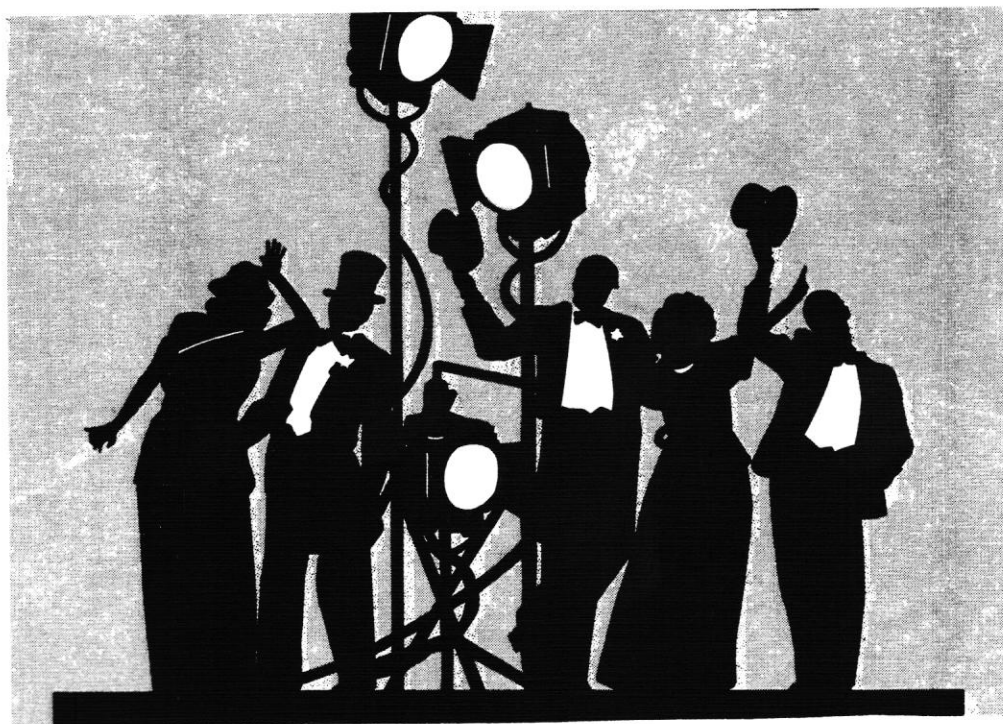


KOL





To the reader,

The pages of Kol provide a forum for the diverse perspectives of Yeshiva University students. One of the primary objectives of art is to sensitize man to the possibility of multiple perspectives. Ludwig Richter once told of a time when he and three fellow painters determined to paint the same landscape. Their intention was to produce paintings which were as realistic as possible. They found, to their surprise however, that each work differed one from the others. They concluded, therefore, that in the realm of art uniformity of vision cannot exist. At Yeshiva our students share a common roof, but each is afforded his own window.

The poets, essayists and prose writers to be found in the pages of Kol deserve a special citation of thanks. By publishing their work they allow the result of their intellectual efforts to suffer the glare of public scrutiny. The editors of Kol appreciate their courage.

It is to Professor Will Lee that Kol owes its greatest debt. His patience, thoroughness and expertise were ever available. Many of our writers were his students, and their honed skills are a testimony to his instruction.

The Kol Board

Yeshiva University Literary Journal

KOL

1995-1996

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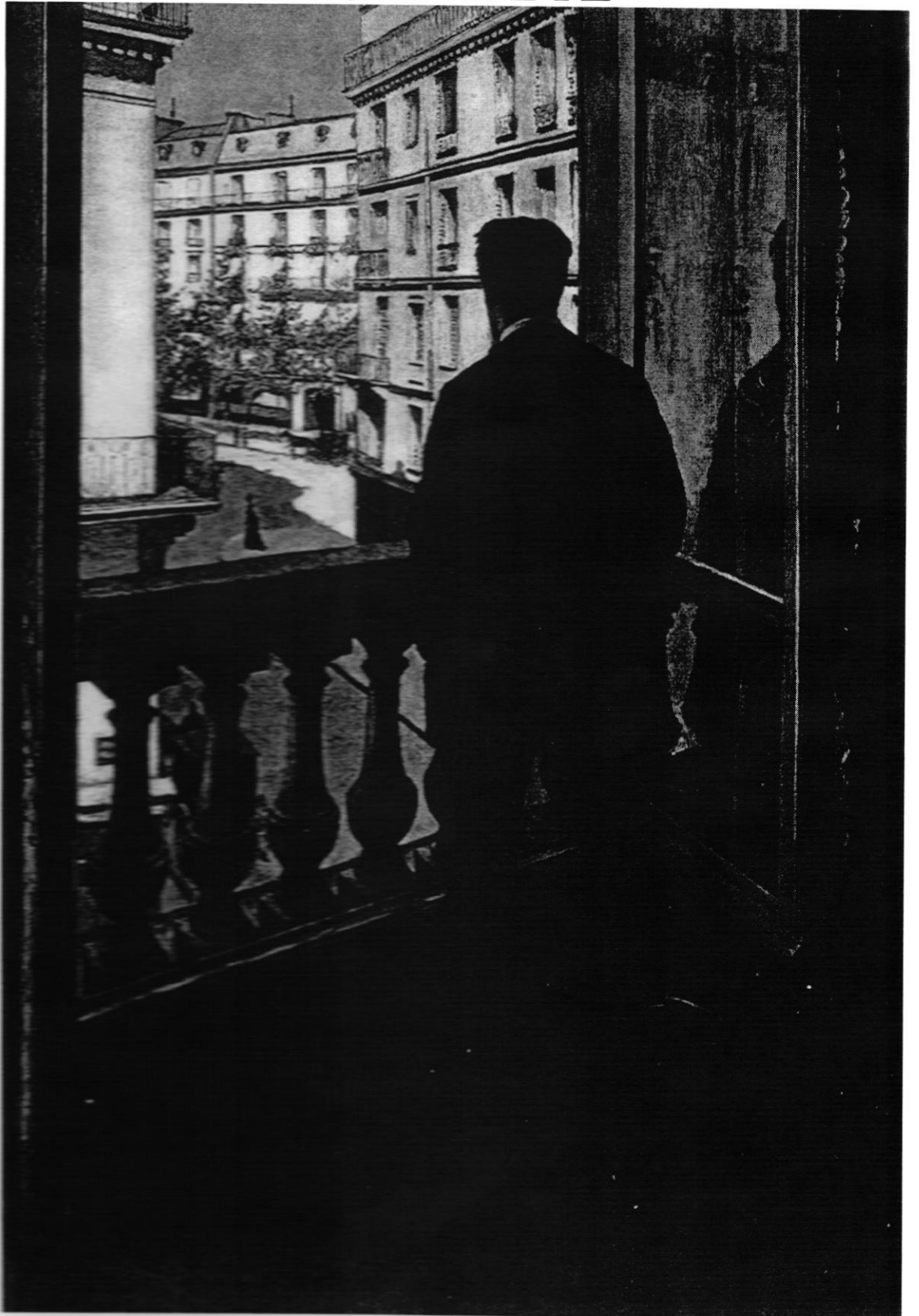
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POETRY



People who read me seem to be divided into four groups:
twenty-five percent like me for the right reasons;
twenty-five percent like me for the wrong reasons;
twenty-five percent hate me for the wrong reasons;
twenty-five percent hate me for the right reasons.
It's the last twenty-five percent that worries me.

ROBERT FROST



God's Lost Child

Shout Out all the Nightlights!

Exterminate all the phids!

Little Milton has run away

to the Halls of Academe

where he wanders amongst the Goths

and converses with Aqualung

beneath the cold white shade

of the tree

of knowledge.

The grey eyed Goths

creeps slowly, silently down the headstoned staircase,

Focused on nothing

Dreaming of voids

They huddle together and whisper over broken glass.

Little M. is with them,

wearing a new white mask and the tattered remains

of his ancient robes.

A green thread

spills over. (In God's garden we grew together
green trees in abundance,

I Jerusalem Oak,

you Jerusalem Thorn.

Intertwined with earth and sky

both you and I flourished.

Until blew in the westwind,

carrying a swarm of hungry Phids

who devoured yours leaf and limb,
but only nibbled mine)

In the vacancy of absence

Little Milton struggles for Existence

Scurrying through blackened bybaths

searching for something,

Some passageway or tunnel, some porthole or rabbithole
to exit or to enter.

Light! He needs Light! He needs
the street corner lamp.

He needs foreign melody

Aqualung hums

Hymn 43 while playing checkers in the park.

Little M. sits by his side

watching ivory kites streak across a crimson sky.

Aqualung shovels red lentils

down his throat

and jumps across another black checker.

His naked hairy arms

Plunge and rise in obscene gesture.

(All along I somehow knew,

Always the skeptic,

You always needed something new.

Sneaking glimpses at the Maidenhair ferns

Growing in someone else's garden down below,

Fascinated by the fiddleheaded figures

swaying mysteriously

in the damp night air)

Nine and a half out of ten

members of the Alchemy Restoration Society

Shuffle towards the Knowledge Tree.

Their hollow heads knock together like coconuts
as they wind their sundials and sip ethanol from alabaster tubes.

L.M. watches them

as they scribble on the blackboard

All that is New

Beaneath the sun.

At five after five

a saxophone sounds one never-ending note

Thrusting the fitfull vision

into a frozen black and white printout.

Newspaper people crumble

themselves into selfless spheres

and orbit around each other

White to grey grey to red red to black.

Little Milton watches ivory kites fade into a black sky.

He searches fro the light.

But night is night

In the Halls of Academe,

And night can sometimes last forever.

A scared little boy feels his way through
a maze of street corner lamps.

Shout out, Milton!

Shout out all the Nightlights!

Get lost, Little Milton, get lost,

Follow your spirit and roam,

so that you can one day find home.

Stephen Kerstein

Towards the Beach

"Is that you Joseph?" Benny shouted,
Squinting at his uncle through the sunlight.
"It's been fifteen years, am I correct?"

"Nah, much more, probably twenty by now—
Still you leave your flowers out in the sun.
How many times do I have to tell you before you learn? They're going to decay
Faster than we have."

Sitting under the shop's dark canvas awning,
Both relatives arranged bouquets.
"Handsome as ever, but still a bachelor,
Eh, Benny? Could've married several times.
But you're too stubborn. How many pretty
Girls did I fix you up with? I tell you
A dozen - and don't give me that crazed look-
What about that sweet teacher or that nurse?
Weren't they handsome enough? Wealthy too!
One you refused could've supported a king."

"But Joseph, I wasn't looking for that."
"Then what, Benny, then what?" "I wish I knew
Exactly how to put it into words-
I guess that's why it's just my thought, or dream.
But it has nothing to do with money.
That I know."

"Maybe money and looks don't count for all,

But if you look for a thing that doesn't exist
You'll be left with nothing.
I'm sure you still wander along the beach
Each night, searching for something you won't find.
You won't find fulfillment in an ebbing tide.
Now, money is concrete. A woman is concrete.
Dreams run in and out, elusive as water.
you can't grab a dream, can you?
No. When you wake up it's gone for good.
But money? A woman? Those you can possess.
You can grab them, and if you're shrewd enough,
You'll hold them forever."

"Joseph! Do me a favor—enough of this talk.
I've heard enough of your lamentations.
Why don't you realize—I'm forty-five now,
Hardly younger than you, old man." Benny paused,
Wiped his brow, and whispered sarcastically,
"Though I truly apologize for disappointing you."

"You've had enough of me? What's wrong with you?
I'm looking out for your best interests.
You don't appreciate me, and you don't
Appreciate my efforts." Joseph licked his lips
Nervously, trying to calm himself down.
"Listen, I didn't mean to get you so angry,"
Joseph continued defensively. "It's just -
I also had trouble finding a wife,
But you've got to take the initiative.
That's why I left home; otherwise I'd have stayed.

Just keep in mind that I'm looking out for
Your best interests."

"Thank you, but I'd rather change the subject."

"Fine by me. Consider the subject changed."

Benny sold carnations to a woman,
Then turned stiffly upon hearing his uncle's voice.
"How's your sister?" He pretended not to hear.
"Ben! How's your sister!" "Fine," Benny mustered.
"Fine! That's all? Great conversationalist!
Don't tell me you've found something wrong with her.
You'd probably find something wrong with G-d."

"I had a fight with her crazy husband.
She hates me for that now. What can I do?"

"I'll fix things between the two of you."

"No. Forget it; it won't work," said Benny.

"Well it's your fault - you don't value your friends.
You don't talk to your sister; you're not married.
What kind of life is that?
Wait . . . listen, I'm sorry."
"I'm not married; I don't talk with my sister;
And now I don't speak with my uncle,"
Benny muttered softly to himself.
He saw a fiery sun spread out before him

As he walked towards the beach.

Eli Shoshani



The General

(Best Poem: English Department Award)

Thick backed and thicker skinned he stands
Before us, his diminutive regiment.
Bellicosity radiates from his flashing eyes;
Truculence marks his weathered skin.
Scarcely taller than five feet, slightly stooped
He towers.

A brief motion of his leathery hand:
An order to follow.
Hurriedly he stamps down the street
Not bothering to glance behind.

We, his army, cross the road.
I stagger, fall, cry out for his help.
None forthcoming;
He marches on, drained of all empathy.

I pick myself up and walk behind,
Imitating his limping step.
He has reached the car, a green Ford wagon;

We hurry to catch up.
My brothers and I slip into the back seat - quietly.
The General tolerates no disruption.

Our mother twists in her front seat to face us,
Her meekness conveying our father's force.
As we drive, I shuffle in my seat,
Risking the slap of my father's wrath.
"Buckle your seatbelts! Sit down! It's dangerous!"
A savage cry of affection.

Eli Shoshani

Tremendous. Just what I needed

(On the assassination of a nation)

World be on your guard!

Safety prevails nowhere, not any longer.

I dream, yes -- wild, crazy, ridiculous dreams. . .

But this is. . . unthinkable? I didn't think of it, I never thought about it, I never

Contemplated, speculated, investigated, considered, supposed,

So much as imagined for a shaky moment.

But one wolf, not like other wolves, did. The wolf who in fever of the battle, Shreds his brother's naked throat with caustic teeth. . . He thought hard about it.

I don't believe in a Messiah.

Take that! I give you no choice but accepting it, I force it into your

mouths (try to speak now!) Eat it with the spoon that kept

you alive for. . . how long was it now, again?

“such a long time?”

And I am tired of arguing, I will not altercate. I will not find “good reasons” or “sound solutions” or earn a reputation as an excellent debater.

Idiot # 1: “Let's all sit together and pretend we understand what's going on.”

Idiot # 2: “Let's all dispute each other's opinions until we feel better. You're an especially superb disputant. Good Boy.”

That's enough! Leave me. I will revert to introspection, meditation,

Not to understanding, but to feeling and experiencing. Can't you understand that your

mother is dead?! She lay all alone in bed -- you left her behind, careless slobs. And on her

deathbed she could not feed you any more. She rots away with cancer, leprosy; her

features melting into unidentifiable molds of boils- . . . Still. . .

you never ceased to put the fallen spoon back in her hand, simulating her persistence, pretending that she still nourishes you. . . I'm amazed.

Here it comes! It's a fabulous thought from somewhere out there. . . and it reads
"Bullets end all problems. Therefore do like him, shoot to the head and your troubles pass
away." It's called rhetoric.

"Well, after I shot him, I felt. . . much. . . much better."

Oh, tremendous. Just what I needed. I greatly admire your work. In fact, please do it
again. One more time in slow motion.

Then, could you sign here, "From Mr. Narrow-Minded with love."

And now he lies dead (the newspaper reported pools of blood), and I feel confused and
embarrassed, ashamed of belonging to this violent people, and I cannot face it: wolves
killing each other, and what a great philosopher that man must be to end the conversation
with such pointed arguments. . . I don't know what to think or what to say or how to end.

Balstar Beckeld

SeNester

Leave your castles outside the subway
don't bring them in these filthy cars
ocean air won't pay your fare
and sand looks better by the stars

Bury your books below broken windows
buy new ones to take their place
kill us now, your faithful notebooks,
you'll need new ones for the winter days

Cherish fully the ingestion
of entombed facts and scribbled notes
treasures like your memorized answers
will clearly help you choose your roads

Just keep quiet till your destination
don't prejudice your losing case
and if the ads cause revelations
don't let them flicker in your face

Crash my carcass on the outside
wait till I can smell the sky
smash the lightbulbs on the benches
free their gases, let them fly

Leave my seat to the waiting homeless
give my trash to the poisoned fish
send this soup back to the kitchen
let it be my final wish

If I could live as long as plastic
be as immortal as rubber tires
to melt my mind into elastic
and flow along the telephone wires

Do not bury me as designated
protect me, please, from perfect rows
save my tombstone from rail rumblings
keep my soul from blackboard snows

Now you really must excuse me
I am in an accelerated course
I have a registration for eternity
my schedule has been approved by a higher force

Anonymous

Encounters

It rained last night and rained again
More fit for submarines than men
But still I walk into the wood
Some how I know it's for my good
The sky is dark, a threat'ning hue
When lo I look to see a light
That shines through trees it grows so bright
My tongue goes dry my face grows pale
The breeze becomes a blustering gale
I try to block this nightmare scene
I try to yell, I try to scream
I try to block this nightmare scene
Though I feel no actual pain
The terror courses through my veins
Not one thing works though I still try
I fear that now's my time to die
There is no future and no past
This endless moment seems to last
The notion now begins to dawn
That to this light I'm being drawn
No longer walking I look down
I'm floating just above the ground
Not of this world but outer space
And yet familiar it all rings true
I feel the sweetest deja-vu
As mem'ries from a far-off past
Flood through my mind at last
The joy I feel cannot be told

Except by songs in tongues of old
So I float still closer with no fear
The day I yearned for is now here
I need the call I'm not alone
I've found my race I'm going home

Ari Kahn

Conversation with My Son

He forced his way into the world

A large lump of flesh

Soaked in uterine juice

Raw possibilities

My son

Light liquid eyes stare deep in my own.

Can he see my thoughts? Can he see himself?

My Son. . . I smile.

Feeling the soft pulse of life in his torso

As my finger traces his arm, his neck, his chest:

Thump. thump

Thump. thump

Thump, thump

Did G-d feel this way about Adam?

Creation.

My Creation

He's warm with blood pumping power in his frail body.

Clinging, crying, cringing, feeling, testing

I smile and my tears, my fears and my joys,

Water his face.

It's him.

It's me.

Joshua Seth Goldstein

The Tree

 trength
athered s
 e ows n
 w r i
 g ee
 tr
 the
 bonsai

Alter Shimon Reiss



Avatism

From the mouth of Pekingese comes the
slavering growl of a dire Wolf
A house cat stretches and yawns,
with the wide jawed yawn of the tiger

Beneath the smile of a taxi driver
lies the murderous grin of
a Kali death cultist, with a strangling
cloth of yellow silk.

A Wall Street banker, giving a speech,

takes on the aspect of a gap toothed
Mongol, with a recurved bow, and blood on his hands.

A delivery man in a Dominos shirt weaving through traffic on 71st street,
is an armored knight leaning low in the saddle with sword outstretched
toward the head of a pedestrian.

Alter Shimon Reiss

Opening

This window goes on forever
beyond
the hills
and shacks
the ocean
like a paw
in sauce
in the sky
a panoramic view
of the deprived
mind

Aizak Inselmann



The Last Storyteller

Why didn't you tell me before
it was too late
about the giant hole in the backyard
where you fall so far inside,
that the dark shadows become
shining beacons

I knew nothing about the red stop sign,

standing in cement by the post office,
that sometimes disappears for days,
and returns uneasily,
like a drunk vagabond unsure of his
reception at his former home

Last night I was lost, and I saw
a shooting star that never died, but
cheated its destiny, burning
with vengeance as it set fire
to empty orphanages

Wednesday there is also the man
who hovers around the carcasses
of demolished buildings,
whispering their names, their numbers,
like an abandoned captor
reminding his forgetful prisoners

Every Tuesday I sit up all night, and worry
that ice cream will disappear from this earth,
so that the Good Humor truck
will lead all the other trucks in a parade
down main street
playing a funeral dirge
laying my childhood to rest

I have learned all these things on my own,
but tell me,
why after I close each door

do I feel as if I had left my belongings
on my seat, as the train rushes on
through the black sleet.

Aizak Inselmann

The Hopelessly Romantic Misanthrope

A constant perpetual state of dysfunctional socialism
boggled minds
emotion of others
It seems
the bathroom is the only place
for pieces and peace of mind
no friends
growing fear
with no inspiration
I will not write
no pretty words
on this page
fried brains have become society's entrée
can I?
may I?
stress it strongly enough
that my faith is down
its fate to drown in a sea of simplicity
Confucius was confused
Tao and all
You think it's easy
I think you're wrong
could it be?!

I slept too long not knowing what was underneath my pillow
It is likely that
all things fall
gravity telling us
the inevitable

I couldn't even describe an adverbial sleep
green with envy it all becomes a matter
of how well you can fake it
for the social eyes that keep
looking and seeing things
they really should not
pull up in my living room chair
stabbing the clicker
staring at endless images having endless lives
these lives
have no meaning to me
so it was the same old familiar
thinking of all those
old things
when our dreams were filled with toys
and none of our emotions
were ever scrambled
into meaningless hidden messages
that drove us into fits of lonely
walking frenzy
when the girls knew no games
and our hearts weren't hard enough
that they could break
I could hold her hand
and feel
but that girl died a long time ago
with workless summers
so the red-eyed street preacher on 72nd and Broadway
JUDGEMENT DAY IS COMING ON THE SECOND THURSDAY IN MARCH
and all those that believed

waited
to cross the Rubicon
on the second Wednesday in March.
A slow silent static build to a deafening roar.
G-d's fax machine has just run out of paper.
Pandemonium ensues in the ne plus ultra.
"NAKED NAKED FOUL"

Exeunt

David Rappaport

Cold Coffee

As I walk, storming gusts of snow throw me
Around, spinning me into a disorienting headache. I look down
Toward the sidewalk for direction. *Where can I learn of
The nearest coffee house?* Stumbling over clumps of ice,
Sliding across the street
On my heels, *how many more blocks?*
Red light. I feel the bitter blasts of cross
Firing winds: a willow tree swaying
Under a thin, plastic hood.

Frozen hands grappling with the gold plated bar handle, I thrust
The door open. Warm waves of Colombian air pull me
Inside the coffee shrine. Peeling off shells of clothing
Drenched in dripping, thawing ice—susceptible, a naked
Snail exposed. I stand in line, trembling,
Waiting for the waitress to preach my order,
Thankful for the warmth inside—as winter's organic strength
overpowers me.
Alone- drink some coffee.

Served, my hands warm up with the mug's heat.
I sip swiftly, yet gingerly, while it burns my tongue. I can't taste
The second sip, but continue swallowing heedlessly. My
Throat throbs, eyes steam, stomach seethes,
But the headache is gone.
Content, that everything will start to fall
In place. A map, so clear, I see it all
Up close, like scrolls unwound around the walls.

But how will I cross the clumps or sidestep the slips? I ask
The waitress for another cup. *Or the willow-swaying winds?*
I gulp. As I stand up to see my worried feet, I notice the water puddle
under my dripping jacket. Dizziness arrives,
Returning me to sobriety. *Where am I?* Sitting down,
My hands grab the mug and pour its pills into me.
Now I see the map - of me eased into a trap,
I stand to reach for the door...
Or, shall I have some more?

Tzvika Nissel

Cotton Mouth

Entranced yet alert, my eyes fixated
Upon a speaker's bearded mouth.
Though for me, his message a smiling jumbled blur.
My sheet music shuffling while my neck twists
Around to six hundred people, women, and friends
Waiting
Tensely I sip.
The wet drops on my seared tongue as effective as
Drizzle on a Mississippi's summer soil.
(Perhaps he forgot?)
Adrenaline pouring
Into me...(Would he look at the time!?)
Now, gnawed fingernail bits flicked from my mouth.
Desperate
My eyes failing to read his lips for a cue...
Nothing
But his blurry teeth talking.
"Go ahead, Danny, you're up."
Surreal, the sudden jabs in my back.
Trusting, hoping, my eyes perk up
Once more at the blurry bearded, but now
Comprehensible smile!
His gestures not his words pull me forward.
With silence as my accompaniment, I sing my song.

Daniel Najman

Walking, the Southern Side of the Kesalon Valley

(Tied for Best Poem: Yeshiva College English Department Award)

The road has grown soft
in the heat of the sun
and the blacktop shines
with an oily gleam.
and recently painted the
white lines are so bright
it hurts to look at them.
The road winds along the
side of the cliff, the pine
forests stand on either side
tall and brown, with spiny
bunches like green hedgehogs at
the ends of the branches.
and the cedars: Straight and
tall, and wrapped in a veil
of scaled green twigs

And clearing on the sides,
they would wink by in a car
but they linger to one walking
by foot on the soft and hot road
small spiny bushes with small
pink flowers, thistles, the size
of full grown men, with
purple flowers of thorn and petal
and tall light green stalks
with towers of yellow flowers

and wild grains, wheat, and rye
and barley, spelt
and the poppies: fading red flowers
with huge tattered petals.

Birds there are too.
The brown loud jays in the trees,
more than there are anywhere else
anymore, and hoopoo with their
ridiculous double crowns
and waxwings and choughs and
others from thousands of miles in
every direction: Here a swift from
the shores of Iceland. Here the shadow
of an eagle from the Russian steppes.
Each appears for a second and takes
center stage, with a flash of movement
and color, or a burst of song.

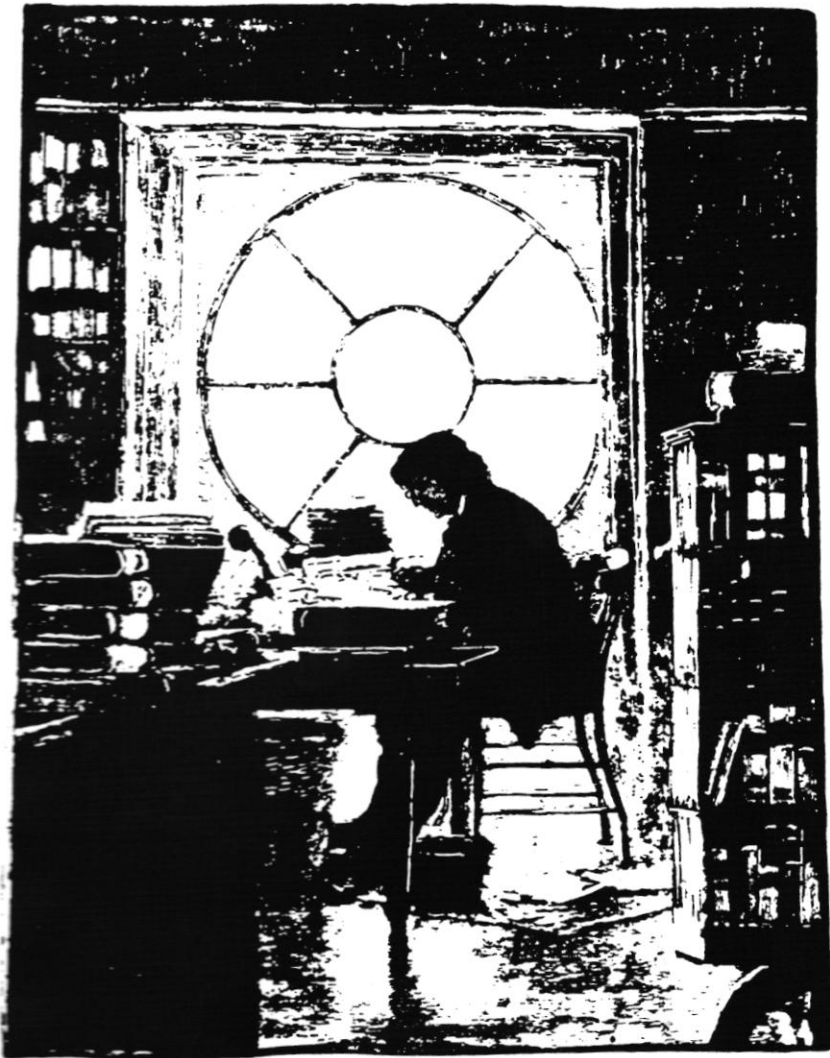
Alter Shimon Reiss

PROSE



If there is a special Hell for writers it would be in the forced contemplation of their own works, with all the misconceptions, the omissions, the failures that any finished work of art implies.

JOHN DOS PASSOS



High Holidays

(Honorable Mention: Jerome Robbins Memorial Award)

by Eli Shoshani

That September, as he had done every September that he could recall of his previous twenty-nine years, David Frischman attended Rosh Hashanah services. The air had recently turned breezy as it always does at that time of year. The leaves were beginning to turn into no more extraordinary colors than they had the previous fall. The only marked difference in David or in his surroundings was the son that he held by the hand. His son, Josh, was three years old, and this was to be his first time in synagogue.

David was not a religious man. However, there was some pull, some force, that led him to the synagogue at this time of year. Though as a child David was brought to synagogue weekly, his father never really expressed a desire for this tradition to be continued. Even in his father's later years they never really discussed the subject. There was nothing quite so dramatic as a deathbed request, but they had an understanding. Some things were meant to be continued.

When David was eighteen, his father died. Though David had already abandoned religion, he faithfully went to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services each year. Now he was initiating his son into this ritual.

David and Josh entered the crowded synagogue. The prayers had already begun, and they were forced to sit in the back. David took in everything at once, seeing nothing individually. Masses of people and elaborate chandeliers crowded the periphery of his vision. He saw objects and people as a blur of color. He sank into the plush red cushion on the bench. Too late, he recognized the man sitting next to him.

"Hey, Popeye," said the short fat man in a quick nasal voice. Thick chubby legs and narrow stubby feet dangled downward, not quite reaching the floor.

"How are you, Brutus?" asked David, tiredly returning the greeting, feeling obligated to respond.

Their strange nicknames originated from David's youth when he still participated in many of the "less holy" holidays. The holiday on which David received his nickname was Purim, when

he walked around the neighborhood in a Popeye Costume. To retaliate, he had dubbed his fat friend "Brutus," after Popeye's cartoon enemy.

"That's your son, Popeye?" added Brutus, noticing David's son.

"That's right, Brutus."

The cantor's voice rang clearly throughout the synagogue along with a steady undertone of the congregants' prayer. Where David sat, however, an additional layer of conversation was audible. Brutus and his unsavory friends were just a few of the conversationalists that occupied the rear seats. As the synagogue was crowded, the serious and the non-serious were intermingled.

"Big game today," Brutus said, nudging the friend at his right.

"You bet!" said his skinny companion while he rubbed his nose with his jacket sleeve.

Brutus sat thinking for a moment and then said, "Who do you think'll win, Max? I picked the Yankees."

Max adjusted his bright red skullcap that matched the bench cushions and said, "Well I couldn't decide, so I didn't even put any money on the game."

"You didn't?" Brutus asked incredulously.

The two then began to discuss the odds on the day's horses. David managed to partially block out their words until they became no more than an incessant buzz.

Josh sat quietly at the corner of the bench, and David patted his head. David then opened his prayer book and stared at it for several minutes. He didn't read anything. He couldn't remember thinking anything during those moments either, unless, perhaps, subconsciously. In that sense, those minutes were part of a temporary blackout, not a daydream.

David was stirred from his blackout when he realized that everyone in the synagogue had risen. He stood, and when everyone resumed sitting, he mechanically conformed.

The prayer was not so foreign that he could not recognize it; yet it was not familiar enough to follow the words easily. Praying once or twice a year was not practice enough, it seemed. David's frustration mounted, and several times he felt like cursing, but restrained himself. For one, he was in a synagogue, and also, he was in his son's presence. David knew that with one curse, all merit gained from attending the services would be nullified.

David decided to take a break from reading the prayer in Hebrew. He was much more comfortable with the English version, but he sensed that it lacked something. With all its “Thees” and “Thous,” it seemed to be straining for holiness. Not only that, but the English prayer made him feel different, as if he were segregated from the other congregants by some palpable distinguishing mark.

David glanced sideways and saw a couple of men in white robes solemnly swaying back and forth.

Near them were several men with white satin skullcaps atop long flowing hair. They sat stiffly, not reading a word. Occasionally they leaned over and whispered to their companions, as if conferring on business matters. Their discomfort with their surroundings was evident.

Like David, these men were non-religious. They were referred to as “three day Jews.” David too. He had often thought about this. Going to a synagogue three days a year would not affect anyone profoundly. You can’t cram all your feelings for God into three short days and then walk away from religion having gained something tangible. With religion, David felt, one must either accept the practice, or reject it wholly. Yet, he himself was continuing what he had come to view as a charade.

At the podium, a man with a long beard prepared to blow the shofar. Everyone rose as the man pulled his prayer shawl over his head, and recited the blessing.

“Daddy?” asked Josh, “What are they doing?”

“One second, Josh. You’ll see.”

The first blast sounded throughout the synagogue. It was clear and the sound did not falter. The blasts that followed were similarly sustained.

“Daddy, what’s making that sound?” asked Josh, patting his father’s wrist to attract attention to his question.

“That’s a horn they’re blowing. A horn of a ram. It’s called a shofar.” Josh looked perplexed, so David added, “It’s kind of like a trumpet.”

“Oh,” said Josh, still with a perplexed look.

“So what are you going to eat?” Brutus’ conversation filtered towards David once again.

“Probably tuna fish,” said the red skullcapped Max. “I can’t wait to get home.”

“How do you eat your tuna fish? I like mine with lots of mayonnaise and celery,” said Brutus.

“I eat it straight from the can,” answered Max.

“You’ve got to be kidding!”

They lapsed into silence.

“Say,” called a man wearing a pink flannel shirt with a bowtie and checkered pants, “when does the game start?”

“It said 12:30 in the New York Times.”

“It’s gonna be good one,” Max interjected.

This comment was followed up by a debate over which team should be favored. Starting pitchers, relievers, and sluggers were contrasted.

“The coaching’s gonna be a big factor in this game. The Yankee manager, he’s a shrewd guy. What’s his name? Showler I think. Yeah, Showler. He’s a shrewd character. He’ll win them the game.”

“You really think so?” Max asked Brutus.

The conversation continued. David noticed that one man who was sitting six or seven rows ahead would turn around every few seconds, looking extremely annoyed. Brutus and his gang were making a racket, but David didn’t see how their noise could have reached the man.

The cantor reached a crescendo, and then paused dramatically. The entire synagogue was silent.

At David’s right, Brutus cackled loudly, breaking the stillness, and sending the annoyed looking man towards their bench.

He wore a prayer shawl above his white coat. The coat was unbuttoned, and a black suit jacket peeked out from underneath like a stain, disrupting the white purity.

He strode up the aisle and stopped at David’s left. “Shh! Shh!” He hissed angrily with his forefinger at his lip. “Nu!” He said, rapping his prayer book with his knuckles, indicating that Brutus ought to open up his own.

He stood over David, waiting like a watchdog. Brutus smiled a bit uncomfortably, but David was certain that he was far more uncomfortable than Brutus could possibly be. David was a novice at such matters, while Brutus seemed to be a veteran of many similar confrontations.

“Go away. Go bother someone else, you loon.”

“Shh! Nu!” Came the reply.

“Get out of here you busybody. You’re like a bloodhound, sniffing for trouble. You must be getting real bored with praying, huh? You came over here to stir up trouble and get some excitement. Got to get your kicks, huh? I know your type. I know you like a book. Go back where you belong. You’d better fix yourself up before you preach to me!” Brutus sat down, muttering.

Max patted Brutus on the back as if he had won a prize fight. “You did terrific!”

The man remained, however, hovering over David and Josh, who were the closest to the aisle. He moved his feet sideways, left to right, and then right to left, clicking them together impatiently. He held his prayer book in his left hand, but it was closed; both of his hands rested his hips.

“Why don’t you go someplace else,” added Max. “Try the bathroom. Maybe you’ll find us there.”

This remark brought a response of raucous laughter from Brutus’ bunch, and Max’s back was now thumped in appreciation.

During the next hour, similar remarks were directed against the man, yet he chose to remain standing in the aisle.

David fed Josh a bottle of apple juice. The cantor stepped from the podium, and the rabbi ascended. Josh, David noticed, fell asleep before the rabbi had begun his sermon.

“Look,” Brutus said. “The rabbi just started talking and he already put Popeye’s kid to sleep. That’s a world record!” Brutus barely managed to finish before the laughter snorted through his nose.

“Shh!” hissed the man from the aisle.

“Why are you staying here?” asked Brutus. “Come back later when we start praying again. The rabbi’s talking, so you don’t need to defend G-d now. Come back when the rabbi finishes.”

“Shh!” came the answer, and then the words followed in a staccato burst. “You need to have respect for the rabbi! He’s God’s representative!”

“Get out of here already,” Brutus and his cronies called repeatedly.

"Look at you fools," said the man. "Why do you bother to go to synagogue if you're just going to talk like a bunch of old women."

David was beginning to identify with the man's point of view, though he could not forgive his confrontational style.

"Look around you. Half the people here come only once or twice a year. Like this man," he continued, rudely singling David out with his pointed thick finger. "But at least they have respect. They're-"

"Ah, shut up, you moron!" Brutus interrupted. "Lousy moron."

"You listen to me! They're not religious, but they have respect for others. That's the issue. But you guys come here every week and talk as if you're in a social hall!"

"Get out of here," came the taunt response.

At that point, the synagogue's caretaker, who had been hurrying up the aisle reached the bench. He spoke loudly in a heavy Hungarian accent. "Everyone be quiet or I will call the cops and you will be kicked out."

Turning to the man in the aisle the caretaker said, "Get back to your seat."

He feigned doing so, but returned when the caretaker had gone back to the front of the synagogue.

"Ah, forget about it; I'm getting out of here," said Max. "It's no fun here anymore with this bucket of sour grapes spreading his bitterness around."

Max moved down the aisle, his red skullcap and fake gold buttons flashing as he pushed through the doors.

"He'll be back," commented Brutus.

During the next hour, Brutus went outside several times. He seemed anxious for Max's return.

Josh slept through most of the services, and even, somehow, through the majority of the shouting. David was relieved when the prayers concluded. He was glad to escape the synagogue's oppressive atmosphere.

David resolved to go to a different synagogue from then on to fulfill his obligation, but he didn't feel that anything would be different there.

He walked outside with Josh and paused by the synagogue's gates, waiting for Beth, his wife, to emerge from the women's section.

Brutus and his cronies began to descend the synagogue's steps when David first realized that Max had returned, and that they were standing alongside each other. Brutus looked relieved.

"Hey Maxi!" Brutus shouted happily. "Thought you'd left us for good. Where's you go?"

"I just went home for a little while," Max replied. "The Tigers are winning, 7-4."

The Three-fifty Special

by Daniel Sentell

John tenderly touched a sunburned cheek, then looked off into the distance. He wanted to see a Dairy Queen, a Carvel, or even a 7-11, but the only thing there was an elderly dust-coated diner. It appeared as if it had once been white. "Why me?" thought John. "What had I done?" With an assurance born of experience, he knew that if he chose to enter the diner, he would be greeted by a waitress named Faith or Mary or Lou Anne. She would be wiping down a twenty year old counter with a rag whose normal residence was her side apron pocket. After a few minutes, if no other customers came in, she would start a second wipe down. In back, where they had a room called the kitchen, a Rusty or Sam or Butch would be slapping down a patty on a slightly irregular lump of lard. The three-fifty special consisted of the cooked burger, fries, small coke, and a slice of pie of the day. John grimaced at the thought of having to endure it all again, but he was afraid that if he didn't do something soon, he would begin to dehydrate. Maybe he'd be able to get by with just a few glasses of iced tea. Maybe the waitress wouldn't be in a talkative mood. Maybe he would grow wings and fly home.

He started walking to the diner, and realized that walking was becoming monotonous. His shoes had covered miles already, and his feet were remembering every step. He didn't like walking, but what choice did he have? Morley had made it clear that they couldn't live together. He knew she was right. Their life had always been...turbulent. It seemed that everything they did had to be a competition. Who could finish a book first. Who could sit back while the other one cleared the table. Who had control over the TV remote.

John shook his head. Why so many examples of such pointless aggression when there were so many other things that brought them together? His favorite was the day at the beach. They sat for hours just lying on the sand, molding it in their hands like warm soft clay. The surf washed over their thin tan bodies, and they laughed at the covering of salty foam. That had been an experience to cherish. What was wrong with them that they couldn't make the sweetness endure?

The diner door suddenly appeared, and woke John from his thoughts. With a slightly trembling hand, he turned the knob. The shadowy diner interior sought to envelop him as he walked inside.

“Hey sugar, it looks like you’re a bit far from home.”

He hated when they called him sugar.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

Her name tag said Mary-Faith, and her hips said too many bored hours with the pie of the day.

“Iced tea please.”

“Sure thing.”

Mary-Faith walked behind the counter and filled a glass with ice. She smiled at him as she did it. That smile was another thing he hated. Anywhere he went he would get the upturned lip and the not-so-glistening teeth. John knew he was cute, but he didn’t believe that that was enough of a reason. Why couldn’t people just act normal around him? Was it too much to be treated as an equal? That had always been Morley’s problem. She could never see him on the same level.

He looked in his wallet. Some scavenging around uncovered a grand total of six dollars and forty-two cents. That was it. If he didn’t find work soon, he would have to consider the impossible.

Home.

The thought sickened him, but he couldn’t turn his mind from it. Endless meals trying to sit happily around an intrinsically sad table. “And how was your day today?” Fine. The same as all the thousands of days before it. Why do you ask? “My, you’re in a grumpy mood.” I pack a lunch, I leave, I come back. If my life was any more exciting, I would have to pack two lunches to keep my energy up.

“Here you go sugar.”

John took the tea and mumbled a thanks. Maybe he could wash dishes here. What would that pay? If he could find a one room dump somewhere, it might just be enough.

He signaled Mary-Faith. She swished over.

“What can I do for you?”

"Do you think I could talk to the owner?"

"Butch?"

John sighed.

"If that's the owner, then yes, I'd like to talk to Butch."

She stared at him for a moment.

"Is there something wrong with the tea?"

"No, the tea is fine."

Mary-Faith still looked uncertain.

"I guess if you wanted to you could."

"I do."

"Okay." She called out loudly to the back, and a short squat man appeared between the double doors.

"What?" he growled.

"This guy here wants to talk to you."

He turned to John.

"What?"

John cleared his throat.

"I was wondering if I could be of service to you, perhaps in a dish washing capacity."

"Are you joking with me?"

"No sir. I really would like the work."

Butch's words were muffled as he turned back in the kitchen.

"Look around you. There ain't nobody here. Go find someplace where you're needed."

The swinging door closed quietly behind him. John sighed a second time. That was quick.

"Maybe I could help you."

He looked up at Mary-Faith.

"What do you mean?"

She sat down.

"I mean if you really wanted to earn a few extra dollars, you could..."

She didn't get to finish. The front door had been thrown open, and standing there was a man in freshly pressed cotton slacks. John's eyes widened. He wanted to hide, but it was too late. He had already been spotted.

"Johnny, where have you been? Your mother's worried sick about you."

John didn't answer. He just sat and looked up at his father.

"You're only ten, Johnny. You still have to tell us when you go out."

And All Our Yesterdays Have Lighted Fools

by Hillel Spielman

My parents and hers were friends. They had known each other since graduate school, and when the time came to make those first tentative steps into the brave new world of adulthood, they settled together in the same secluded, comfortably rural New England town. Although she was born six months before I was, almost from my first breath we breathed together, sharing the same carriage and crib. What I lacked in age I made up for in size, and from that early age we grew up together, inseparable and in love.

Gradually, as our friendship expanded and intensified in proportion to our years, we shared new experiences, emotions and ideas, delighting in each other's company and our shared life. Yet even at that young pre-school age, as we developed physically, emotionally and spiritually, all too soon our differences became apparent. It must have been fairly early on that we transcended the barrier of differing physiognomies. This first sign that we were not, in fact, some two-part being, caused us each to appreciate the other all the more.

Some days I would go over to her house and we would romp through the tall chirping grass in her backyard, or perhaps slide down the carpeted stairs on pillows, living our own adventure in our own perfect world. Some days we would go to the park and ride dirty plastic swings up to the sun or climb the rusty jungle-gym up to the bleary sun-bleached moon. Some days she would come to my house and we would build great towers of blocks only later to demolish them, laughing, with a not entirely accidental sweep of a hand or a stamp of a foot. We were invincible. We both had ample senses of humor, and her whimsical, outgoing, tom-boyish personality combined with my quiet, self-assured, opinionated one to create an incredible chemistry that could have endured forever.

Then suddenly, we grew up.

At six in years old we each went off to different Jewish schools near Boston, I to a more demanding traditional school and she to a school of more liberal conviction. One afternoon per week, however, the bus schedule would join the children of our schools for the long ride home. All week I would wait for that one bus ride with great anticipation, for on that one ride I would save the seat next to mine for her and we would talk quietly, play, or just watch the world go by

together. Those bus rides with her have always been very special to me, and I treasure them now through the kaleidoscopic memories of a childhood from which I have, to my great surprise, only recently awoken.

Soon we each made new friends within our own respective schools and had little time for each other. Her family moved closer to the city and to her school, and our bus visits abruptly ceased. As we progressed through the grades we grew apart and separately, seemingly destined never to see each other again. At first I was devastated. Alarmed, I noted that not only had my best friend left me, but that she seemed happy enough without me. Soon, however, I was accepted into the warm fold of my class and for the most part stopped missing her. Occasionally, though, I would suddenly recall her beloved mischievous smile, or recapture the bubbling vivacity of her alluring laugh. Then, I would wonder longingly, much as I wonder to this day, what my childhood love might be doing or if she might not still remember the one with whom she spent so many happy years.

Ten years passed quickly and I found myself hopelessly entangled in the obstinate pursuit of adulthood that so obsesses young adults. At the tender age of sixteen I felt confident that I had finally awakened fully to the celebrated wonders of life after the long sheltered slumber of my childhood. It was in the midst of this spurious awakening that, quite by accident, we met for the last time. I ran into her, literally, during the intermission of the school play. Predictably, she did not remember me at first, and it was only after I had introduced myself several times with various clues and recollections that she finally revived her memory and recognized me. She blushed, and I blushed for her. I smiled and tried to start up a conversation (Where to begin?), but it was short lived. We were both nervous and off balance, moving clumsily from topic to topic, conspicuously avoiding the last ten years of our lives. School was tough. Her parents and younger brother were fine. No, she was glad she had chosen not to attend my school. No, she did not know what she wanted to do when she grew up. And she was casually dating a classmate of mine. We separated cordially but awkwardly. Returning to my seat, I was left with a dull throbbing emptiness that for the remainder of the evening made me want to concentrate intently on the play to the exclusion of anything else.

And I went home that night confused and humbled, though I was not quite sure why.

Earl Grey or Mint?

by Tolkien R. Ules

"Ever so kind of you to come, Mr. Parker. Earl Grey or Mint?"

"So sorry I'm late. Earl Grey, thank you. Docksford had trouble finding the umbrella."

"Oh, is it raining? What a dreadful shame. It was such a lovely day yesterday."

"Speaking of yesterday. . ."

"Come, everyone, do sit down. Tea is ready. We would like to begin. Mr. Parker, such a pleasure to see you again. I hope you have some stories for the committee. You, after all, were elected to attend yesterday's funeral."

"Actually, Mrs. Wilcox, I have quite a disturbing story to share with the committee. As you all know, Hermie's funeral took place yesterday. Such a pity that of all days it had to be yesterday. Imagine - a burial on the loveliest day in a long while."

"Yes, it truly was a nice day."

"Well, when I arrived, a few moments late, I saw that there were only three other people present. Three people and the undertaker. I thought at first that I had come to the wrong cemetery. Hermie was such a remarkable man. Surely, there should have been more people to pay their respects."

"Yes, a remarkable man."

"Well, I did ask, and it was not the wrong cemetery, nor was it the wrong plot site. I asked whether perhaps because I had come late. . . But they told me that they had not even placed the body in the grave yet. Now comes the disturbing part. This undertaker that was there . . ."

"Must you mention the undertaker while we are having tea? I do have quite a weak stomach, you know."

"My dear, without the undertaker there is no story!"

"Very well, continue."

"As I was saying, this undertaker was, undoubtedly, the most repulsive man I have ever seen. A tall, unwashed brute. In any event, when the time came to bury the body, the filthy chap was nowhere to be found. When he did finally appear, his hands and face were clean - a spit and polish job. He picked up the body, and instead of lowering it to the grave, he actually climbed

into the grave and placed the body down as gently as a babe in a crib. And then, after climbing out of the grave he took off his hat and placed it on his chest. In all my years I have never seen anything quite like it.

“Hermie always had a way with these types.”

“Whatever do you mean Mrs. Wilcox.”

“Many a time, I would come across Hermie with a scruffy child devouring some tidbit or cupcake he had just bought the boy on an impulse. And then, of course, he’d dole out wads of money to these threadbare miscreants that would show up at his door. Not that one should not help these people. Now, I have no quarrel with the generous, but keep it formal, I say. Limit the actual contact with such types to a bare minimum. Wouldn’t you agree, Mr. Parker?”

“Absolutely, Mrs. Wilcox.

“I did not know Hermie well, but there is truth to what you say, Mrs. Wilcox. I often saw Hermie visit the house of the undertaker of whom Mr. Parker was speaking. Each time he would embrace the dirty fellow. And whenever he did, he always left with some of that white powdery residue on his suit, the type which is used in mass burial sites. I suspect he even brought the undertaker gifts. Goodness knows what!”

“Oh, I suppose food and the like. You know the poor, darling, they have always got hungry mouths to feed and more on the way.”

“Well, none of this excuses the way in which this undertaker conducted himself. It is not his place to show feelings. I mean, really! What are we coming to? If I were you, Mr. Parker, I would write a letter of complaint to his superior. After all, one cannot condone such behavior. The man should know his place!”

“What good would that do? His superior is probably just as ill-mannered himself.”

“I suppose so. What a thought! Anyone for more tea?”

Grief with a Pang

(Best Short Story: Jerome Robbins Memorial Award:)

by Yosef Shoshani

Memories of my second grade year have forged immedicable mental wounds; even some physical scars remain. When I allow my thoughts to ramble unsuppressed, they often return to the tenebrous corridor, the towering gray, metal door, the stained brass doorknob. Suddenly, instinct warns me to stop, to remain outside. Yet, a recurrent sense of impotence overwhelms me. I wrench the doorknob compulsively. If the door does not yield, I press my entire body against it and push. At last, it opens, emitting a grating, scannel sound. A rictus of utter malignity and torture gapes before me.

I pass the threshold.

I take my first, hesitant steps into the classroom. (Oh! Every time it seems to begin anew!)

My face stings in the pitilessly raw air. It throbs at the callous laughter of my peers. I want to escape: the door is only a few feet behind me. But I do not turn back: for outside waits a grief unroused by pain, a stifled, numb, lethargic grief. Inside, the hurts I suffer grant me pain and tears, outlets through which to relieve my sorrow. The pain reminds me that I am alive, that I can feel. Whether I choose to live outside or inside these memories, I grieve. There is no way out: I must choose the better of the two griefs. I remain inside.

Laughter. Again.

What have I done this time? What grave sin have I committed?

I turn my stinging face to the ageless, wispy Rabbi with the straight, steel gray beard. His thick glasses frame an aquiline nose; the pallid flesh of his face is made prominent by contrasting black pupils. Those pupils fixate on me and then dart toward the class.

“Shh. Be quiet,” he says severely.

The class quiets down.

I walk in quickly, quickly. I briefly check for bubble gum or any other miscellany on the seat of my chair. One time I found a rat's tail planted in the center of my chair, a gray truncated rope with blood oozing from it. Thankfully, this time there is nothing, but I wipe my chair with

the rag I have prepared. I take my seat quickly and begin to remove the necessary books from my knapsack and to arrange them on my desk.

“A little bit faster. You have to do these things a little bit faster,” says the rabbi. He stands up and begins to wipe the blackboard behind him with a chalk eraser. He selects a piece of chalk from a small box, breaks it in two, and begins to write on the board.

What will happen to me? In vain, I search my memory, hoping to extract at least one clue indicative of my plight. Nothing. Only the vague consecution of my dream is known to me: I will be hurt and then I will cry. I also know that while I dream I will have a sense that all is familiar, that it has occurred before.

The Rabbi has finished writing a list of words for us to copy. He turns abruptly to face the class and grabs a broad yardstick to point at us while he talks. Before he begins, he smiles, flashing a set of brilliant white teeth. I recall his name, Rabbi Vogelmann. He was the rabbi who frequently deserted the class, deserted me, leaving us with huge assignments to copy into our notebooks. The long-standing rumor was that he went to the bathroom at these times. Exactly what he did there was a matter of prodigious speculation.

I remember one boy, a chubby bespectacled kid with long, curled side locks, would always muster a wisecrack as the rabbi left the room. Once this boy spoke, the class felt it safe to leave their seats and gambol about the room until the rabbi returned. This boy's joke signified temporary freedom.

“What did Aaron say? What did he say?,” asked the unlucky ones who had not caught the joke firsthand.

“He said,” they would answer, “he said,” and then they would see me staring curiously. (Of course, I had not heard the joke either.) They would turn away with rancorous smirks and whisper among themselves. I was excluded.

It was hard at first, but I soon acclimated myself to my ruthless environs. I beat my pencil on my notebook savagely, as if engaged in a higher communion with those letters and words the rabbi had assigned. I was a stranger: accident of birth had subjected me to venture to their neighborhood, to their classroom. Certainly, I did not set foot there by choice.

Years have passed and I remain a stranger. My visits to the classroom are no different now than they were when I was young; only now I am old and burnt out. My mother does not think so, but then she is like every other mother: she does not want to face reality. She does not love me; she loves an ideal. She loves the little boy who brought home good grades, the best in his class. Her love does not shield me from the scorn of my classmates, but rather exposes me to it. I am vulnerable, weak and still a child; though now I cannot even bring home good grades; I cannot be the best. And even worse, I am self-pitying. I cringe from the rabbi who stands above me. Oh! What will he say? What will he do? I hope he does not leave the room. I want to leave. Yet I remain seated, anxiously anticipating the suffering that is inevitable. I am a helpless automaton, subject to my mind's caprice.

The rabbi opens his mouth to speak. His words sound strangely garbled and distant, and I struggle ineffectually to grasp their meaning. Soon I can see neither the rabbi nor my spiteful classmates. I no longer sit in a classroom, but in an apartment in Lower Manhattan, where I live alone (Ha! If what I do from day to day can actually be called living!). The apartment overlooks a park where children are incessantly at play. Their shouts and their laughter assault my ears. I want to close the window, but I dare not get up and risk jarring myself from this state of catatonic reverie.

Pum, pum, pum. Who is knocking? Is that my door? Pum, pum, pum. The sound is coming from the door to my apartment. Whoever it is, I will not let them in. They can keep knocking. PUM, PUM, PUM. But it might be the girl from downstairs, the pretty one with raven-black hair and green catlike eyes. I caught her staring at me once, when I walked by the lobby; I was wearing a brown leather aviator's jacket and a cashmere scarf. Maybe I should open the door, if it really is she. . .

"Herbert. what's wrong with you? Why do you have the windows open? It's freezing in here. And look, you're sitting here in your boxer shorts. Hmmph! -- at least you have a pair of socks on, so your feet probably aren't cold." It is a familiar voice; it is a voice that frequently harangues me with lectures. It is my mother. Why didn't I hear the door open? And how did she get into my apartment? -- I never gave her the key! She must have had a duplicate made. Drat! She never told me she was going to copy my key; that's not fair! She has brought my family. My Tiresome Old Family! Oh, go away!

"I don't believe this. Do you believe it, James? Herbet left the windows open all week. We came here last week, remember? And I opened the windows to air out the room. Well he left them open. He's probably sick, sleeping in here with all these open windows."

"Leave him alone, Laura. Leave him alone. He's not sick."

My father seems to be taking my side, but moments later he is screaming at me. They are all screaming at me, even my younger sister. Why don't they go away? Tiresome. . . They are very Tiresome. If I close my eyes as tight as I can, perhaps I will fall asleep again. Then I can dream. If I yawn a big yawn, maybe they will realize how tired I am. Maybe they will let me dream, if I just yawn: *Ahhh!* That did not work. It made me feel more tired, but they are still here, still screaming at me. If I close my mouth tight and don't respond, then they will surely leave.

"He doesn't answer! Why don't you answer, Herbert?"

I will not respond, no matter what they say, no matter how they insult me. I am too anxious to return to my dream. I will shut my eyes too. Perhaps if I feign sleep, they will leave.

"Ah gut morgen everyone," Rabbi Vogelmann begins shrilly. He lowers his voice: "Write everything twice into your notebooks and I'll be right back. No hanky panky, no messing around, okay?"

"Okay, Rebbe," the boys answer solemnly.

I can see the rabbi does not believe them. He notes the uncommon number of refractory students; and his eyes accuse us in advance. But there is no time to reiterate instructions. He throws a remonstrative glance over his shoulder as he leaves the room. The class stands respectfully. The door shuts.

I remain seated, concentrating on my notebook and the assignment before me.

Aaron, the chubby, bespectacled boy, gets up from his chair. It is time for his wisecrack.

"You know where the Rebbe goes?," he asks in a hushed tone.

"Where?," asks one boy. All of the boys now crane their necks in eager anticipation of Aaron's joke.

"He goes to macht peepee," says Aaron.

"What's that?," asks a chorus of voices.

"He goes to the bathroom to make!" Exclaims Aaron triumphantly.

"Hee Hee Hee Hee!"

Aaron hoists his pants from the crotch with chubby, restive fingers. He continues:

"My Father had Vogelmann for a teacher a long time ago and he knows. My Father says the Rabbi prob'ly goes to make."

"Hee Hee Hee Hee!"

"Well he really takes a long one," offers another boy.

"Hee Hee Hee Hee!"

Even I cannot help giggling. *Hee Hee Hee Hee!* Some of the boys are standing on their desks, and others are writing on the board. I know it is not decent to laugh at the rabbi, but Aaron's joke was too funny. I am still laughing. *Hee Hee Hee Hee!* I hope they do not notice me.

"Hey look," says a boy named Jason. "Look everybody, look at Bummy laugh. Bummy's laughing." I wince at the shameful epithet, Bummy, with which I had been tagged as a kid. I want to retaliate, to lash out at him verbally:

"Oh, go pick your nose!"

Jason squints his eyes and wrinkles his nose distastefully; he snorts twice, not an *oink oink*, but as a real pig would sound:

"Nchuhh, Nchuhh."

"Get out of here," I say.

"Pick my nose? Pick my nose?," asks Jason threateningly. "You said you want me to pick my nose? Okay, I'll pick my nose."

While sneering at me, he thrusts his index finger up his nose, slowly withdraws it, and rubs his effort on my notebook. He smiles brutishly and searches my face for signs of emotion, hoping that I will break into tears.

I struggle to suppress the tears welling in my eyes. I glare at him truculently through the watery film that has glazed my pupils. I rise from my desk and spring at him. He is smaller than I am; I pummel him relentlessly.

“My father is a police officer,” cries Jason. “He’ll arrest you and put handcuffs on you.”

“I don’t care!”

“He’s got a billy club and he’s got a gun. He’ll shoot you! He’ll put you in jail!”

“I don’t care!” I shout as I throw him to the ground. His threats do not dissuade me from avenging myself. I am beating him with my small, hard fists. He is screaming; his words chopped by convulsive sobs. Secretly, I am frightened by his cries: I have always been scared of his father. He often brought Jason to and from school, and sometimes even wore his dark blue uniform with a heavy holster belt slung from the waist and a long billy club swinging at his side. Whether in or out of uniform, he was a threatening figure—a huge man with a wide jaw, black inset eyes, and a trunk for a nose. It was strange to see him standing next to Jason, his tall form obscuring Jason’s puny one. And it was frightening to hear his incessant belly laugh roar from his throat and then reverberate through the vacuous school corridors. At this moment, however, my fear of Jason’s father does not at all frustrate my desire for revenge. I want, more than ever, to hurt this boy for all the times he hurt me.

My vengeance is short-lived. The most vicious boys in the class jump on me. They begin to slap me, to punch me, to pull my hair, to kick me. I run to the door of the classroom with them clinging to my shirt. I reach the door and open it hastily as my shirt tears in one boy’s hands. I run out into the gloomy corridor shouting “Rebbe,” but I am soon dragged to the floor ruthlessly, like a bleating lamb ensnared by a horde of hungry wolves. One boy pounces on top of my prostrate body and clutches my shirt in his teeth.

“I am a tiger,” he says and growls to prove it.

“What’s going on here?” yells a voice from above.

I look up. It is the rabbi, his glasses askew, his mouth frothy with suds of toothpaste. A white toothbrush is clenched in his mouth; it juts out like an elephant’s tusk. The rabbi helps me rise from the floor, as he screams at the other boys to return to the classroom. Spittle flies from his lips and hits my face. Though he sees the spit, he does not bother removing it; rather, he grabs my wrist and hauls me to the classroom.

We take our seats. The rabbi wipes his mouth with a handkerchief he has drawn from his pocket. I remember the spit on my face and rub my cheek with my shirtsleeve.

The rabbi begins to scream:

“Got en himmel! What kind of class is this?”

He is twittering like a canary; his voice strikes impossibly high notes. He becomes aware of his ludicrously shrill tone when he notes the look on his students' faces: most are smiling; some are even laughing aloud. He resumes his tirade, but lowers his voice an octave:

“I can't leave you here for two minutes alone. You are babies, that's what you are. All of you are babies. And I don't even want to know what happened. you will all be punished for your behavior, that's all.”

A voice whispers within me, “Even me?” Self pity overwhelming me, I begin to cry. I set my head down on my arms so that no one will notice my tears. The Rabbi does not disturb me. I can hear his voice, now squeaky and thin, now loud, even resonant. He has begun the lesson. Soon the sounds grow softer, lulling me till I begin to sleep.

I awaken feeling a cold, moist clay-like object pressing on my neck. It is a hand; someone is patting me. Someone is telling me that I must get up. *I don't want to cuz I don't feel good leave me alone please?!* I feel compelled to look up. It is the rabbi. He says I have slept for fifteen minutes. He would like me to wake up. We are reading an important part in the Chumash, one that I cannot afford to miss.

“Class,” the rabbi announces, “Do you have the place in your Chumashim?”

Yes, the class nods.

“Mmhhh, very good. Okay now skip the next seven p'sukim [verses]. We're skipping them because they're too complex.” He pauses, waiting for us to locate the proper verse in our texts.

“Chaim,” he points to me, “do you have the place?” Only my rabbi addresses me by my Hebrew name. I am accustomed to the name Herbert or Herb; it takes me a moment to respond:

“Yes, I have the place, Rebbe.”

“Good, let's continue.”

“Wait Rebbe,” interrupts one boy, “what does too complex mean?”

“What?” The rabbi asks.

"You said," he hesitates, "You said that something was complex. You know, you know the word, you said it before."

"Oh -- complex!" Answers the rabbi uncomfortably. "I just mean that the p'sukim were too hard to understand, that's all. You'll learn them when you get older."

The boy points an accusatory finger at me. "I bet Herby could learn them. He's the class Bummy. He thinks he knows everything."

The class laughs. My face turns torrid with shame. There is nothing I can do to mitigate my uncomfortable situation: if I cry or run from the room, my peers will revel in my defeat. I must remain. Tears spring to my eyes, and again I am forced to lower my head to the desk and to shield it with my folded arms.

"He's crying," shouts one boy gleefully.

"I'm not crying," I retort from under my arms. "I'm only tired. I'm sick and tired of all of you! You're idiots!"

"That's enough out of everyone," says the rabbi. "And Chaim, don't ever again say such a word like the one you just said. Otherwise, I'll have to take out the scissors and remove the pimples from your tongue. You want me to do that?"

"No," I say softly.

"Yes or no? Chaim, I don't hear you! Chaim look at me!" What should I do? Look up? But I have tears in my eyes! The other kids in the class will see them. I cannot risk that I will not look up.

"Look at me," he says sternly. "Chaim, I want you to look at me right this second."

I rub my eyes against my shirtsleeve to dry them. I put a finger to my right pupil to check if it has dried; instantly new tears spring to my eyes. Again I rub my eye with my shirtsleeve. The eye must be bloodshot: it flares with an itching and burning pain.

I look up.

"See, he was crying," one boy behind me snickers softly.

"I was not."

"That's enough out of everyone," the rabbi admonishes. Before he resumes the lesson, he glares at me. I am his burden. Inside, I know, he must be cursing me for my disruptive presence in his classroom. To him, I am the troublemaker, the odd one who cannot relate to his peers.

Again thoughts of self-pity and woe pervade me. *Why me? Why only me? Who else suffers?* At least he forgot to repeat his question on whether or not I want the scissors' treatment. Everyone knows he once cut a boy's tongue off for being disrespectful; though, I have often wondered how he got away with such a crime. Can a policeman punish a rabbi? I am sure they can; but I do not think a rabbi would commit a crime so heinous that it would warrant retribution by law. Rabbis are too good for that — I really mean that. Anyway, I cannot believe my rabbi would cut off my whole tongue; he would probably just skim off the pimples that grow when I use bad language.

“When we return from lunch, we will finish the rest of the perek. Oh yeah, “the rabbi remembers excitedly, “Don't forget, we're going to have a birthday party this Friday for Aaron. His father's going to bring pizza to the classroom, everybody, so nobody bring lunches.”

“We know that already,” the class responds.

“You told us a hundred times already,” pipes one boy. “We're not dumb.”

“Okay, okay,” says the rabbi. “Okay, line up boys. Line up for lunch.”

The class is restive and fidgety; the boys are ready to bolt forth from the classroom at the rabbi's lunch-time announcement. I, however, dread any interaction with my classmates. I would prefer to remain seated rather than hazard a walk to the lunchroom. But I know my rabbi will not allow me to sit unsupervised, and so I am compelled to rise from my seat.

My rabbi now opens the door and stands bedside it. He commands us to form a line, an orderly line. He will not conduct us to the lunchroom until we behave. He waits three minutes for the class to quiet down, with a look of patience veneered over his rigid features.

I want to be the last one on the line: however, two boys slip behind me. I feel desperate fingers pinching the flesh on my leg. I slap them off without turning to face the boys. I hear giggling behind me but struggle to ignore it. We march down the stairs.

The lunchroom is part of a vast basement within the building. It has a beige and brown tiled floor and walls of a bone white with periodic splotches of gray. (I could never tell whether the walls were painted these dusky colors or age had effaced their original look.) Today, as always, we are late for lunch. It is a rare occasion that my rabbi does not forget the time, whether

intentionally or not. We enter the lunchroom just as the other classes prepare to leave. Their tables are littered with overturned milk cartons, dirty cups, plates, and assorted plastic utensils.

We walk toward the counter to receive our food. I take care to walk only on the beige tiles and to avoid the lines separating beige and brown. *Ouch*. Again I feel nails digging cruelly into my flesh. My torn shirt twists in the boy's grip. I turn to identify him: it is Aaron; his chubby cheeks flushed with exhilaration. I examine his eyes for a sign of compassion, but see nothing. I do not know whether to beat him or to cry. Either action will be equally ineffectual; either way the rabbi will deem me his contemptible onus -- the perpetrator of all the strife in his class.

"You better bring your own lunch tomorrow," says Aaron, "cauz I'm not gonna give you pizza, and not soder either. So if you want to eat, you just have to eat your stupid peanut butter and jelly." He smiles again. He is still gripping my shirt. I shove him away from me and he stumbles to the floor. He gets up, hoists his pants to his chest and prepares to fight; but the rabbi turns around, stares at us, and we both resume our places in the line.

"I'll get you back," whispers Aaron confidently.

We reach the counter.

"Rabbi," says Bertha the cook, a stout Russian woman with a pale blue kerchief tied to her head and a big wart above her lip. "I tell you not be late no more--" Her words are thickly accented and ponderous. "No more times." She grins at the rabbi, exposing a set of widely gapped, yellow teeth. Her heavy lips fall shut, her two front teeth resting on the lower lip. She sets a huge pan of mixed vegetables onto the steam table before her and begins to stir them with a broken spatula. "For you Rabbi," she says, raising a few vegetables on the spatula. "Fresh!" Again her front teeth reside on her bottom lip and she closes her mouth. Suddenly, she grimaces and draws her teeth into her mouth. I can see her jaw working vigorously. I hope she is not chewing her tongue! That would be too awful to contemplate. I am grateful when she stops the chewing motions--so grateful that I hardly notice I am being pinched again. *Stop pinching me!* Bertha smiles at the class, and then turns grinning towards the rabbi. "Please, Rabbi, you want fishcake?" She asks. "Good fishcake, hmmph."

"No thanks," answers the rabbi tersely.

We receive our plates of food and walk to our designated table. I take a seat at the far end of the table, adjacent to a blind boy named Eliezer. We are not friends. In fact it is

dangerous to sit next to him as he often erupts into fits of epileptic fury, of many of which I have been the indirect target. However, he has never been included in the class antics. He and I are both outsiders.

The rest of the class takes their seats.

Aaron says, "Don't sit next to you-know-who; he farts and smells while he eats."

The class laughs.

The rabbi tells Aaron to sit down assigns him extra homework for his calumny. It is little compensation for the embarrassment I suffer.

I begin to eat, but soon stop. The class is laughing again; however, this time their laughter is directed at the rabbi. The rabbi is seated before a loaf of rye bread and a bottle of ketchup; it is his favorite meal. The clotted remains of the ketchup are stuck to the side of the jar. He digs out the ketchup with a long plastic knife and spreads it sedulously across the bread. What is most fascinating is watching him take abrupt, birdlike pecks at the bread. His hands only function to prepare and hold his meal. Once he grasps the bread between his fingers, his neck dives toward it, his teeth tear off a hunk, and his neck darts back into place while he chews.

Two boys are mimicking the rabbi's eating motions with their own food. The class laughs. One of the boys saunters behind the rabbi and begins a parade of grotesque faces and gestures. He juts out his lower teeth, cranes his neck, rubs his belly, and mouths the words "yum, yum."

I look at my plate, upon which a swollen fishcake stands idle in a mass of wet spaghetti. A gray snakelike hair is intertwined in the spaghetti; a shock of revulsion surges through me. Ughh! Bertha's hair! I will not eat it, I think. But an eerie eructation of my stomach reminds me that I am hungry. I remove the hair with a napkin and regretfully begin to shove the greasy food into my mouth; I take a bite.

My classmates are still mocking the rabbi. I sigh; at least they are not making fun of me.

The blind boy, Eliezer, has been eating voraciously. Now and then he shifts his head away from his plate and stares, as if transfixed by the impalpable void before him. Laughter peals forth from the class and Eliezer turns his head, intrigued by the sound. The rabbi sits stiffly and continues to eat in his peculiar manner, ignoring his taunting students. He is consuming the bread rapidly and is down to half a loaf. Eliezer turns to me, his eyes startlingly focused. He asks *what is so funny*. I tell him about the rabbi. He laughs, giggles, and laughs again even harder.

“That’s the best joke,” he says. “Yum, Yum.” He turns back to his dwindling plate of spaghetti, glad to be let in on the joke.

I, however, am thinking of my terrible day, and my terrible misfortunes. I look at Aaron; he is throwing food. The rabbi ignores him and concentrates on his bread and ketchup. I wonder how the rabbi can bear the ridicule; I cannot.

Aaron spies me staring from the far end of the table. He throws a whole fishcake at me; and though it falls short, the entire class laughs and points at me. Again my face (my poor, poor face) flushes red with shame. Eliezer, hearing the laughter, turns and says, “Oh boy, that’s the best joke.” He laughs and pats me on the back.

The Bar

by Gaboosness John

The old wooden stage stretched out long and narrow into the barroom surrounded by tables and chairs. Stage lights hung from the ceiling projecting a white light that made the room seem very bright and small. Sawdust was spread across the floor, and a cloud of dust sat heavy in the air. The bar was stuffy during showtime, but that was an hour away. Now it was empty.

A woman came out from behind the stage and sat down at one of the stools beside the bar. The bartender poured her a beer and handed it to her. She slowly lifted the cup to her lips and sipped from the top without spilling any on the counter. She was blonde with long legs and a receding chin. She wore a tight red top and a short slip of a skirt with sparkling beads. for it was Tuesday, and that was what she wore for her Tuesday show.

“Are you doing the long show tonight?” asked the bartender wiping the counter with a cloth in small clockwise circles.

“Yeah. I need the tips, with them raising the rent and all.”

“You fixed the lights for it yet?”

“After my drink, I will.”

The bartender stopped wiping the counter. He took out some dirty cups from under the bar and started rubbing one from the inside while turning the cup round with his other hand.

“You get that coat you wanted yet?” the bartender asked without raising his head from the cups.

“Which one?”

“The fur.”

“No. Too pricey. Got a nylon fake instead.”

“Blue?”

“Yeah.”

“Warm?”

“Not like fur.”

She sipped a bit more of her drink, but just let it sit in her mouth for a while without swallowing.

“The doctor was just telling me that Mr. Fanaci hung himself.” the bartender said.

“S’ that true, Doc?” the blonde asked, turning her head.

Some stools to the right of the blonde sat an old man. His chin was resting on one of his hands. His other hand was on the counter next to a half empty glass of beer. He stared blankly at the beads of water running down his cup and slowly nodded his head in response to the blonde’s question.

“It’s always them big tippers that hang themselves first,” she said.

“It’s them trouble makers that take the longest.”

“You mean old Nick, running up on stage and all?”

“Yeah.”

“They come in from the cold, get all drunk, watch the show, holler and fall asleep. They ain’t going back out there without a bit of a pushin’.”

“Drunk bastards.”

She finished off her drink and got up.

“I’ll go fix the lights and things,” she said.

The old man stopped looking at his beer and watched the blonde.

She stepped up onto the stage and walked through the door into the back.

“Which number’s the center light?” she called out from somewhere behind the stage.

“Eight,” the bartender shouted back.

A light in the center of the long stretch of stage brightened, and then began to move around.

“More to the left. That’s fine,” the bartender called.

The light was always placed a bit to the corner of her main spot on the stage, otherwise it got too hot up there. She came back out onto the stage and walked towards the center. The light was fine. She walked a bit further out and tapped around on the wooden stage barefoot. She had not put on her shoes yet; they hurt and she only wore them when she had to.

“This plank’s loose,” she called to the bartender.

“Mark it, I’ll look at it later.”

He tossed her a red marker. She bent down, put an X on the plank and turned around.

“I am going to get my shoes,” she said, and went back behind the stage.

The old man slowly got up from the stool. He put some money next to the half finished beer and took his coat. He put it on, did up the buttons, and walked towards the front door.

“Where you going, Doc?” asked the bartender.

The door opened and a crowd of men came into the bright light of the bar towards a table by the stage. The bartender could not hear if the old man answered as he walked out into the dark cold night.

The blonde walked out from behind the stage.

“Where’d the Doctor go?” she asked, seeing the empty stool. She looked across the room at the window, but could only see the reflection of the stage and the tables, for it was too bright inside the bar to see out into the dark night.



Seasons of My Childhood

by Alter Shimon Reiss

The seasons of my childhood were spring and summer. We lived in Harvestkill, one of the smaller towns in the Catskill mountains, and the winters there were very harsh. For me, winter was an excruciating blur of immoderately deep snow, and the industrial yellow of school hallways. Fall was also unpleasant. School, and biting winds, with only winter to look forward to. Spring and summer. Those were the seasons when I could live.

The house we lived in was a small grey stone unit, built to resemble the older and more stately homes of Harvestkill. It wasn't as big as those homes, but it was ours, and we all loved it very much. We a little lawn in front, and every spring the tiger lilies would bloom in that lawn right near the road. They were big, and orange—not particularly subtle flowers, but for me, they were the heralds of summer.

In early spring I could distinguish the tips of the lilies pressing up from the moist brown-black earth, and they whispered in my ear promises of freedom. Later, the buds would come out, long and green, and I would open them up, and stare at the inner parts of the flower revealed, until the school bus came. Then I dropped them, because boys did not play with flowers. But I still heard them telling me of summer, even later in the day from the depths of geometry class. When the buds first started to open, I was ecstatic for days.

Summer was coming. The trees whispered it, the birds sang it, and the lilies exclaimed it. Afternoons grew longer, and I went on hikes in the light green forest on weekends. I would take a black and white spotted notebook along on those hikes, and I would write stories and draw pictures in it when I stopped to rest. And the hikes I took ...there was a trail that went from my house through a blackberry patch that in spring was filled with small pale flowers, and always filled with deadly sharp thorns. Then the trail meandered through a stand of young birch whose white thin trunks swayed in the wind, and whose loosely jointed leaves made a noise like an ocean in the slightest breeze. Then the trail set off for the vast depths of the Catskill forest preserve, where it crossed and merged with so many other trails that it was impossible to follow anymore.

But I had been along that trail many times, and I knew where many of the other paths went. One to a blueberry patch, where I would stuff my face in the summer, until the blue juice

stained my lips and fingers and shirt, and I was slightly sick to the stomach. Another to a shallow lake, filled with cattails and algae, where I could catch sunfish, and sometimes bass, and always bullfrogs and newts and minnows and tadpoles. A third went to a stand of white pine, and another to the haunted house.

That path went through a stand of hemlock that spread dark and thick and it always seemed to be dark and cool there, no matter how hot it was elsewhere. Then it followed an ancient trunk, long rotted and covered with beefsteak mushrooms the size of dinner plates, over a creek and over a stone wall that had long worn down to an irregular pile. There the trail ended, but on the other side of the wall there was a small clearing, and in that clearing was the haunted house.

It was on a spring Sunday that I first gathered up enough courage to step into that clearing. The ragweed and Queen Ann's Lace and other grasses were very high, and I had to wade through them to get to the house. It was a wooden structure, bleached grey by the elements, and one half was a good deal lower down than the other. There were many houses like this one in that part of the country serving as farms and hotels, or gathering together in camps, and bungalow colonies. If they could not make a profit, they were abandoned, and the forest took the land back. They were dangerous places, with broken glass and rusty nails, not to mention the occasional nest of rats or snakes.

Because of their decaying state and creaking hinges children naturally referred to them as being haunted. I had been in others with laughing groups of my peers, finding the occasional treasure like a mildewed Archie comic or broken picture frame. But this one had always been mine alone, and I had admired it from afar until that spring day, when the lilies had opened, and the cicadas were loud, and I stepped into its clearing.

I had my notebook with me, of course. It was nearly full at that point, and the last pages would be filled with the story of the Haunted house. I had read about pressing flowers, and that week, the pages of the notebook were filled with lilies that I had found, and was pressing, so that they would last me through the winter.

I don't know why I decided on that day to enter that house for the first time. Maybe I was growing uncomfortable with the acceptance of ghosts that I had feared since the first grade. Maybe I wanted to see for myself the ghosts that in my heart of hearts I always knew were there.

Whatever the reason, I went into the clearing. The sun was bright, in a pale blue sky, and a thrush was pouring liquid notes out into the air.

The front door was stuck, as I knew it would be. I stopped to consider. Once white window frames beckoned, but tiny sharp teeth of glass still rested in the edges of the windows. I tried the door again, putting my shoulder into it this time. It opened protestingly, and the sound of the hinge giving was satisfyingly ominous. I stood outside, letting my eyes adjust to the dusty darkness.

I still can't say what I really thought that I would find in that house. Floating heads and sheet clad ghouls were never really part of my mythology. I think that I wanted to find something personal about the builders. Something specific, something sad. An old picture, one of those luminous black and white photographs, perhaps of a child, or of a young woman. An ancient dress still hanging in an upstairs cabinet. Something that made it a part of history, a part of a story that I could see and feel and touch, and take home and wonder about. Even a playbill, or an ancient and moldy Sears Roebuck catalog would have been enough.

But there was nothing. Not a piece of furniture, not even a second floor. The house was nothing more than a shell. The second floor had collapsed onto the ground floor, leaving a huge pile of rotten boards and rusty nails on the floor. I was shocked, and I felt that my haunted house had betrayed me. I turned and ran from the house, back home. I tried to enjoy myself in the forests after that, but I never could. Without the mystifying specter of the old house looming over everything in the back of my mind, everything was changed. Everything was somehow smaller, less satisfying, more insignificant.

We moved to the city two years after that, when my father had to get a new job, and I was never faced with forests much after that.. That shell is still standing, or so I've heard, and it will stand for a thousand years after that, I think, as it now has a story inside it. I left my notebook behind, with the lilies I had been stockpiling against winter. I lost it when I ran from that place, and I never felt able to go back and get it.

ESSAYS



When you're a writer, you no longer see things with the freshness of the normal person. There are always two figures that work inside you, and if you are at all intelligent you realize that you have lost something. But I think there has always been this dichotomy in a real writer. He wants to be terribly human, and he responds emotionally, and at the same time there's this cold observer who cannot cry.

BRIAN MOORE



A Librarian in Babel: Chance, Infinity, and Meaning in Jorge Luis Borges

by Asher Friedman

If the mark of a great work is that it spurs a multitude of interpretations, then Jorge Luis Borges' story "The Library of Babel" certainly meets the criterion. Critics have explained the piece as a representation of the Freudian unconscious (Monegal 25), an exposition on the process of creating literature (Sturrock 102-103), and as a dark perspective on the potentials of science and knowledge to improve the world (Bell-Villada 112-113). Another mark of Borges' greatness is his facility in alluding to other works (Christ xi-xii). On one level, Borges' stories dialectically allude to each other. On another level, Borges alludes to a vast stream of metaphysical thought that extends through centuries and across continents. The "Library of Babel" alone features two conflicting strains of metaphysical thought left seemingly unreconciled by Borges.

From the first sentence in "The Library of Babel," Borges makes it clear that the story is a model or perhaps a parable of our own universe. The narrator immediately distinguishes between those who call their world a universe and those who call it a library: "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries" (Borges 51). Each gallery contains identical utilitarian furnishings, bookshelves and two closets in one of which, "one may sleep standing up, in the other, satisfy one's fecal necessities" (Borges 51). A mirror and two lamps complete the inventory of the gallery. Interestingly, the only objects in the universe that seem to serve no purpose are the books themselves. The books are nonsensical, "formless and chaotic...a labyrinth of letters" (Borges 53). Those who call the universe "The Library" hope beyond hope that some hidden book in some faraway gallery has a page or even a line of sense from which insight can be gleaned. The narrator, by refusing to refer to the universe as "The Library," indicates his bias. He cannot believe that the identity of his world can be ascribed to the useless texts occupying its shelves; either something beyond the books gives the world sense, or there is no meaning.

This argument between the hopeful vision of the world as a meaningful library and the more cynical belief that it is simply an unexplainable universe carries on throughout the story. At some point in the distant past, the disorder of the library was solidified in theory—scientists of this strange world posit two axioms that explain the chaotic configurations assumed by characters in

the books. The first, that "The orthographical symbols are twenty-five in number" (Borges 53), sounds rather obvious but in fact is as revolutionary as our own discovery of the atomic structure of our universe (Bell-Villada 113). The second axiom posits that "In the vast library there are no two identical books" (Borges 54). From these axioms, it is "deduced that the Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that is given to express, in all languages" (Borges 54). While at first the library's inhabitants exulted at the realization that all truth is by definition contained within the volumes of their universe, they soon returned to their former misery, for these meaningful volumes are beyond reach --the chance of discovering a book with even one page of meaningful (true or false) text is almost incomputably small. "It suffices that a book be possible for it to exist" (Borges 57), so that thousands of galleries may contain the same chaotic volume, with variations between them as small as one letter.

This is the premise of Borges' story, and within it, undercurrents of two thoughts oppose each other. The more recent of these literary philosophies is elucidated by John Sturrock: "The creation of literature by the mechanical combination of its graphic constituents is not a new idea. We have lived for years with the speculation that, given time, so many monkeys sitting at so many typewriter keyboards and hammering blindly away, must end by producing...*Paradise Lost*" (101). The source of this idea, however, is not literary, as Sturrock suggests. Rather it originates in a statement attributed to T.H. Huxley, a prominent supporter of Darwinian evolution theory in the late 19th century. To creationists and others who pointed to the order and apparent design of the universe as proof against theories of random evolution, he said, "Six monkeys, set to strum unintelligently on typewriters for millions of millions of years, would be bound in time to write all the books in the British Museum...If we looked through all the millions of pages the monkeys had turned off in untold millions of years, we might be sure of finding a Shakespeare sonnet amongst them, the product of the blind play of chance" (Qtd. in Jeans Foster 54). Borges in his brilliance extended the metaphor. If the monkeys typed for an indeterminate amount of time, 'the Library' would result. On a literary level, Borges disapproves of this metaphor. In his "A Note on (Toward) Bernard Shaw," Borges points out, "If literature were nothing more than verbal algebra, anyone could produce any book by essaying variations...the formula produced by this process ...would lack all value and even meaning" (Foster 208). Borges insists that for a sentence

to possess meaning, it must consist of more than words; it must be the result of some creative author, and this authorship must be reflected in the work. Since the universe in "The Library of Babel" is a literary one, I would suggest that Borges' disapproval extends to it as well. The desperate search for meaningful texts is useless, for even the most lucid and accurate text in "The Library" is merely the product of cold chance, and possesses no more value than a volume full of chaotically arranged letters.

The second source for this idea of a universe containing every possible variation is called 'the great chain of being' by the intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy. Lovejoy traces this idea back to Plato's *Timaeus* and then through the history of western thought. This 'principle of plenitude' (Lovejoy 52) posits that for God's creation to be complete, it must contain within it everything possibly creatable. As Spinoza formulates it, "whatever we conceive to be in the power of God necessarily exists...from the necessity of the divine nature must follow an infinite number of things in infinite ways -- that is *all* things which can fall within the sphere of an infinite intellect (Qtd. in Lovejoy 152). In a letter, Leibniz explained his formulation of the concept as follows: "All the different classes of beings which taken together make up the universe are, in the ideas of God who knows distinctly their essential gradations, only so many ordinates of a single curve so closely united that it would be impossible to place others between any two of them, since that would imply disorder and imperfection...And, since the law of continuity requires that when the essential attributes of one being approximate those of another all the properties of the one must likewise gradually approximate those of the other, it is necessary that all the orders of natural beings form but a single chain, in which the various classes, like so many rings, are so closely linked one to another that it is impossible for the senses or the imagination to determine precisely the point at which one ends and the next begins (Qtd. in Lovejoy 144-145). This, in effect, is Borges' library, in which "it suffices that a book be possible for it to exist. Only the impossible is excluded" (Borges 57). Every conceivable variation, whether it be in the placement of a comma on page 235 or in the spelling of a nonsensical fragment like 'hehfhuauy' must be represented in the library, for without each and every variation, the library is not complete.

Plato, Spinoza, and Leibniz had more in mind than a simple description of the state of the universe when they developed their metaphysical systems. The principle of plenitude played a fundamental role in their theodicies. Each justified the existence of evil by proving that evil must

exist, since a world without evil would not be complete. According to Leibniz, God “wished to communicate himself, even at the expense of that delicacy which our imaginations ascribe to him, when we assume that imperfections shock him. Thus he preferred that the imperfect should exist, rather than nothing” (Qtd. in Lovejoy 223). Lovejoy points out in an endnote that ‘perfection’ and ‘fullness’ are primarily antithetic rather than equivalent terms...The principle of plenitude is rather the principle of the necessity of imperfection in all its possible degrees (339-340). For God’s creation to be complete, it must include sinners as well as saints, philanderers as frequently as philosophers.

This theodicy would then explain the necessary immensity of the universe in “The Library of Babel.” For the library to be complete, it must contain every possible book. When computed, the monstrosity of the number of necessary volumes is astounding. Foster in *The Philosophical Scientists* worked out the number of possible variations possible in attempting to pen a 159 letter sonnet by random choice of letters. There are 3.6×10^{175} possible permutations (Foster 52-53)! To achieve every possible book containing 410 pages with 3200 letters per page would require a near-infinite number of books.

The conflict between the two strains of thought in “The Library of Babel” now becomes obvious. The atheist evolutionists and the God-defending theodicers used the same conception of the universe to support their views! The evolutionists proposed an infinite number of random chances to prove the lack of an active Creator, while Leibniz and Spinoza proposed infinite variation as a necessary condition for a perfect Creator.

How can we resolve this seeming contradiction within Borges’ work? The solution lies within the story. The story is about a search for significance and meaning not unlike the one religious individuals pursue in our own world. Many inhabitants of the library are convinced that within some book, some page or paragraph or line, lies meaning, and with that meaning they will attain knowledge of the Creator. Borges describes this search in “The Secret Miracle”: “Toward dawn he dreamed that he had concealed himself in one of the naves of the Clemantine Library. A librarian wearing dark glasses asked him: ‘What are you looking for?’ Hladik answered: “I am looking for God.’ The librarian said to him: ‘God is in one of the letters on one of the pages of one of the four hundred thousand volumes of the Clemantine. My fathers and the fathers of my

fathers have searched for this letter; I have grown blind seeking it.' He removed his glasses, and Hladik saw his eyes, which were dead" (Borges 92). But the cruel truth is that by necessity there is no significance in the Borges' library. Every word possible is instantiated in one of the infinite volumes of the library. The truest statement in existence may be (must be!) bound in the same volume as its negation. The despair felt by the inhabitants of the library is not caused by the immensity of their task -- instead it is the innermost recognition that their search is futile. Any sentence exists in the library due to a chance combination of letters, and as Borges is quoted above, any sentence "obtained by this process...would lack all value and even meaning" (Borges 208). So in his portrayal of their world, Borges destroys the argument of the philosophers. Their theodicy intended to avoid the problem of evil by negating the meaning of any evil occurring in this world as a necessary occurrence of chance. But by insisting on a world infinite in variation and devoid of repetition, Leibniz and Spinoza destroyed *all* meaning. Meaning entails abstraction, a conception of some ideal. But by definition, no one book in the library, no one idea, no one object in the real world can be pointed to as a paradigm -- the difference between two entities is so minute that no single book has any greater significance than any other. Every book in the library (the most meaningful and the most random) and every entity in the real world (the most perfect and the most evil) is an equally random, valueless product of chance.

This is exactly what the evolutionists attempted to prove. However, the story is no vindication of the atheist position. Foster, in analyzing Huxley's claim that monkeys typing for millions of years would recreate the library of the British Museum, calculated that the improbability of randomly typing *one* line out of all the 700,000 books in the museum is 8.6×10^{39} (56).

Foster concludes that, "allowing Huxley all the monkeys there have ever been, typing for all the time there has ever been, there would be a shortfall ratio of more than one hundred million millions, and that only relates to the chance of typing one line of one book in the British Museum" (56).

So there is no practical philosophical conclusion attainable from "The Library of Babel", for both of its philosophical sources are disproven. But in the end, Borges doesn't mind these contradictions. As Sturrock puts it, Borges "appreciates speculative styles of philosophy for the very reasons that most practicing philosophers in the West despair of them, as offering

unfounded, contradictory, and frequently incredible representations of the cosmos...He works the history of metaphysical thought, therefore, to great advantage and to the great disadvantage of the reputation of metaphysical thought” (21). Borges’ story reveals the two major philosophies behind it to be nothing but a bunch of intriguing ideas.

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There's a Hole in Mr. Bucket

(An analysis of the first detective in English literature)

by Dov Simons

Following in the footsteps of its Gothic father, the nascent mystery genre developed over the second half of the nineteenth century. The main character in such works was, and still is, a man or woman with the ability to perceive hints and clues others miss to interpret often confusing predicaments. The great investigators of all time, Sherlock Holmes, C. Auguste Dupin, Hercules Poirot, Miss Marple, Sam Spade, Perry Mason, Columbo, Inspector Gadget, and others vary widely in their idiosyncrasies, but all share that same uncanny ability to see through the mundane and commonplace to pluck out the truth.

So. What should we expect of the progenitor of the august line of esteemed British investigators? A man of unquestionable capability, a paragon of virtue who can do no wrong, no doubt. Yet, in Charles Dickens' novel Bleak House, we find instead Inspector Bucket. A somewhat skilled investigator, he sometimes causes unnecessary, highly undesirable consequences. Mr. Bucket finds his will not his own, but instead subordinated to more significant characters and more powerful institutions. Thus, his pursuit of justice is limited to cases which the dominant legal system wishes him to pursue. Consequently, Mr. Bucket often finds himself performing duties he frankly admits he does not enjoy and actions he finds regrettable. Like all others in Bleak House, Mr. Bucket is oppressed by the omnipotent Chancery legal system.

To be sure, Mr. Bucket executes his investigative duties in a tolerable manner, sharing his skills of disguise, observation, and deduction with all of the great investigators of subsequent time. He traces Gridley of Shropshire to Mr. George's shooting gallery, and cleverly gains access to the fugitive by passing himself off as a doctor (Bleak House 403-4). The detective's tracking ability also plays a large role at the climax of the novel as he follows Lady Dedlock across the English countryside, and eventually to Chancery (840-841). Esther comments on his ability to extract information from passers-by, and return "more alert than before" (828). He unexpectedly deduces that Lady Dedlock must have exchanged clothes with the Jenny (840). His uncanny ability (acquired from his consultive finger) to get into the mind of witnesses and suspects allows him to extract information and construct a psychological profile of them. His analysis of Harold

Skimpole (831-833) leads Esther to finally confront and condemn Skimpole (882-886). The most dramatic example of his abilities, of course, is his revelation of Hortense as the true murderess after observing her excessive mourning for Tulkinghorn (793-797).

But Bucket's actions cause unforeseen, disastrous consequences on a scale nearly unheard of in other such novels. Bringing Jo to Tulkinghorn (367-370) allows the lawyer to discover Lady Dedlock's affair with Nemo/Hawdon. To prevent the orphan Jo from telling anyone else, he "moves on" Jo, past treatment for his smallpox, to death (830). His confusion between Jenny and Lady Dedlock during the chase delays him long enough for Lady Dedlock to die of exhaustion. Revealing her secret to "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet" (783-785) and her status as a suspect (and her alleged motive) puts the nobleman under undue duress and contributes to his stroke and enfeeblement. Bucket does find Gridley - just in time to witness his death, again showing up too late to be of much help.

The problems Mr. Bucket inflicts on others stem from his field of employment - the law - yet he is genuinely sensitive to their feelings and the callousness of the justice system. Serving Grindley his "peace warrant" for threatening lawyers, he urges the dying man to resume his struggle, partly to encourage the man to stay alive, partly because "I don't like seeing a man giving in like this" - that is, giving in to Mr. Bucket himself, an emissary from the Court of Chancery (406-407). He also tells Mr. George his arrest on a murder charge is necessitated because "I have a duty to discharge," but is willing to delay that duty to allow the soldier to enjoy Mrs. Bagnet's birthday party. He delicately mocks the aristocratic nobility controlling the law with sarcastic references to the great ancestry of 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet' (781). Although never openly stated, Mr. Bucket's distaste for the law and disapproval of some of its actions are apparent. Perhaps that is why Dickens only gave the detective his title and surname, to imply that his personality, his soul, is suppressed.

Mr. Bucket finds himself in a dilemma; he disapproves of the British legal system and the misery it causes, and yet is part of it. He attempts to alleviate any harm done when he can, but often his actions lead to undesired, sometimes deadly, consequences. The first detective in British literature is an example of today's actual police detectives, who do a good job but often find the law preventing them from doing much good. Thus an august line begins with a three dimensional, albeit marginal character, tangibly human, unmistakably Dickensian.

Stephen Dedalus: Portrait of an Artist?

(Best Interpretive Essay: English Department Award)

by Yosef Shoshani

Although seemingly devoted to portraying Stephen's burgeoning poetic resolve—his “flight” into real artistry—Chapters IV and V of Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man actually establish Stephen as a mere aesthete, not yet artistically proficient. Indeed, the narrative technique in these chapters is confusing, and may divert the reader into believing Stephen an artist: the stream of consciousness method successfully engulfs even the most wary of readers into Stephen's thoughts; and it is from Stephen's inner perspective that the reader views him emoting feelings of liberation from the constraining Catholic priesthood to which he almost succumbed. Sightings of birds, for both the reader and Stephen, become a leitmotiv signifying Stephen's flight into a welcome freedom of artistic expression, into the liberating priesthood of art, wherein he ordains himself “...a priest of the eternal imagination” (229). Because the novel adeptly mirrors Stephen's consciousness, the reader must objectively strive to apprehend the nature of Stephen's progress as he matures, without solely heeding Stephen's own beliefs.

Susceptible to Stephen's overwhelmingly artistic thoughts—his desire, as Cranly puts it, “to discover the mode of life or of art whereby [his] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom” (246), his abstract discourse on aesthetics—critics such as John Blades have erroneously classified the Portrait as a *Kunstlerroman*, a catalogue of the protagonist's maturation toward an ability to fulfill his artistic yearnings. If carefully considered, the novel's title reveals a blueprint for appraising Stephen's development that does not require viewing Stephen as anywhere near the verge of artistry. Had Joyce entitled the novel A Portrait of the Young Man as an Artist, the reader would perforce evaluate Stephen as an artist. However, as Joyce's title indicates, the novel portrays an artist as a young man—when he is young and not yet an artist. After all, however intelligent he may seem as an adolescent, perhaps Stephen's artistic capabilities will only produce a fruitive end in his later years. And indeed, in Ulysses, Joyce confirms this approach: for the Stephen of Ulysses, though older and more mature than he was in the Portrait, has still not discovered a suitable means for artistic expression; and, employed as a teacher, he grows more financially destitute with each passing day.

In the Portrait, Joyce's generosity to Stephen is limited to the creative intellect with which he endows him. As a child, Stephen demonstrates artistic aptitude: he sings of a green rose (7); he meditates on the multiple meanings of words such as "belt" (9) and "suck" (11); and he even considers the aesthetic beauty of poetry: "How beautiful the words were where they said *Bury me in the old churchyard* (25)!" In his adolescent years, his consciousness of language extends not only to the meaning and beauty of words, but also provokes him to question how and why these words afford him pleasure:

He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to himself:

--A day of dappled seaborne clouds.

The phrase and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the greyfringed fleece of clouds. No, it was not their colours: it was the poise and balance of the period itself (166).

Ultimately, this need to understand the origins of his response to beauty in language leads him to form an aesthetic theory of his own.

However, Stephen's lofty intellect keeps him from recognizing the reality of Irish existence, and, consequently, from artistic success. He thinks in idealized, aesthetic terms, barring mundane apprehensions: in a rare moment, he condescends from his thoughts on the "essence of beauty...[,] glad to find himself still in the midst of common lives." Here, although Stephen expresses "glad[ness]" as he passes "on his way amid the squalor and noise and sloth of the city (177)", the narrative tone is essentially ironic: for this realization of his surroundings immediately follows feelings "that the spirit of beauty had folded around him like a mantle and that in reverie at least he had been acquainted with nobility" (177). Thus, Joyce portrays him patronizing the earthly "common[folk]" with his royal intellect.

Regarding himself an artist, Stephen deems it his mission "to press in [his] arms the loveliness which has not yet come into the world" (251). His belief in his predestiny as an artist comes with the realization of the mythic import of his name, Dedalus—though, in reality, it is a superficial and unearned title:

Now, as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy...

of the end he had been born to serve and had been following all through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being (168-169).

Ironically, in this instance, the “banter” of Stephen’s peers stimulates his epiphanic moment. “Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!” they cry to him in jest. Yet, their cries “flatter his mild proud sovereignty” (168): he fatuously sublimates their realistic “banter” to signify his life’s vocation.

Because Stephen is grossly insensitive to the realism of the world external to his thoughts, he does not produce good poetry. His inspiration for his villanelle takes shape in “vague” internal emotions, “an enchantment of the heart...”; “a spirit fill[s] him” (217). In his struggle to transpose this “sweet music” onto paper, into words, he relies on sheer formulaic construction: he muses over its “rays of rhyme; ways, days, blaze, praise, raise” (217); verses of exaggerated alliteration [“With *languorous* look and *lavish* limb” (223)...] complement these trite rhymes. When he speaks aloud a few verses of his villanelle, “the music and rhyme suffuse his mind” (221).

Stephen’s aesthetic discourses are further proof of his unreadiness as an artist. His theories are incomplete when compared to those expressed in Stephen Hero and Ulysses: in writing the Portrait, Joyce trimmed Stephen’s aesthetic theory to two key doctrines—the notion of the “epiphany” and the conception of life and history as a fluid series of presents. In the Portrait, Stephen attributes the origin of aesthetic beauty to “the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing” (213), first conceived in the artist’s imagination. This theory does not account for the external influences on the apprehender’s imagination, unlike his more maturely developed theory of epiphany in Stephen Hero, in which the *whatness* of an object “leaps to [the artist] from the vestment of its appearance” (SH, 213)—a factor external to the artist’s interior musings.

Likewise, in his diary at the end of the Portrait, Stephen asserts a linear and progressive view of life, wholly different and far less developed than the one he exhibits in Ulysses. “The past,” Stephen writes, “is consumed in the present and the present is living only because it brings forth the future” (251). Here, his only sign of maturity is his feeling of dissociation from his past.

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However, from a theoretical perspective, he seems to believe that his life is moving toward a manifest goal—artistic success. Perhaps, then, Stephen’s views are modified in *Ulysses*, after he discovers the future has borne him none of the opportunities he had anticipated in his adolescence. To be sure, in *Ulysses*, Stephen conveys his revised theory of life—considering it a fluid series of presents—in solemn, despondent tones: “When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once... (UL, 40).”

Stephen’s discourse on aesthetics functions as one reason for the reader’s repudiation of his art--of the villanelle he writes in the fifth chapter. In explaining his theory to Lynch, he propounds that

the personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak...The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails (215).

In truth, Stephen never points out what exemplifies the impersonal narrative. However, far from “paring his fingernails” for prospective readers of his poetry—far from the coldness and egotism this statement implies--Stephen exposes his emotions through maudlin verse. Though striving to “impersonalise” himself—to efface his identity from the narrative of his villanelle through directing the narrator’s questions and accusations to the poem’s temptress [“Are you not weary? You have had your fill of him? (223)”]—his emotionally overwrought state marks the poem. While uninspiringly methodic in form, the verse also reverberates with self-pitying allusions to Stephen’s own feelings. The only distance reflected within the villanelle is not one between author and narrative, but between the author and the “temptress” he covets. Stephen finds sympathy in his poetry: “Weary! Weary! He too was weary of ardent ways.” The line, “Tell no more of enchanted days” (p. 223), conveys his disillusionment with the land of his youth and the naiveté of his childhood; it foreshadows his resolution to leave Ireland, to detach himself from the Irish people--a “race of clodhoppers” (249)!

For the reader inclined merely to sympathize with Stephen and his artistic ambitions, Joyce strategically reasserts Stephen’s naive view of his predestiny as an artist in the last sentence of the

novel: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (253). Again, Stephen demonstrates his allegiance and trust in irrelevant superficialities. His name, as we discover in *Ulysses*, will not make him a good, successful poet. Thematically, therefore, Chapters IV and V do not optimistically portray the flourishing of a predestined artist; rather, they portray an aspiring artist, whose immature and introverted consciousness must set him up for immediate failure. Through Stephen, Joyce realistically conveys the great struggle and perseverance requisite for future triumph in any facet of life--a struggle Stephen must continue in his quest for artistic fulfillment.

GOLD AND SILVER PENCILS. (Hall Marked.)

