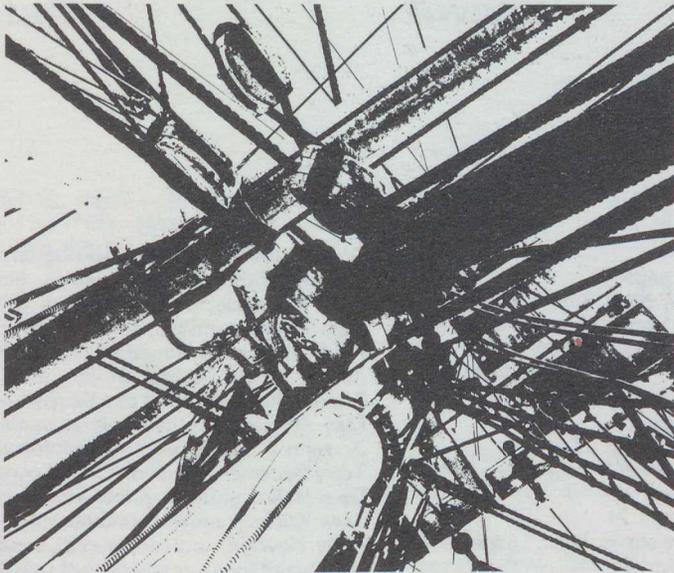




towers volumethirtysevenwinternineteenseventytwo

Scott Sanders



Towers 37

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Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

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first prize

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second prizes

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J. HAL CONNOR AWARD FOR CREATIVE PROSE

Judge, James Giles, NIU

first prize

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Judge, Barbara Palmer, NIU

Glynn Steele, A Journey into Outer Darkness: James Joyce's "The Sisters", page 45

MAUDE UHLAND AWARD FOR FRESHMAN WRITING

Judge, Bonniejean Christensen, NIU

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Z

Dick Steele

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

World without end. Amen. It's
A pleasant enough thought—
Until you really start to think.

Before I began to come apart
I had no idea just how much I needed
the possibility.

I mean the real possibility of that
Z.

I was like a monkey without a tail.

Bad digestion. Couldn't get to sleep.
Found myself worrying about just what
It was I was worrying about.

All the classic symptoms.

No, not love. Something bigger
And more God-awful
If you know what I mean.

Just fine now. Sleep like a stone.
Eat nails. Not a care in the world.

Just pinned the tail on the cosmic
donkey:

Z.



Tom McMahon

Close Quarters

Robert T. Donnell

1.
Half the moon
gently fills
a cloud's fur cradle,
warms and is warmed.

Unseen baby rabbits
curl and press
against the wall
while I sleep.

2.
Your cheek's aura
warms my palm
the instant
before touch.

Arms surround
our humid distance,
limp whiteness trapping
dense selfconscious breathing.

The Repairman's Widow

Karl Elder

I am the cricket with one leg,
Myself alone in others' dreams.

My wedding date is sealed for good
And hangs in varnish on my wall.

The nail that held it there is gone—
The years have simply kept it up.

If only I could say he went
Another way—surely it would fall.

Instead my heart has found a way
To keep itself alive and hard—

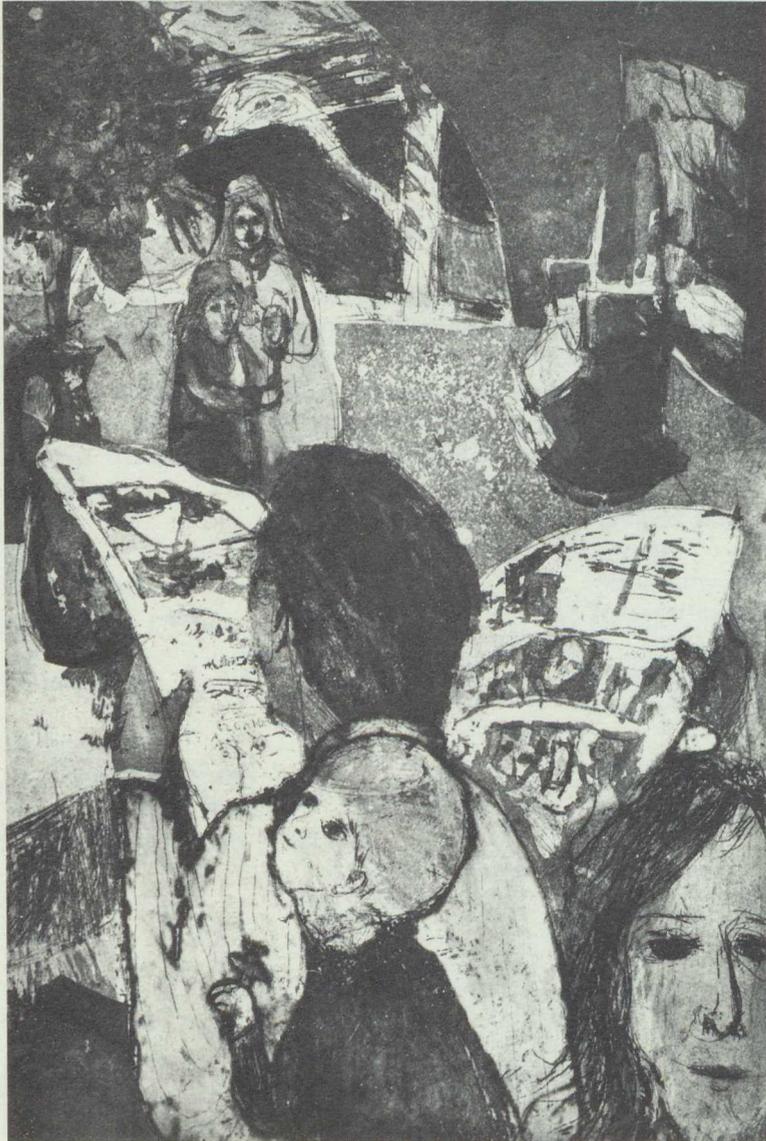
A monthly check still feeds me
And profits from the shop remind;

At sleep in town with the pliers
I sneak and snip lead-in wires.

Aunt Edna Always Wore

Christine Okon

hats in the sun and
sunglasses in the shade,
and spoke fearfully
 of hippyblackjews taking over
 in their siege of corruption,
and spoke fondly
 of handsome boys in hansom cabs
 (where romance was saved from the city rain)
 where tears should never be trusted.
and would work to conceal the pain
by tightening her orange lips
that shivered still in the sun.



Julie McCorkle

Michael

Jim Tyne

at dusk shadowy michael crept
to hide silent in dark corner
where his head hurt
all winter he lurked at the edge

once, with timid wavering voice
he sang a sad, mad melody
to soothe the trembling

in his mind, michael felt the distant
stealthy approach of the sombre
black dream, his only friend
and waited for that grim Dawn

Ward

James Minor

In afternoon the ward is knotted
with men, each one
a testament to his coming,

when men change
with no reason or rhyme
for understanding, life is
an eye within an eye,
ear within an ear,

faces that know nothing
more than faces are empty,
hold only the image,

on humid days when the screen
is overcast, warning of rain,
blood thickens and men sit fixed,
time measured by heaviness
in the eye.

A Pigeon

Guy Senese

I run on the grass, grass green as that
palette hue of the fierce painter. I'm at
some time of year when too many bubbles burst.
Bubbles of life pink, pink as the stripe licked first.

A new hue now, carved a bump in the green.
I fly, bitten is the wind in my teeth.
White and streak black, blows and is seen.
Pigeon lays straight, a chevron, its neck a flutter wreath.

Blown by wind, I guess, this next day I pass.
Rolled by wind, or something, seems fresh the gullet flask.
Clean by rain, the down will turn, little, in breezes.
Quietly, the smooth Black and White outside, freezes.

I have run by each day now, and turn my head away
Further, and Further, as I go. I did not see
the bird, as I passed its feather today.
I wonder. When I ran, I did not look. Did it me?

I rear for this, and in recompense, I dreamt,
a little curl arc in that wet. The fluff rent
from stately tail that once drew a certain figure.
That feather the breeze turns up. I do not fear
the cold dry pucker.

Old Widow's Death

Flora Foss

I cannot grieve for her,
a wash tub bubble burst
while a back was turned

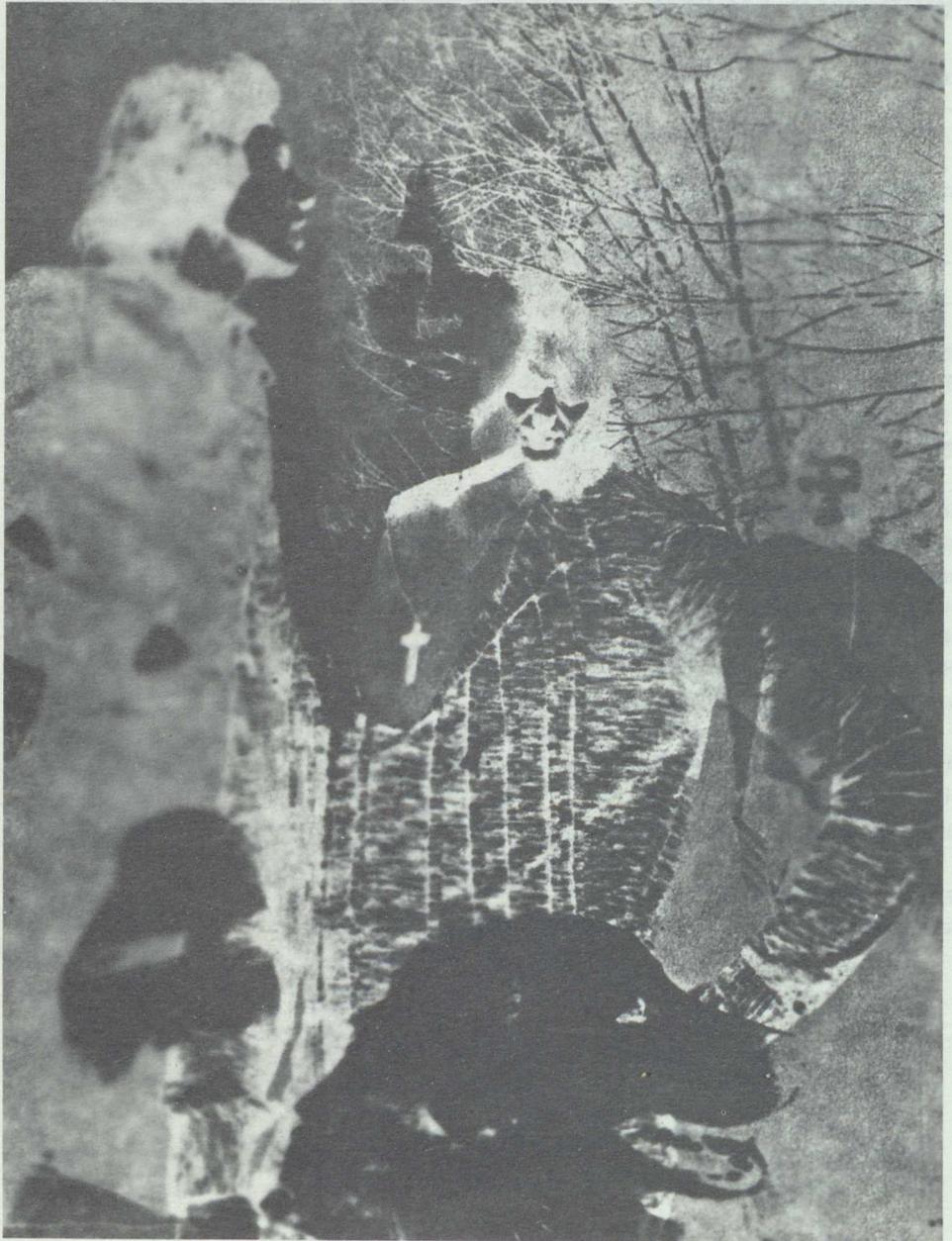
leaving no trace of meals taken alone
amid wet hung stockings,
the vigil toward dawn—
sorting the dust of old flowers
for a lasting face of love.

A life, impersonal enough,
hulking above a pair of solid feet,
the shouldering of so much dirty laundry.

Good old parts turning stubbornly
like crickets in a sphere of glass;
children sloughed off like skins.

And yet the sun sifts through her hair
where, bent over the day,
she wraps her children freely.

Restless, I seek my stream
upon that face.



Tom Kollins

Something You Never Forget

Dennis Dillow

Yes I remember it well. Of course I do, it's not something one easily forgets. She died on a warm Sunday morning in August—my wife. It was insufferable. Like being under a blanket when you were a kid, breathing that warm, damp air—one of those boyish ordeals, and then you could always come out whenever you'd had enough. But you can't escape from warm Sundays.

No, no. I do remember now. It was a Wednesday morning, had rained all night and the furnace had come alive surprisingly in the chill of predawn. My wife was lying on her back staring at the ceiling, rusty morning light on her ashen skin. Staring at the ceiling with unblinking eyes. For much too long a time. And I remember how cold and hard her stomach felt as I stroked it reflectively, asking her what was on her mind so early in the morning. And how I raised myself on an elbow to study her eyes, her face, the sagging rondure of a breast—all pale and distant and inanimate as soapstone. And being suddenly pleased by her thoughtfulness in holding her breath for me. Sour breath makes my skin crawl.

Or then maybe it was on a Saturday and was snowing. Was it? It is confusing now because in the back of my mind lies the impression of an inescapable heat, and this seems to have been very important. I guess it doesn't matter that much, but I wish I knew for sure in case someone ever asked me about it. Can't really blame myself, though. After all, it has been a year or two since she died. My wife, you know. At least.

I've been to dozens of funerals and have come to the conclusion that there is something unnatural about them; they're not fooling anybody with all that pancake and fauna, those bracing smiles and inane sermonizing. "My, doesn't she look nice. So natural. So peaceful."

She was orange and her lips were tinged blue through the pink powder and there were unfamiliar lines radiating from the corners of her mouth and eyes. She looked like she had been dragged through a wasteland, thrown out with

the evening garbage, had a bad case of locked bowels.

I wondered what they would have thought if I had started to laugh. Just to break the tension, or would tell how I absentmindedly dumped coffee grounds in the sink that morning and had clogged the sonofabitch up. Water all over the kitchen and a full box of Tide soaked through and completely ruined.

Nothing seemed to go right that day. I guess I actually did laugh a little when the hearse ran over a beer bottle and had a flat and the funeral director was aghast when he realized there was no spare. So they put the coffin in the back of a 1963 Buick station wagon and had to leave the tailgate down because there wasn't enough room. Later the funeral director said he was sorry for the way things had turned out, and I just smiled, trying to reassure him, and said my wife had probably thrown that beer bottle there and it wasn't his fault, for christsake. My wife used to drink beer right out of the bottle like a second rate bitch.

I had a dog for a while after my wife died. A miniature schnauzer—purebred, by God, but I got her cheap because she couldn't have pups, which is just as well as far as I'm concerned. Her name was Roxie and she was a lot like my wife except she didn't drink beer. Roxie liked wine—the cheaper the better. I used to catch the mutt smoking cigars in my favorite easy chair. I'd warned her about that a hundred times. You stay out of that chair. You've already burned two holes in it! But it didn't do any good. She used to do things to spite me. Oh, how clever she thought she was—calling the cops the other day after I had whacked her with a rolled up newspaper for putting salt in the sugar bowl. Then when the officers arrived she stood there like an idiot, babbling vicious stories about me. The officers nodded knowingly and backed out the door. I knew they wouldn't believe her. Schnauzers are notorious liars.

It used to be boring being alone. At first I read

a lot—from the classics to Zane Grey to TV Guide. But even that gets old so now I do different things every day, sometimes terrible things. I would put Roxie outside so she wouldn't see, even though she couldn't possibly understand, but even animals can sense perversities and are frightened by them.

I tied little mirrors around the inside of the toilet stool and even had one in the bottom under the water. Then I watched between my legs. But the lighting was too dim so I didn't see much and it wasn't worth the pains I had gone to in lining up those mirrors. I took a bath and decided to read from the Bible to get my mind off things, but I couldn't find it anywhere and realized with disgust that Roxie probably had it again. She sneaks off and reads the dirty parts and pretends to be so uprighteous and pious about the whole damn thing. Well, no more. I found her cowering behind the bedroom door, the vile little bitch, so I grabbed her up and tossed her in the oven, turned the light on inside and watched her yelp and crawl around but in the end she turned black as a cinder. I will not tolerate such wickedness.

Someone once said that mornings are the best part of the day. Who said that? I think I must have.

I used to be a milkman but the insurance company gave me money when my wife died so I've got plenty and I don't work anymore but I still wake up early from habit. My wife used to sleep late mornings and would bitch so much when I asked her to get my breakfast that I finally got used to cold cereal. In all my thirty-three years I've never learned the technique of cracking an egg. Eggs make me gag anyway.

Serenity is rarely memorable, but those mornings are still vivid, even though they were bland and unchanging. I used to step outside in the dark in that white uniform, struck dumb by the cold, drive to work in that cold car, and that soggy cereal between my teeth reminding me all day of those cold, quiet mornings. Up early alone, to bed early alone. She always stayed up late and the occasions were few when we ventured to bed together. I saw a lot of her back in those days. She had a large mole on one shoulder blade that always seemed to be regarding me. I hated to touch it. It was soft and pliable and nasty.

I slept late when I was a kid. Ate cold cereal too, but with zeal, genuine reverence. But now I consider sleep to be dangerous. It leaves you defenseless, easy prey to witches and devils.

Animals in the wild are no more vulnerable than when they are defecating. When you gotta go, you gotta go and there's no cuttin' it off. You ever wonder why dogs look so bewildered when they're taking a crap? The old fear of being jumped. Sleep is dangerous because there are no laws governing actions and events. The Nature of Sleep is malignant and sinister and nameless anomalies run rampant. I am lucky in a way, though, because I can dream in third person, you see, and can cause awful things to happen to others. *Others* get chased by tornados, *others* find themselves downtown bare-assed, have leeches and spiders swarming all over them, *others* fall down the basement steps into the vipers. And I am as detached as you please. Sometimes I awake in a cold sweat, laughing.

One morning I was sick. It had started the evening before as a kind of vertigo and progressed till my heart was tripping like a bird's. By the time I went to bed I was burning up with fever and afraid to close my eyes lest I be mashed under the thumb of Man Mountain Alvarez, an old nightmare nemesis of my youth. Somehow I made it through the night but when it came time to get up for work I knew it was going to be useless so I said to my wife, "I'm sick. I better stay home today. Get on the phone and tell them that I can't come to work. Tell them I have the shakes and a fever. I'll never make it through the day if I have to get out of this bed. Please tell them for me."

I could hear the wind outside blowing snow against the window. My face must have been glowing in the darkness, my throat dry and hot as a furnace.

"Do you hear me?" I asked when my wife failed to respond.

And then I knew she was still asleep. She hadn't heard a word, and when I looked closer I could smell her breath. It was warm and stinking and rotten as a dead, flyblown pigeon in the sun. I got up and went to work without eating anything.

There are lots of things I wish I had done, now that I look back. I wish I had stayed at work all that day. But I was all but delirious with fever and my eyes seemed to keep crossing and I couldn't drive the truck and I was sweating in the freezing air as I tried wading through drifting snow to surmount what must have been a thousand porch steps.

There are other things I wish I could do now.

Did I ever tell you how I can disappear? Yes I can. You see, I become invisible, drift into strange rooms on moonbeams and laugh at people's bedtime antics. It really makes them sit up, as you can well imagine. A lot of those fools just move out. U-Haul gets a lot of my business.

No, don't worry about me. I have plenty of ideas. I could be a smash on television if I wanted to. Remember how tired you used to get from the old canned laughs coming from nowhere on TV? Canned laughs are great, though, if you know how to use them. I would videotape a bunch of very sombre and serious events—funeral orations, weddings, the President declaring war, newsreels of hurricane disasters, Peruvian earthquakes, John Kennedy's assassination, Mussolini's upended body being stoned by frenzied Italians, a tour through a leper colony in Zambia—and throughout the footage I would insert canned laughs. A chuckle or two in throaty baritone as the priest casts dust to dust over the remains of Senator Dirksen. A snorting howl of delight from a chorus of raucous women as a bloated three-year-old Biafran child drops over dead in the mud from malnutrition. It would be a hit, outrageous of course, but a record setter on the ratings' chart. Each week the episodes would become progressively macabre, abominations would run rife, the more grotesque the funnier. Doctors fully frocked in blood spattered surgical gowns slapping life into a pink baby delivered by Caesarean section, then hurling the screaming little body against the wall, muttering in stark silence, "Poor little fella. . .he never had a chance." Guffaws and tittering from the laugh track. Yes, I think that everyone should be forced to laugh aloud at funerals, laughter should be piped in from hidden speakers, anyone caught shedding a tear would be shot. Death is hilarious, the best joke of all.

I came home about an hour after I had gone to work, just couldn't stand it any longer. The sun had just barely made a blush on the horizon and you could see the trees across the drifting snow in the field standing gaunt against the skyline. I unlocked the back door and went in.

I hear the bed creak like it does when you lash out in your sleep. This is an unfamiliar sound to me because my wife sleeps very soundly and never makes the bed creak. I walk down the hall, everything wavering as if I were underwater, and I hear another sound—bare feet hitting the hardwood floor. There is an urgency in the sound

and in an instant a naked man appears before me, some clothing tucked under one arm. He dashes past without a word. And I am staring from the open back door, immobile, staring at that naked running man. He is running right through the snow toward the trees across the field, white powdery snow flouncing up to his buttocks makes me think of a trail of dust.

And my wife, standing in the bedroom doorway, a roseate flush spread from her face across her bare breasts, is holding her flannel nightgown to her stomach and is backing away as I approach, trying to ward me off with a spiel of explanations, imprecations, screams.

I remember putting a pillow over her face to quieten her and after a few minutes she finally did shut up, the bitch. First time in twelve years, and I laughed at the uniqueness of the moment. And when I lay back to rest I thought how peaceful the mornings are.

My wife was lying on her back staring at the ceiling, and when I looked into her face and kissed her I thought she was so kind not to breathe her breath so I would have to smell it because I have a nervous stomach anyway.

I admit now that I was wrong all along. Funny how things will just come to you out of the blue. It was a *Friday* morning and it was in *December*. That sure sets my mind to rest.

Sam's Magic Power

Lon Anderson

boredom has made itself
a house guest
of someone whose only
wish is to be alone

through the night
colors play against
each other
for reasons known
only to them
areas of light
and dark change places
they become road blocks
of boogie and blues songs

I gaze openly,
with eyes closed
bright orange
yellow greens
give birth to
brighter day reds
not yet told.

reaching the canvas
my killers' ax blade
touches my throat
with yet another rye to drink,
so many from the first this day.

But the stair-doors
still remain closed
and the floor next to the top
can not be reached

stumble against bricks
to run through tall corn fields

and I smell the sweet powders
that Sam Beckett gave me,
his colors were brighter than mine
with one hand held high
Sam's reds became those of a
brighter day

the storm increases in fury
with colors flying
to unheard of places
the chain around them
let go of their hands
so they can swim from the shore
to be seen by screams of animals.

the door to the top floor
swings open,
my body in bottles
now sails a colorful lake
glowing with white
the powder of Sam Beckett



Heidi Block



Joe M. Allen

"Winter Love: Gestation"

Jerry Bernbom

for a time
I felt love growing
for solid earth,
and silos
stark against the sky—

today
it's all certain
standing on the embankment,
each foot solid
on a railroad tie,
my back to so much concrete
and the neon of the Strip—

the endless sky
embraces me
and the earth whispers
(dried grass
and barren trees)
her promises,
her winter waiting-song.

Analogy of Tai-Hsi

Dick Steele

At night at dusk
In the atmosphere
Where it began
Is a cygnet sounding
Unseen in the rushes.
It gives first voice
To warm nights
And wings the marsh winds,
Cacophonous, warm blood,
Air and feathers,
Fantastic in the bullreeds.

It is intimate analogy.
The scene is adopted
By the spirit
And the spirit caught up
And made manifest in the scene.

The Chinese painter understands it.
In this one by Tai-Hsi
Where is the man?
Water, cloud, rocks, mist, trees.
There! In the lower right-hand—
A bridge...

(One is distracted by the vagaries of mist)

On the bridge an infinitesimal figure.
He carries two buckets.
Shamelessly small among the pines.

One says there is very little
In the picture that is man.
Tai-Hsi objects,
There is nothing that is not man.

It is the essential analogy.
Tai-Hsi smiles,
He is not lost in the mist
That makes of the most of the mountain
An uncreated thing.
He walks bravely
On that stick of a bridge
Piteous in the midst of the water.
The pines and the jags enhance him.
He endures increase.

So with this picture too—
At night at dusk
The dark and stars and lake
And pines participate
In the gathering of things,
And in the marsh a cygnet sings.

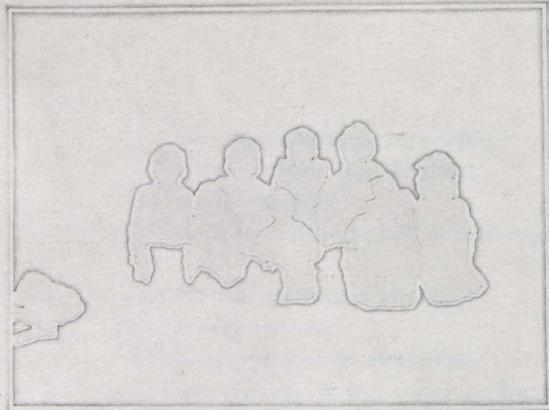
This Wintry Black

James Minor

The aura
of you,
the flesh
& spirit,
is more
like the hint
of flower
stemming
in mind
when thought
condenses.

At night
within the dark
of sleep
I dream
a memory
in grey

&
woman,
you are
the fog
filling
the soul
I rise
to give,
this wintry
black.



Charlie Guerin

"Do Come Home for Christmas, Dear"

Kathi Young

Now the timely-red drips holly berries
And green sprays mistletoe. Capture
The Mother's thin smile,
Her celestial glow before you;
Her babe in swaddling clothes.

I don't know. It is a fantasy
like Santa men
On street corners for many—
For many do believe.

It is all they have,
a promise
to be kept
in Lenten days
to come purple.

I'm getting closer to home.
Can I see Him yet?
Looking out the window...
Were those statues ever real people,
Did they ever come together,
Did she ever strike that pose,
hand over heart?

The Writing of Rivers

Karl Elder

Everywhere there's a river.
A river in walls
Running in veins, the wires.
You think your rooms don't sing?
Lay your ear on the air
Like one-sided glass,
More visible than real,
An oboe.
Listen to it wind.
Watch it flow
In the ear of children
Poking snakes in gardens.
The wind caused by tongues
Of snakes jeering at sticks
Ripples curtains in rooms
Where mouths of rivers
Are bottoms of cups, milk over
The rocks of your teeth.
You dream of night.
Parked beneath a lamp
The windshield streaks with rain
And shadows at her skin.
You need say nothing.
Here you learn how
She can be a river too:
On a page, a stream of words



J. John Dzuryak



Source

Flora Foss

I Vision

I believe I've glimpsed you,
the sun just coming,
the farm still shadows
in lightly painted mist.

Big red man
turning the Arkansas clay,
eyes against the earth.

So much husk rattles
in high wind,
the warm grain withered.

Yet I have been half-glad
you mist away with dawn,
strangely lost in the rocky fields
where love was scattered

and we made a harvest of our grief.

II Return

alone seeing
the dark glow of his eyes
you came. The house
warped, blistered,
linoleum guts sagging.

Came bringing the song,
a swell of Gulf air
in cheesecloth curtains.
Made the red rick-rack dance,
and you, the broom and me,
whirling and laughing
around the kitchen.

Half-giving,
the land, the years
yawned, claiming us.
Now as I leave again

I see you rooted,
a thin pine in strip hills,
heart of all that wraps,
fixes us,
however unwilling,
home.

III Dream

From the loft
I watch you still,
flowing brownly,
milk pails brimming,
immense hands opening to the delta,
broad currents of your brow
receiving, offering all.

Flow into you,
sorghum immersion,
I a driftless daughter
with the sloe-eyed, pulsing musk flowers.
Darkening under the sun,
falling away,
all leave by the same dream.

Your man,
thin Indian, withered,
died in the winter.
What banks you here?
ever deepening, endless,
sweet and blackened source .

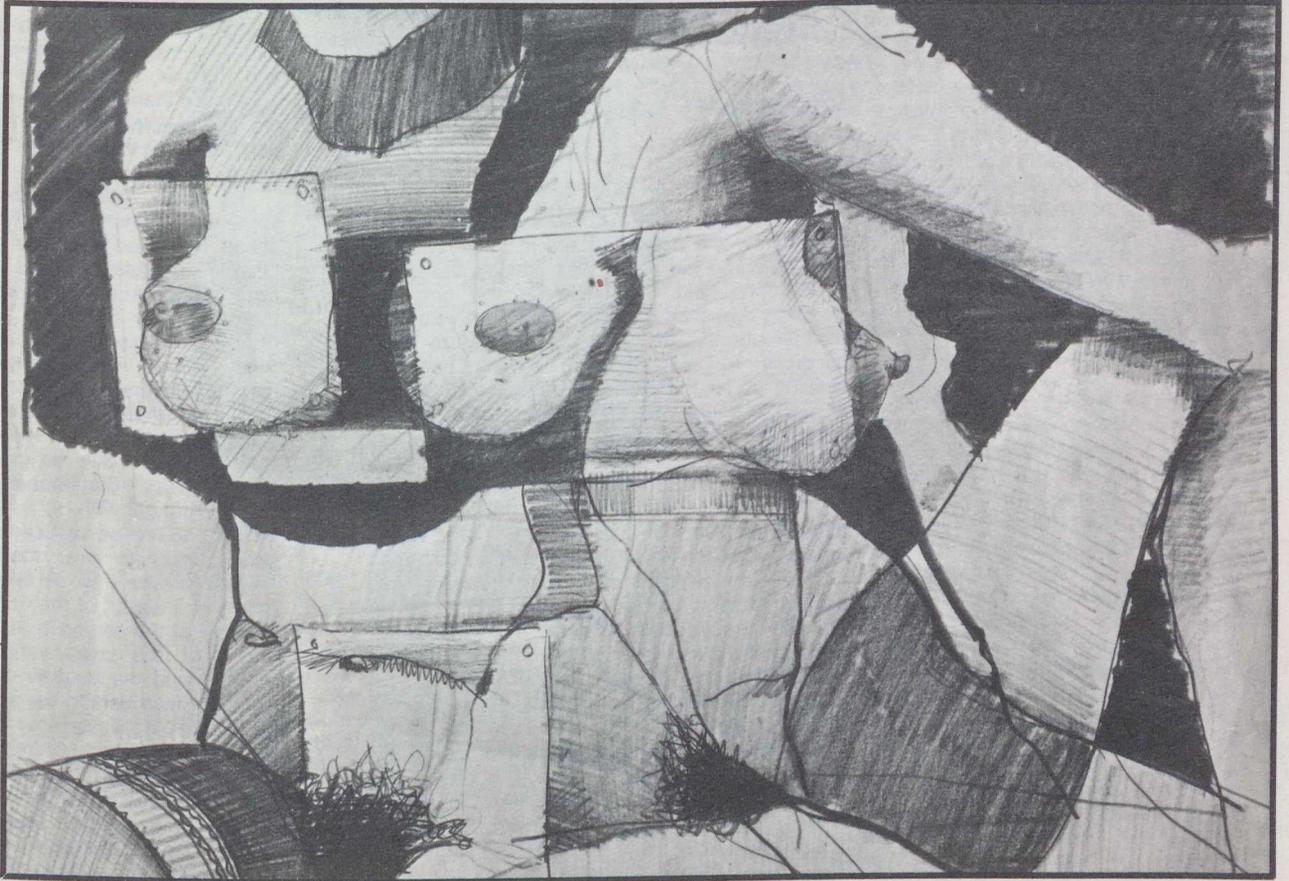
Seascape: Dunkerque 1971

John Cebula

A voice is shuttled across sand
where crabs dance between tides,
dancing while fish
flip silver grins
on the beaks of gulls;
is taken by the waves,
rolled between their talons
and palmed on the beach
of crumbling bare rocks
and broken shells.

The usual moon moves the usual water
breaking across the dunes,
driving before it screaming gulls:
a shuttled voice, freed and cracked,
sinks below the usual claws
ripping at the red-silvered hulls.

Terry Beckman



Christopher

John Manderino

Christopher looked up from his *Our Neighbors Below the Border* to see if Sister Therese was watching him. She was erasing the chalk board. She held the eraser in the firm yet elegantly detached way that his Aunt Lydia held the telephone. He was always slightly embarrassed to see Sister Therese's backside shaking under the layers of white gown as she wiped the board with short brisk strokes; unlike the wide clumsy sweeps the boys on clean-up assignment used. Christopher had always sensed something in the difference that seemed to sum up everything that separated him and his classmates from her and the other nuns. Never before today, however, had he felt so ashamed by the stern delicacy of Sister Therese's raw, slender fingers; for he knew that within half an hour she would suddenly order everyone to put their books away and proceed in line to the church for the special Holy Thursday confessions. He felt his head growing hot and his breath sharp and icy.

For weeks he had been secretly dreading this day, had only felt secure from it when he was able to make it seem far in the future. "An hour is a long time," he would tell himself, "and there are twenty-four in a day, and there are still several days to go." Now he looked at the clock to prove how slowly the second hand moves, how long even a minute is; and there were at least twenty before it was time. But as the minutes passed, he could feel sweat blooming under his green shirt and corduroy pants. "Baseball, think of baseball," he began telling himself. It wasn't so much the pleasantness of the game—the white ball, the cool grass—that could relieve the seriousness of the ordeal ahead, but, rather, the importance of the game, the fact that grown men play it, that they devote their lives to it, that millions of people pay to see it, that a player might skip mass, stay away from confession, swear, laugh, get into fights, that life moves in a wild, busy, raucous, back and forth way, that Ty Cobb was a tough sonofabitch and was important, very important, and that there are a million creepy, skinny people who touch

themselves at night and hang around urine-tacky men's rooms and have never gone to confession, and that he, Christopher, is a baseball player, and, more than that, the world is billions of years old, and people are forever dying and new people born, and that this moment is nothing, is trivial, is unimportant.

He was calmer now, had succeeded somewhat in detaching himself from what lay ahead. He pulled out of his back pocket his Little League schedule and tried to worry over the big right hander Acme Steel was throwing against them Saturday. Saturday. Two days. He thought of how suddenly it might become Saturday, how today would be two days ago. He felt the moment becoming less real, less urgent, taking on the weightless filminess of memory. For the first time since the announcement a month ago that the class would be going together to confession today, Christopher considered actually going through with it, actually going to confession, he had so succeeded in making the day seem practically over that he felt capable of the few minutes it would take in the confessional. But as he thought of the dark, hushed booth, the mumble of the person in the adjacent booth, the sound of the small window being suddenly opened, and the shadow of the priest's bowed, listening head behind the screen, he knew again he couldn't do it; for how could he put it, once the priest calmly asked him what he was referring to by "impure and sacrilegious thoughts?" How could he ever, ever, tell a priest that during devotional prayers to Mary he not once, but several times, imagined the Mother of God without clothing, with large, glossy breasts, and twin beams of holy gold light pouring from each nipple? Suddenly, Sister Therese spoke. "All right, let's put everything away and very quietly get into line for confessions. We follow the seventh grade." Christopher had that dizzy, giddy feeling he always experienced before doing something desperately wrong.

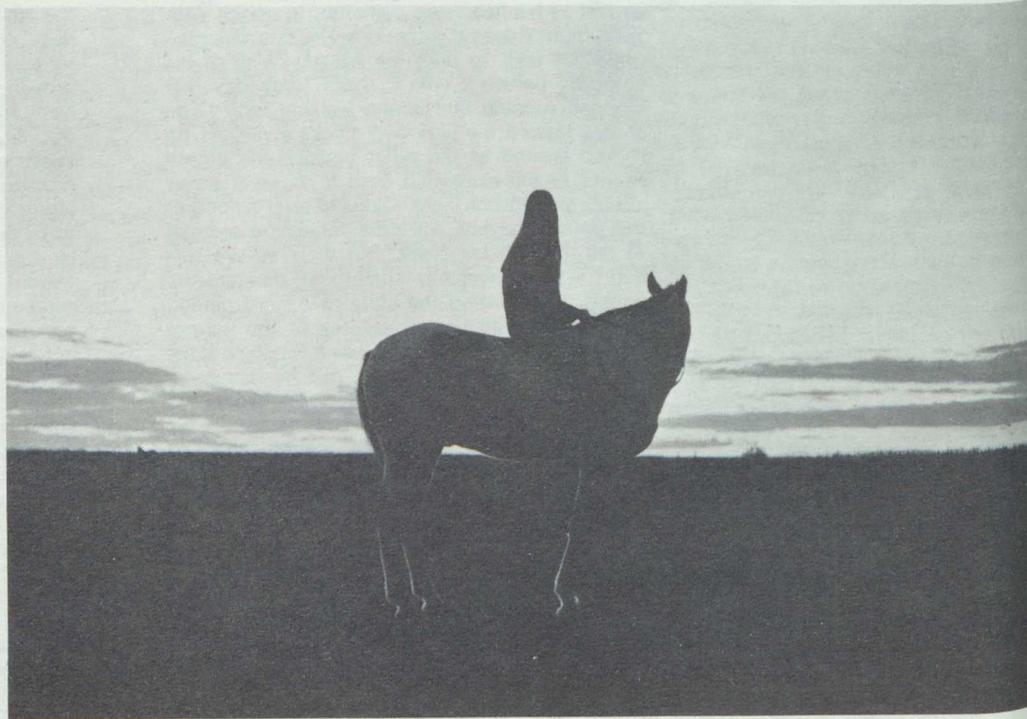
Walking in line down the long dark hall that led to the side doors of the church, his legs felt wobbly, and his steps were cloddish and deliberate. Run, he must run. There was a side exit along the hall he could dash through. He'd be seen, of course, but he'd be well gone before Sister Therese, at the head of the line, would know. In the several seconds before he would reach the door, he considered what seemed the only other alternative—go to confession but fail to mention *that* sin—but he had decided long ago

against that, a sacrelige itself, and now again refused to take such a sinful way out. Here, then, was the door. For a moment he hesitated, but, as he often did when immobilized by fear, he punched his open hand and shouted to himself, "Now!"

He was running. It felt good to be moving just as fast as his head was spinning, to watch with wind-blurred eyes the cracks in the sidewalk race under his feet, to hear the whistle-swish of his corduroy pants. It was a sharp, grey day. He stopped running and began walking with large strides toward the park two blocks away. As he looked around at the quiet houses, the empty streets, he felt estranged from it all, as if these streets and houses were not his to exist among at this part of the day. A sudden loneliness seemed to fall through his chest. But then, as was his habit whenever doing something dangerously wrong, he assumed the state of a third person narrator, relating the adventures of the young, wild, Lincoln O'Shea. "This was a tough spot for Linc," he began to himself, "but he had been through a lot of wild adventures more dangerous than this. So the kid just put his hands in his pockets and walked real slow toward the park. He wasn't even scared when he saw the man coming the other way down the sidewalk, even though the kid did cross the street. 'Can't be too sure,' he said to himself as he spit, but not through his teeth like he was trying to be cool, but just because he really had to. Then he started running. Linc ran fast because, you see, he was a baseball player too, one of the best. You could just tell by the way he ran with his head down, bent forward, toes turned in, like Luis Aparicio. It was too bad for the kid that he had to lead this life of danger, always hunted after, and he was kind of wishing he could just be a ballplayer, but, you see, the kid was a wild rebel too much and he just wouldn't put up with that strict stuff from them like everybody else did." He had reached the park. He quit the narration. He felt ugly, weak, and impure next to Lincoln O'Shea.

The park was empty. The swings and monkey bars somehow reminded Christopher of the dime store Santa Claus on break he saw last Christmas, smoking a cigarette, tired of his job, sick of all those beaming selfish faces. He walked to the baseball diamond. He stood at the shortstop position. He smoothed the dirt around his feet with an arc-like sweep of the tip of his shoe. He stepped onto the infield green, yanked up a

handful of grass, and jiggled it in his closed hand. Then he rubbed his hands together till the grass had smeared his palms with strokes of green. He walked up to the slumping pitcher's mound. He picked up a small rock by his feet and fired it toward the plate. It struck the steel wire backstop with a weak ring. He ran to the plate and stood in the slope of the batter's box. He slowly scanned the whole field. It seemed asleep or, rather, like a dear old friend who for some reason didn't recognize him. A weak, scared feeling was growing tighter in his chest. He ran towards first base, rounded it and, head down, hands clawing the air, raced toward second; "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah," he muttered tightly as he crossed second and churned toward third; a giggle was growing now like a bubble in his chest as he swept by third and drove toward the plate. He touched home and, without slowing, started toward first again. "Oh shit, will you go?" he screamed to himself. On his way to second he saw a small flock of sparrows in the grass of short left field, playfully tugging on a shredded popsicle wrapper. He stopped running. The wind, sweeping out of left field, cut through his damp shirt, lashing his skin tight to his bones. He thought of Ty Cobb, an old man in a shiny wheelchair, pissing in his flannel pajamas. He felt betrayed and naked. The birds in left rose together in a brown fluttering cluster. They hung in the air for a moment, scrambling about like confused dancers, as they searched the wind's direction, then swept off along its undulating course. He longed for their mindless simplicity, the freedom of their blind indifference. "Christopher," someone shouted. He stiffened as if shot. It was his mother. He recognized the casual voice she always affected when he had done something seriously wrong, that didn't require her, that frightened her. She was leaning out of the car window with her hands still cupped around her mouth. The white scarf over her curlers hung to one side, as if hastily tied. Shame burned and swelled through him as he walked toward the car, scratching his arm with a scowl, as if pre-occupied in his annoyance with the make-believe itch. As he reached the car he pretended a fit of coughing, which he kept up as they drove away, till he was able to manage only a feeble hack. Finally, she spoke. "Oh, this car. Feels like it's gonna break down any minute now." He was counting the number of telephone poles they passed. His eyes were burning with tears.



Geroldstahl in Late November

to Sabine Westerberg

Andy Niekrasz

The sky's contracted into gray clouds
loaded down with winter,
dragging across the Breisgau valley like an old cripple
ready to collapse.

The fruit trees've been picked clean—
their crooked branches trembling,
arthritic fingers,
in the cold.

A lonely pear tree
drops a curled leaf or two.

I try to shake off
thoughts of home.

Snow

Gary O. Holland

I

the sound of snow touching the ground

late at night

I walk out into the cold grey light
of the moon

and white hot meteors of snow arc and plummet to earth

— immediately I am not here

but somewhere out in the densely starred universe

a cold drop on my face

and just as quickly

I return

II

as I walk through an empty field

without a sound

even weeds are taking on a fragile loveliness

even my eyelashes

heavy and damp

I should like to die this way:

late

later than when the moon is out

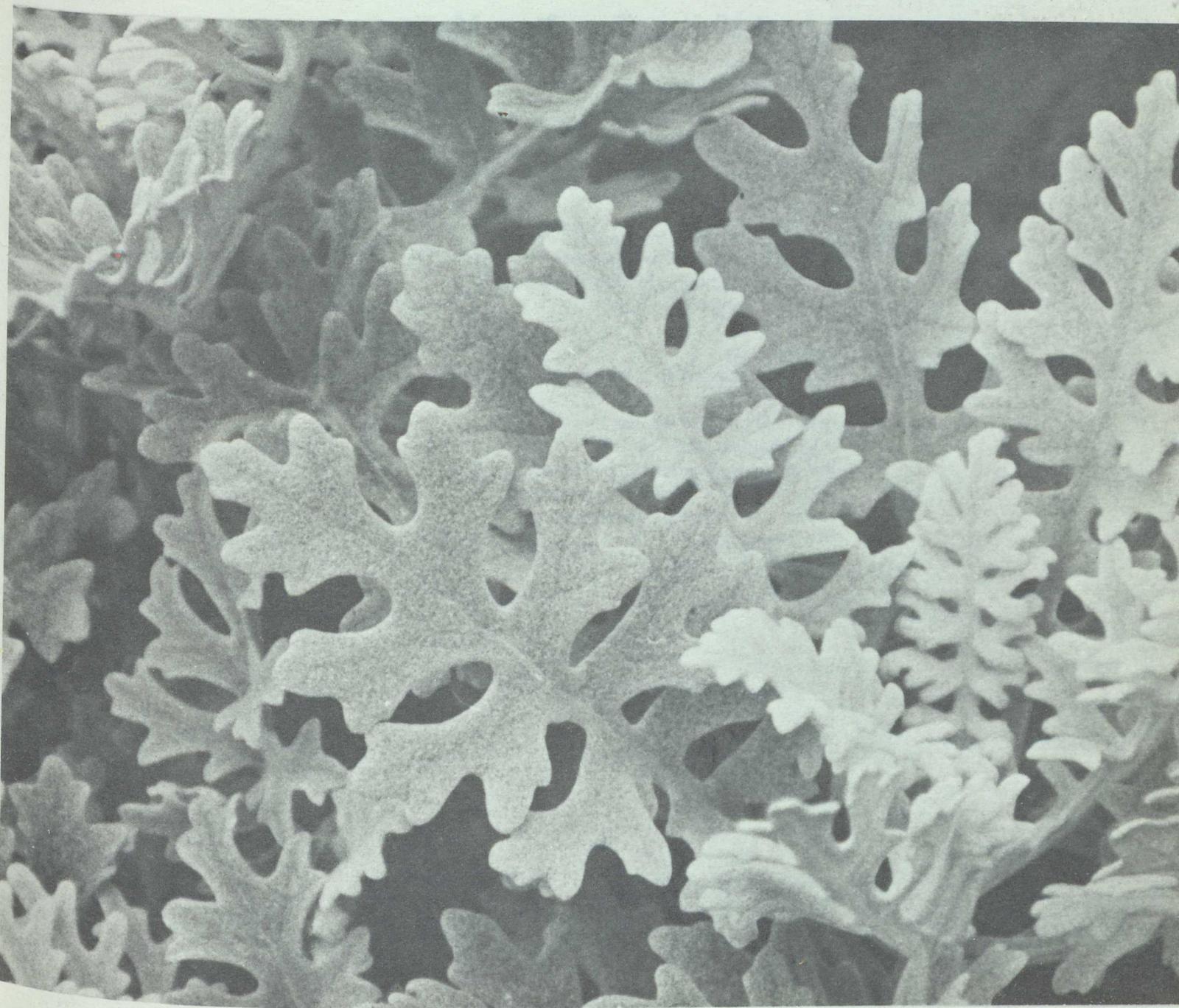
to lie down naked in a field

and allow

the snow to caress me with tiny hot shivers

and melt

and settle in the silvery grass beside me



A Last Visit in Taos New Mexico

Carol L. Mitchell

I

the air was stiff
from the heat of a seared sun hanging
by chains so its bell won't beat
out the noon hour, ignoring the season's
change a winter curdled sour

tumbleweeds
that once skipped to a desert november chant
free wild
now tangled inert against building
sides thorned wire borders
the street dust puffs filled the heat
with each step filtered on just shined
shoes, wind whined around ears
that didn't hear

II

on a porch mr pacheco viejo
one hundred three
this year will not chance a smile
from his throne today and you
little angel juanito stopped
your feather dance play and came here
a tear for a cool kiss
i touched your brown cheeks and knew
you too will miss them

last night
i danced full headdress
indian vision
legs stubbed and varicose tight
tribal hymn chanted
—blue lake god you don't need these two
thick rope arms swung
until hands hung loose like twin nooses
coffin cold

[Untitled: Two Parts]

Jerry Bernbom

I see—touch
watching
feeling poems
gather and dissolve
like smoke
in rolling patterns
from a hand-rolled cigarette

it's not the cold
makes my fingers tremble,
spill tobacco,
leave illegible lines
of pencil-work
instead of verse.

at home
on a snow-bound farm
with snow-scaped fields
and snow-shadowed trees

more than leaning
wire fences
or acres of white
keep you from me

like smoke
frozen in flight
from my chimney
I halt
unable to paint you
a single crystal
of my snow.

November Moratorium

Gary O. Holland

THE OLIVE ORCHARD, Van Gogh

Painted during the artist's voluntary confinement in the asylum at Saint Remy, this scene depicts the moment when the ripe olives are harvested. He wrote of his picture, "The whole is a very subdued range of colors. It is a canvas worked at from memory after the study painted on the spot, because I wanted something very far away, like a vague memory softened by time."

—Leaflet, National Gallery of Art
Washington, D.C.

I. Coming Into Washington

For a long time
the only light in the lonely dark
was scarcely visible at the far tip of the wing
of the roaring airplane.

Then suddenly they appear below
as though someone has spattered mercury
on black velvet:
neon signs become multicolor stars
and cities swirled galaxies of light
on the black cosmos.

As the plane turns and sinks
the earth rolls away then back
like a wave on the endless sky...

II. Candlelight Death March

From an unseen cemetery
to the Capitol they march
one by one
like risen spectres of the dead.
Each carries a candle
that powders the misty darkness,
each bear the name of someone dead
around his neck like a millstone
trying to put on with solemn agony
that agony of dying alone in a steaming jungle:
Screams! Gunfire!
the desolate dust of a helicopter landing
in punctured eyes
and slowly

each sense extinguishing itself.

Puff out the candle,
Place the name in an unpainted coffin.

III. The City

The city is filling overflowing with people,
they flock like pigeons on every lawn,
on every statue:
a marble general is not indignant,
his century gaze has come to understand
the ebb and flow of ideas.
A young mother, hair in brown braids,
nurses her baby on the Capitol steps,
while FREEDOM stands high above
in green tarnished bronze.

IV. March

Before I had seen them scattered in groups
throughout the city,
now they were surging through every street
towards monumental strength:
an ocean of people
grating against the coast of war.
Four hundred thousand people flood into one area
and we cannot move.
A stoplight beams
green yellow red
green yellow red
for an hour and I have not moved.

The day is cold
but the wind turns warm blowing across the many people,
by the monument we build fires,
we laugh, we sing,
tomorrow we will hear that the president watched television.

(The thousand faces have since blurred with each other,
but the face of one boy
gentle and softly brown
sometimes comes into focus:
he is still offering a half-eaten sandwich
and smiling,
but I refuse and he fades into the memory of the crowd.)

In a puff of cold wind
the area clears
and left are only
smouldering fires
and a few lonely men
picking up the leaflets
that rustle among the autumn leaves.

V. Leaving

Engines roar
less loudly than the shouting
of half a million marchers,
and my body is pressed gently back into the seat
by the moving jet.
For a second
the death agony of a soldier returns,
the smells and sounds of the people,
then we lift slowly away
from the lights of Washington.

VI. Autumn Again

A year ago
the world seemed ripe with peace,
and we labored to pluck the olive branch
that swirls with the sky.

But guns do not reap harvest,
and those days when we hoped for peace
are slowly fading
like a vague memory softened by time...



Holly Newton

sometimes the mind sees hope
for finding what the soul seeks;
sometimes not.
in either frame the seeking is the same.

to date uncertain what the seeking's for.
though she has not found it,
she still insists that it exists
and her soul still searches:
it won't believe that god is dead.

(seeking, the body cannot rest;
distraught, the mind cannot lie still.
it is two o'clock;
i know it by the feel.)

Jean Tessier Nash

Plato Catches the Drips

Ann Bailie

A brilliant shade of fuchsia
Mingles with older forms
Already set in their ways.
Having claimed their hold
To the Chianti Classico, Vintage 1967
They contest the appearance
Of those, warmer,
And younger,
Who slip past Mirafiore
And harden on Paterno Imports Ltd.

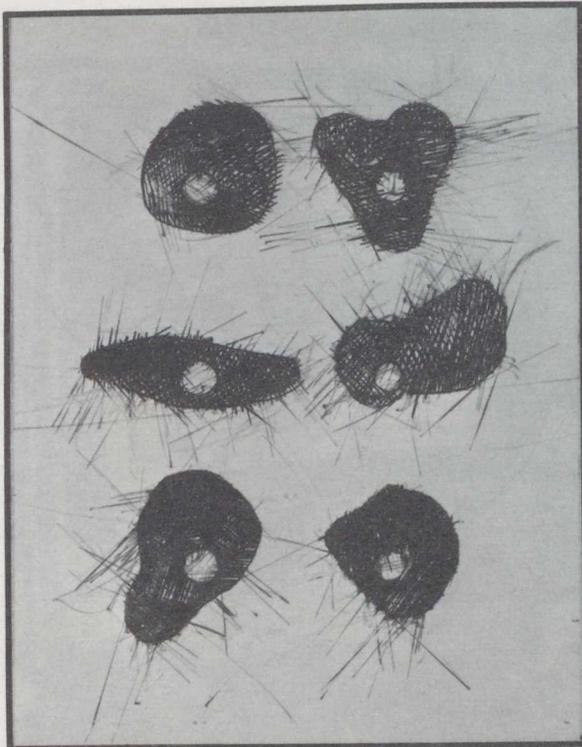
Feeling Horny in Amsterdam I Decided to Write a Dirty Poem

Andy Niekrasz

That blonde over there — the one with
the big tits straining her
Power to the People sweatshirt,
begging to be let out to play —

the one with the sunkissed legs
splitting the air apart
like an atomic nutcracker
when she walks —

I'd like to gobble her up,
sucking in all her fucklusciousness,
and spit out the seed.



For a Friend

Thomas P. Liszka

- What does it mean to heap moist, root-routed spades of blackest dirt into a shady, gaping, cavernous pit; there inhuming deep, under heavy mud, under voyeur-worms, under a pressing world of blinded life, a seed?

By shoves, by gropes, by drinking in the slime, it grows by one dimension in a line against the weight of isolating mud, not knowing that it will, or has, become (for yet alone, yet blinded— by the sun) a flower.

Its petals, straining, grasp out at the sun— for brilliance reached alone is happiness. But might that ember ever be enclosed, t'would blaze through, as ever through the distance which once made the white warm petal luminous.



Lon Anderson

A Journey into Outer Darkness: James Joyce's "The Sisters"

Glynn Steele

Some contend that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. Similarly, a contention suggested in *Dubliners* is that the opposite of God's presence is, simply, his absence. Most obviously expressed in "The Sisters," the central theme of paralysis progresses throughout the collection, represented by the many characters who, numbed to the vital forces of life and divine hope, are, as it were, indifferent. But as central a theme as paralysis is, it may gloss over a more dreadful insinuation of the plight of some Dubliners. In "The Sisters," Joyce has created much more than a gray void uninhabited by a potent God. Here, he equates the absence of grace with a sinister and enticing hell inhabited by a damned priest who attempts to seduce a young boy, presumably so that the youth might share with him the torments he already suffers in his private outer darkness.

Recalling the awful sermons in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well as the personal hell envisioned by Stephen Dedalus, one realizes Joyce's preoccupation with the explicit, anatomical rendering of the region of the damned. If, as Tindall suggests, *Dubliners* laid foundations for several of Joyce's later works,¹ one might reason that an early manifestation of the Joycean personal hell is found in "The Sisters."

If it is difficult to accept the portrayal of a priest, one of God's elect, as a member of the damned, one need only recall the temptations of Christ, the torments of Job, and the enticement of Eve: all illustrate that those most precious to God are often those most cruelly tempted to stray from his service. Implying that Father Flynn has let slip from his grasp the chalice of the sacrament, the story could as well suggest that he has more purposefully thrust the cup from him, and with it, his commitment to God. His

priestly garments, the outward and visible sign of his calling, are sullied with snuff and have turned a dirty green. Perhaps the vestments are reflective of the inner self, implying that his spirit too shares the blackened, moldering condition so evident on the surface.

If a tragic flaw is present to hasten the priest's demise, it must be the sin of pride. When, during his visits with the boy he speaks of the duties of the priesthood and the gravity of the performance of the sacraments, he is, in short, describing power. Significant again in allusion to Tindall's proposal is that Stephen Dedalus was tantalized by another of God's humble elect who, in proposing Stephen embrace the priesthood, enticed the proud young man with a vision of power. Serve God though they will at the cold fire grates of his churches, two priests prominent in Joyce's fiction yet betray hubris, which so incongruously weds itself to the humility of the office.

The fall of Father Flynn as seen by characters in "The Sisters" thickens the shroud of mystery enfolding him. "And then, his life was, you might say, crossed,"² is Eliza's bewildered summary of the priest's carelessness, madness, and unfortunate end. The priest's sister may be terming his thwarted life "Star-crossed," but more likely, in continuation of the religious metaphor of the entire *Dubliners* collection, she suggests that Flynn had a "Cross to bear," a burden, perhaps, of some private guilt. Toward the end of his life, the priest betrays the curious and repetitive desire to drive with his sisters to Irishtown "just to see the house again where we were all born." (p. 17) Since the return to the birth-place or homeland usually indicates a desire to recapture lost innocence or to retreat to childhood security, Flynn's desire to go home may indicate an attempt to escape the burden of sin. Further

evidence of this is lent by Flynn's appearance in the boy's dreams as a looming gray head trying to confess. The insanity that came upon the priest, significantly, while he was in the confession box, may also suggest his prepossession to remove guilt. Yet the priest's sinfulness, whatever its cause, is in itself unstartling, as his mortality both occasions and warrants it. Not until the supposed passing of Father Flynn is examined does the full impact of his malevolence become realized.

"You couldn't tell when the breath went out of him," (p. 15) his sister tells us. The women cannot give witness to the fact that Flynn *expires*, that he actually *breathed out the spirit*. If his moment of passing is imperceptible, where is the distinction between life and death for him? Since his great body has all along been described as corpse-like, since his spirit already haunts the boy, I feel there is reason to believe that Flynn is already in hell as the story opens. One of the more frightful awarenesses Joyce thrusts upon Stephen Dedalus is that, if so destined, each individual experiences a unique and original hell. If Stephen envisioned stubble-feeding, dung-trailing goats as retribution for lust, could not Flynn's hell—punishment for severing his most-elect self from God—take form in the imprisonment of a priest in a temple of God from which God is absent?

For Flynn, we are told, the sacramental cup of grace "contained nothing." For Flynn, the empty confessional became no more than a confining mad-box of torment. Increasing, as it were, through time, the priest's damnation penetrated a smaller temple of God, the body. As if contrived by the Archfiend himself, the exquisite torment of paralysis separates the body from its faculties even as the man is separated from the Godhead.

Central to the story as well as to this discussion is the relationship of the boy and the priest. The primary insinuation of unwholesome camaraderie comes, ironically, from Old Cotter. The nastiness of his suggestion is repeated in the distastefulness of his person: His beady black eyes, his red nose, and the offer extended him to "take a pick at the leg of mutton" become suggestive of a vulture, who, beak tearing at the meat of the lamb, perverts the eucharist most foully. Since Flynn's sisters and the boy's guardians accept the relationship of priest and youth, why does Cotter know that it suggests

indecent? How does he know that there was "something queer...something uncanny" about the priest, and why is he the herald of death? Perhaps as a buzzard, he too recognizes and feeds on putrefaction.

Rendered by Joyce with artistic vulgarity, Flynn is pictured so offensively that one never assumes the boy is insensitive to his ugliness. Rather, the youth is fascinated by the priest's grotesquerie. Early in the story, he shows morbid preoccupation with three words redolent of imperfection, but most of all with "paralysis," of which he said, "It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work." (p. 9) This passage summarizes the alternating pattern of repulsion-attraction that the boy feels for the total world of Flynn's back-room hell.

The boy pays frequent visit to this tongue-lolling gargoyle incongruously buttressing God's paradise. He bears the gift of snuff as if in offering to a strange deity. As the Oracle at Delphi, breathing the morbid odor of the temple's decaying reptile fell into a trance, so does the priest, inhaling "High Toast," honor the boy's gift with a vision of catacombs and Napoleonic adventure. Given to the care of an uninspired aunt and uncle, the inheritor of a life confined by boredom and poverty, the boy would naturally shun his guardians' world of mediocrity, yielding instead to the seduction the moments of fantasy his audience with the priest provides.

More than offering glimpses of the other-worldly, the priest speaks of the solemnity of his office, of religious secrets so potently complex they become mystic in the boy's awe of their difficulty and power. Unable to understand the liturgical intricacies, the boy was yet made to learn the responses of the mass by heart and to recite them while the great corpse-like master looked on, pleased as if with the dark chant of a strange ritual. It was no secret that the priest had "a great wish for him," had already designed a future for the boy. Thus it would seem that the youth is already at least partially lost to this most perverted of Mentors: his soul, if not sold, as that of Stephen Dedalus, to a maleficent Rome, at least is bartered for in the sleazy marketplace of dirty Dublin.

That Flynn exercises magnetic power over the boy is illustrated by the frequency of his visits to the priest and by the disturbing nature of his

dream. Containing a vision of swinging lamps and long velvet curtains, it seems set in Persia. Mention of this distant and romantic land suggests part of the boy's attraction to the priest's world: the journey into fantasy. But the dream is not without its measure of fear for the boy, who says, "I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region." This description recalls the attraction-repulsion pattern of response the boy exhibits toward the priest: simultaneously grotesque and pleasurable.

It is interesting to consider this dream in light of the legend of the incubus-succubus figures, spirits appearing in the nocturnal and exotic dreams of young men and women. Creating fear and unrest, the visitants were said to be demons responsible for births of witches, demons, and deformed children. Father Flynn seems to exemplify this incubus figure not only in the boy's sleep but in his wakeful world as well, for even when not dreaming, the boy still experiences the distressing vision of the paralytic's disembodied head in its effort to fulfill the compunction to confess.

The notion that the boy was distressed, fearful and perhaps partially ensnared by the priest's microcosmic hell is reinforced by the youth's stating that he felt freed of something by the priest's death. But curiously enough, this release does not come until a visiting priest, Father O'Rourke, performs some holy ritual over Flynn's corpse. This done, the boy is relieved, and can once more walk, significantly, on the sunny side of the street. Thus it would seem that O'Rourke has performed not only a last rite, but an exorcism which frees the spirit of the young boy.

Although I do not suggest that Joyce intended "The Sisters" as a Jamesian *Turn of the Screw* sort of Gothic Tale, I think that speculation on the kind of sinister forces present in James's work would not be beyond Joyce's consideration. Moreover, Father Flynn seems as ambivalent a figure as was James's governess, vacillating between benign counselor and seducer, between messenger of grace, and instrument of damnation. So often in Joyce, the clergy are presented as far less than holy. In *Dubliners* alone, which begins with this most horrible priestly portrait, the figure of the priest gradually diminishes to a nameless, faded picture hung on the wall of a dead house. The priests of

Dubliners are dead or dying, preoccupied with the anatomical obscenities of mortal sin, or defrocked, or citizens of a crass world, or shabby portraits of their former selves. They come and go throughout *Dubliners* like bats flitting in and out of the crypt, the dirge of their mysterious presence echoed later by screams from the nun's madhouse in *Portrait*.

Luckier than most Dubliners, the boy of "The Sisters" has been released from these complex and malevolent forces which recall all those inartistic creativity-damning, love-preventing elements of the city that try to suck his youthful promise into their brown abyss. Yet one feels that this boy, the figure of any young Dubliner, will probably spend life looking over his shoulder lest the sinister demon of paralyzing Dublin too closely dog his footsteps.

Notes

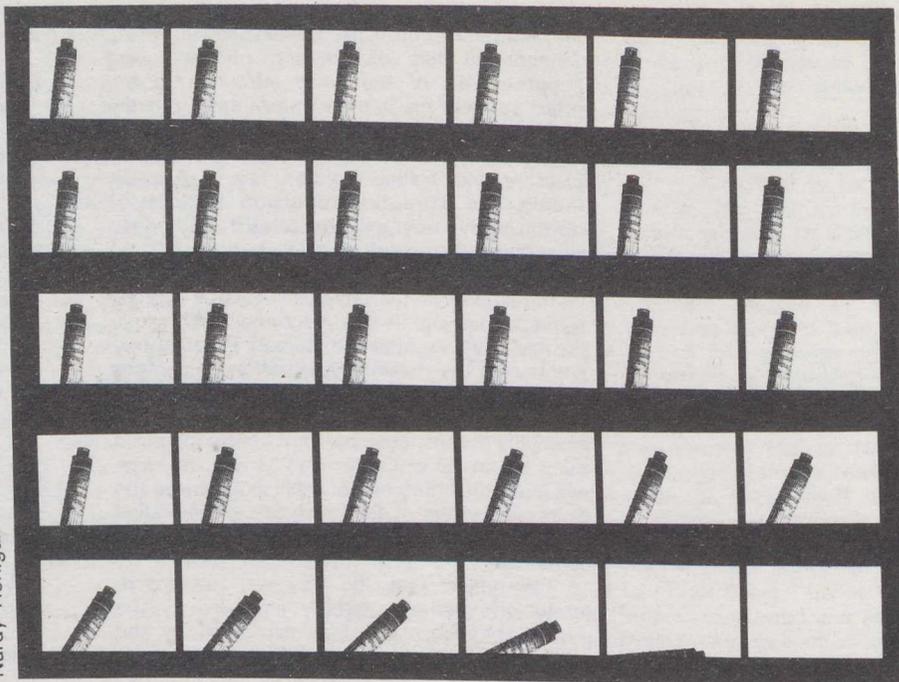
1.

William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*, [New York, 1959], p. 13.

2.

James Joyce, "The Sisters", in *Dubliners*, (New York, 1960), p. 17. Subsequent quotations will be cited within the text.

Nardy Henigan





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