it was no longer detectable. Their facial bones protruded so prominently it would have been impossible to characterize them as elegant.

Myrtle immediately launched into the same litany of questions that were always her first words to Isabelle.

"Did you put holy water in the milk chute?"

Isabelle smiled, her buck teeth jutting sharply out between her thin lips.

"Of course I did. It keeps the burglars away."

"Did you drink your wine to help with your digestion? Did you say your rosary?"

"Yes, Myrtle, I've done it all".

They were alike in many ways except for the insatiable desire of the one to control the other. Both had tight ringlets of hair chemically created and their cheeks were always aglow from an overindulgence in rouge. They were both maidens, confirmed in spinsterhood from an early age. Their brother, too, had never married, for he had felt no urgency or need. He was content to have his sisters care and cook for him without having to bother to enter into a lifelong nuptial agreement.

Myrtle became aware of the sleeping George.

"Go call Georgie. He's slept entirely too late."

Obediently, Isabelle trudged up the worn stairs to summon her brother.

George was the opposite of Myrtle in temperament and the opposite of Isabelle in physical attributes. Perhaps it was this complement of personalities that made for such a successful living arrangement. The brother had a quietness and gentleness about him that had endeared him to many people. He ~~was~~ still somewhat handsome though round and stout. Their diet, reminiscent of their Irish peasant ancestry, consisted mainly of meat and potatoes. The starch had never manifested itself in the women but had transformed George into a corpulent old man. He had served in World War II, demonstrating his valor on the beaches of Normandy. Not a day went by that he didn't resurrect stories of his heroism. His cosmopolitan exploits had led him to shun his sisters' religion. His only concession to them was a nightly sharing of the sacramental port.

Isabelle found George awake but weak and not the least bit refreshed from his sleep.

He whispered, "My time has come."

Isabelle screamed.

"Myrtle, Myrtle. Come quickly. Georgie's dying."

When Myrtle arrived, panting and breathless, George addressed them.

"You have arranged everything in my life. Now I want you to arrange my death. Call Father O'Leary. I'd like to go in the state of grace."

Though he had been raised in a pious Catholic family, it had been many years since he had entered a church. But he was determined to depart this earthly life with the blessings of God and priest. George had frequently gambled in his lifetime. Now he felt he should hedge his bets as much as possible. It would be unwise to die without purging years of broken promises and false dreams.

Myrtle called the parish rectory, but Father O'Leary, who had catered to their eccentric whims for years, was gone for the day.

"This is Myrtle Sullivan. If we can't have Father O'Leary, please send someone else to our home at once to administer the Last Rites."

Father Mike, recently ordained, brash and full of seminary idealism, arrived at their home, which was virtually in the shadow of the church, within ten minutes. Upon entering the parlor, he cringed at the sight of the two foot high Christ dominating the room. He bounded up the stairs extracting stole and oils on the way. His first impression of George was of a sick, but not a dying man. Father Mike was certain the death process could be impeded by a stay in the hospital. However, he did administer the Sacrament, absolving the old man for a lifetime of minor offenses against God and man. Father Mike added a few extra prayers in Latin to please the two sisters. When he concluded he insisted he call an ambulance.

Father Michael Moriarty did not realize that the morning is more frightening to the elderly than those last few minutes before they drift off to sleep at night. The morning brings with it a whole new day of challenges, some of which were once easy daily tasks. The routine of rising develops into almost insurmountable hurdles. It is a time for re-orientation, reminding yourself of who you are, where you are, and how old you are. Without this daily trip from confusion into reality, senility soon invades the being. Once the effort seems too great to extricate the body from the bed, the motivation to live is replaced by an intensive desire to die. Father Mike did not understand. In those early hours, George had crossed the barrier and had lost his instinct for life.

The young man picked up the phone to call the emergency squad. Myrtle looked at him coldly.

"No, I don't want that. It's not a part of His plan and it's not a part of mine."

Father Mike countered her objection.

"It would be suicide on George's part to die in this manner."

Myrtle grabbed his arm and told him with no inflection in her voice, "Let George die with dignity in the comfort of his home, instead of a hospital where nobody cares about him."

The priest panicked and called Mercy Hospital. The women were vigilant as they said their rosaries, echoes of "Hail Mary's" wafting through the house. Mike looked down at George. There was no denying the contentment on his face.

The ambulance came, equipped with oxygen and all the necessities to prolong life. In a flurry of excitement, George was carried into the red van with Father Mike at his side. The elderly sisters watched as their brother was taken away from them.

George was in the hospital for nearly a month. The cost of the stay had exceeded their means, but Dr. Kelly insisted George be kept incarcerated within the white and sanitary walls. A second minor stroke complicated and lengthened George's stay. When he was finally returned home, his sisters found him to be an almost impossible patient.

This was not the George they had known and loved. Where once he would do whatever they commanded, now he was obstinate, cantankerous and quarrelsome. He took to strange night-time habits, wanting to walk at all hours. The conscientious Myrtle felt compelled to accompany him, fearing if she did not, he might fall and break his hip.

Isabelle reprimanded her brother.

"George, you have to stop walking around at night. Myrtle can't keep staying up all night just to make sure you don't hurt yourself."

George had become so disoriented the words meant nothing to him.

"Georgie, you have to start eating. You're becoming so thin, so worn."

He began yelling at his sister. "Get out of here! Get out! Leave me alone, you old streetwalker." Then he cried like a baby.

Myrtle worried even more about George than Isabelle did. After months of care, he was becoming impossible to handle. His incontinence left her exhausted. She was especially pained during his lucid periods when he realized he was no longer the same George Sullivan. His pride and identity had been stripped. She called the rectory for assistance.

Father O'Leary answered.

"Hello, Myrtle. How are you this fine day?"

"I'm not well at all."

The priest dismissed it as more of the complaining that she had done her entire life. Yet she had lost weight and no longer attempted to disguise herself under the twin circles of rouge.

"But the problem's not with me, it's with George. Could you come over? Maybe you can suggest something we can do."

I'm sorry, Myrtle. Father Mike's been transferred to the Newman Club and I'm just too busy. Good-bye and don't despair. I'll pray for you." He hung up the phone.

They were now completely alone with only their God to comfort them.

In the dead of that winter night, Isabelle prepared the table in the parlor. She dressed it with a fresh white linen cloth and lit three blessed candles. The shadows of the crucifix danced on the wall as the flame flickered. George was brought downstairs, pale and withered, only a fragment of the human being he once was.

The three broke bread together. Then Myrtle and Isabelle partook of the cup. Finally, Myrtle mixed a lethal portion of barbiturate into the port and passed the cup to George. From the crucifix, the marble Christ looked down upon the celebration.

AWOL

Fingering sand grains in my beard
I lie here in the fish-eye lens of a lagoon,
Shading my eyes with this silly captain's cap,
Bogart between takes,
Waiting for the past to arrive.
It can take any form it likes —
I am sticky with time,

Shuffling hours in anchovy parlors
Where girls with luscious names,
Their breasts hammocked in a skirt,
Play pool or lounge on stools,
Pouting over cues.
A juke box pulses Marina Blues,
Dinner is scampi in a shell.

No change leavens here,
No quickening save the stink of gas and bait.
Fate is a dizziness prescribed by the sun.

Slackened by the crummy cold
And whore's bedsheet dawns
I sought places
Where I could brush the sky like an outrigger
And the sea would put its fingers in my hair.
Now I sift,
Grown pompano-spooky in the uniform air,
Company for sand fleas.
I'd trade all this for . . .

Out in the Stream, beyond the tapering sand,
A buoy bounces like a child's punching dummy.





NEW YORK

From the air
your cloud-piercing skyscrapers,
star-tipped spires,
constellated eminence
throb with verve of the universe,
enact mimesis of light.

Your skyline shimmers against the night,
the jewelled arms of Salome, castanets aflash,
the swirl and clash of flaming veils
beckoning to her sinuous dance,
wreathing the senses in giddy trance.

And Broadway bleats
in corneted syncopation;
tantaras of the avenues
sweep midtown in chromatic spasm;
paradiddles of pavement shufflers
patter the high-hat heart;
rippling ivories quiver and dart
across the East River's quicksilver crests;
golden bridges leap to starry arrest.

Neon scarves flare along kaleidoscopic Square;
dazzling eyes hold the torch dance beat
that drives men mad with light and heat
to caress electric limbs, iridescent skin,
swing on arpeggio peaks of the din.

When morning finds us on the ballroom floor,
strike up a tune, we dance once more.

THE HEARTH

Heraclitus saw fire at the heart of life,
and the gods themselves were angered
to see Prometheus waste such gifts on men,
It is the only sanity to save us
from a darkness passionate to destroy;
within the wavering circle of its light,
no beasts, no howling visions penetrate.
So late at night, haunted by ancient ghosts
whose celebrations danced around a flame,
I wander the house in search of the hearth.
What will warm us or save us from dark certainty
if we have only glowing wires and frosted globes?
Deep into the basement, where breathing machinery rests,
I grope for honest light, till a glow attracts me.
Kneeling by the furnace, I peer through narrow slits
and see at last a delicate blue flame,
whose presence reassures my primitive soul.
Then giving simple thanks, I ascend the stairs,
to sleep once more, without fear,
knowing the lords of darkness
do not yet reign in my house.

ALTERNATIVE: A CONVERSATION

by

Jim Bourke

He's sending them to Vanderbilt, he says, that silver silence in the midst of music city.

"It will sound better, don't you think," he says, "Than the Mount at Emmitsburg shaded by hills and trees, and founding French priests which Tennesseans never see; or John Carroll laboring in obscurity."

We disagree.

"My older, only brother what could be better; the Archbishop and Saint Seton hand-in-hand. You could do worse, you know."

He mumbles. I continue.

"Sometimes, I think we have Vanderbilt on the brain. (I must confess, here, a fantasy or a wish. My four daughters will go to St. Mary's Notre Dame; to become lovers of learning, themselves, their God, and other men in confrontation.)

"I've been on the campus, all four in fact. One longer than I had anticipated. But at Vanderbilt I met a member of the staff who cooed and billed at me for an hour or more. He was pleasant, earnest, good at what he did, and wore suspenders. That, for me, did him in and I thought you ought to know. I am reluctant to trust the education of my children to a man who wears suspenders. When was the last time you saw a Jesuit with suspenders on? Come to think of it, when was the last time you saw a Jesuit at all; like Hopkins, I bet you forgot about Hopkins, didn't you? You could do worse, you know."

He is shuffling his feet over the phone.

"Then, there's the question of parking," I say.

"What?"

"Parking," I repeat.

Now, he is angry, got to get off, things, to do.

"There isn't any at Vanderbilt," I say, slicing in. "I think it is a telling point all other things being approximately equal. Where will your children park the Mercedes out of harm's way? If no parking now, what about ten years from today?" He laughs. I laugh. I hear his children laughing on the wire, in his rooms, around his home and wife. I am gaining.

"What about Rita," I say.

"Rita is fine," he says domestically and wary.

"That is not what I meant," I say.

"This wife of yours, this breadmaker,
tender gardener of vegetables and children,
bookkeeper, lover of poems, musicmaker, lover
of you and other fine things; gatherer of
tears, cat person, this small foreign car
owner, fiscal wizard, full-bloomed woman.
Where did she go to school?"

(We both know where she went to school,
across the road from the mount at Emmitsburg
where Seton first set foot to root; a different
mount, yet the twin.)

He is thoughtful now.

"And both of you," I say, "are working at
the Archbishop and Saint Seton hand-in-hand, are
you not? You've told me so and I believe you.
Let the children look at you, and choose. You
could do worse, you know."

We click. We smile. We draw.

SNOWBIRD

The snowbird's churning wings
clamor against the rush of winter,
boreal assault on the forlorn land;
Its specter rides the moon's blank eye,
leaden shadows of the sky,
dips in the ghostly estrangement of hills,
and plummets an Inferno of snow

to huddle against the frozen earth.
Impaled on limbs of naked ash,
its lama sabacthani bleeds in silent drifts
of now still snow,
pricks the wheeling oblivion of the skies.
Wounded spirit of the world,
consumed in wintry brooding of the land,
solitaire in its kingdom of frost,
its shuddering heart revives;

ragged pinions rise on twilight air,
plunge into the marrow of the kindling storm,
hurtling against the frenzied eye of nothingness
in its strange pursuit that is fleeing,
eternal stratagem against its shadow of ice,
splinters of the winter nightmare piercing the tiny brain
of the soul outreaching its pain.

SOMEDAY YOUR SIGN WILL BE ENOUGH

Moonlight, warm winds

Stop time and flood me with a sea of fantasy.

Waves roll over and over

The same dance told:

Ancient graceful movement

Ritual of life

Signs with arms and legs

teeth and fingers

Mystery unlocked when language leaves words.

Perhaps illusive ecstasy,

You are almost the essence,

if it were not for the rest of life

which cannot step so gracefully in ordinary time.

Someday your sign will be enough,

But then your now-full dance will pale.

I will be beyond this beautiful limited body

and the fires of love

will have burned clean the sores of the world.

Time will bow and bend full circle.

The universe will full-sigh, glorify

wholeness language yet names;

And with perfect melody

lay down with God.

FOR CINDY

Angst, sunrise, and the lover's juggernaut:
Hoof-trampled grapes on the cow pasture, in-
nocent lowing and the odor of sin,
Where rebel ripeness, nauseous on self-taught
Freedom, yearns for the vine as afterthought
Recovers plain the fact (elusive in
Blue neon when the midnight cowboy's skin
Gleamed like a god's) of flesh found, love uncaught.





A BALLAD

Had I never seen you, love,
How long would I have wandered,
And kept my heart enclosed within,
And never known how to begin to love you?

Had I never kissed you, love,
Or heard your music playing.
Had I never watched your sleeping face,
I would not be staying here beside you.

Had I never known that you
Were all that I have wanted,
Had I never seen you, love,
I would not now be haunted by your smile.



LAKES OF KILLARNEY

An old Irish priest once said:
her eyes are the Lakes of Killarney.

Did he sense they were fed by
underground crystalline springs?

No matter:
secret streams come to surface in her face,
a busy prism catching all colors before
letting them go in the light for me,
a fisherman, fed by her lakes.



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