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MIROSLAV HOLUB

A FIELD SYMPOSIUM
September 1993 marks the seventieth birthday of Miroslav Holub, a remarkable writer whose work has often appeared in this magazine. The poems discussed here by a group of poets who testify to the variety of their interest in Holub's work, along with the essay that closes the issue, an expanded version of a talk given to an Aspen writer's conference, make at least a start toward sketching out the uniqueness and substantial achievement of this modest Czech master, who would no doubt deprecate any plans to make a fuss about him — we did not consult him about our plans for this symposium — now or at any other time.

For something like forty years, Holub has pursued a career as a poet, often under the most trying and discouraging conditions, and his integrity and originality have by now come to be recognized on a planetary scale; he is truly read all over the world and translated into many languages. His universality reminds us that national and linguistic barriers, along with the exigencies of despotism, do not serve to inhibit the meaning and value of poetry. His poems often testify, not without irony and qualification of various kinds, to the fortitude and adaptibility of the human spirit, and we would remark that those same poems, by their very existence, their range and scope, stand as an implicit verification of that spirit, a body of honest and deeply imaginative writing produced in the face of official discouragement and historical vicissitude. It takes courage to write poems in such difficult circumstances, and the courage that the poems in their turn provide, for the writer and his readers, is not to be taken lightly.

What makes Holub especially remarkable among the East European writers who have struggled in adverse circumstances for much of this century is that he has also, simultaneously, managed a career as a research immunologist. This has meant keeping up with a vast and rapidly changing body of knowledge, difficult to master under the best of circumstances. And for Holub it has also meant a wonderful kind of traffic that few of us are granted, a steady and profitable commerce between the poet's and the scientist's ways of describing and understanding the world. The
many ways in which this pairing of interests and vocations has made Holub's work unique are part of the discussion in this symposium, but a full sense of them must be gleaned by reading his poems and essays, and to that end we append a bibliography of Holub in print in English, so that interested readers can pick up where the symposium leaves off, in the midst of the delight and enlightenment that so consistently characterize the world of this memorable writer.

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2. Prose

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*The Jingle Bell Principle* (Bloodaxe)
*Troubles on the Spaceship*, edited by David Young (forthcoming)
IN THE MICROSCOPE

Here too are dreaming landscapes, lunar, derelict.
Here too are the masses, tillers of the soil.
And cells, fighters who lay down their lives for a song.

Here too are cemeteries, fame and snow.
And I hear murmuring, the revolt of immense estates.

translated by Ian Milner
IN THE MICROSCOPE

Reversing two traditional stereotypes, Vladimir Nabokov once said that his ideal was to bring together the passion of the scientist and the precision of the poet — and that is what Miroslav Holub has done in his probing, improvisational, investigative poems. Each of Holub’s lyrics is an organic experiment in language, a testing of the limits of metaphor, not so much a rendering as an extension of experience. His work displays both a way of thinking and a method of inquiry, enacting what it is about: the condensation of disparate meanings, the transmutation of energy.

“What I basically like is novelty,” Holub has said, “knowing by experiment, trial and error.” He has shown a persistent interest in the continuum of living forms, the unceasing metamorphosis of shapes — hence his ongoing attraction to the biomorphic surrealism of Miró. His first characteristic strategy (the “before” section of Before and After: a rapid progression of near-surreal and quasi-objective images that move on the legs of a lucid Williams-like free verse) is evident in the early poem, “In the Microscope.” Here the research immunologist peering into the lens of a microscope becomes a modern-day Prospero, a dispassionate surveyor of worlds. What he discovers is a universe analogous or parallel to our own, the human estate in miniature.

“In the Microscope” consists of five sentences — images — divided into two parts, uneven stanzas. How much is implied in this short poem by the rhetorical structure of “Here too” — how little about the social and political realms (Czechoslovakia in 1958) is stated directly; all is inferred. The poem begins with a striking image of estrangement, a world, like our own, suddenly defamiliarized. The evocation of the broken countryside, of “dreaming landscapes” (moon-like, outside the pale) is followed by a playful, Marxist-inspired image (the idea of a playful Marxism may be an oxymoron) in which biological organisms take on the character of rural proletarians. And this is followed by an image of cells which like their human counterparts die heroically for an ideal, a song.

The poem concludes with a contrasting pair of assertions: a death-ridden image, a life-giving music. More fully entering into
the microscopic countryside, the vigilant day-dreamer envisions burial grounds for the dead cells. The invocation of a human-centered term, an almost classical notion of “fame” (the means by which soldiers become known for their deeds after death), is juxtaposed with the image of a snow-covered world (snow which covers up, obscures or obliterates). Underneath the snow, the poet (for by now he has become a poet) hears “murmuring,” the faint stirrings of life, “the revolt of immense estates.” The political intonations of this final phrase are inevitable, I think: the sense of protesting cells — the claim of citizens with distinct rights (the Estates of the Realm) — gathering to rebel or mutiny. What initially appeared to be a silent or uninhabited universe laid out on a glass slide for inspection has turned out to be a rich countryside teeming with rebellious life.

“In the Microscope” is a quick take, an act of attention. It implies the anthropomorphic even as it resists anthropomorphizing. It is the uncanny work of a poet who is both a keen observer — cool, anti-literary, watchful — and a wary visionary, a scientist who discovers the world — to borrow Blake’s words — “Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.”
I don't know what came first, poets or festivals. Nevertheless, it was a festival that caused me to meet Ezra Pound.

They seated him in a chair on a square in Spoleto and pushed me towards him. He took the hand I extended and looked with those light blue eyes right through my head, way off into the distance. That was all. He didn't move after that. He didn't let go of my hand, he forgot the eyes. It was a lasting grip, like a gesture of a statue. His hand was icy and stony. It was impossible to get away.

I said something. The sparrows chirruped. A spider was crawling on the wall, tasting the stone with its forelegs. A spider understanding the language of a stone.

A freight train was passing through the tunnel of my head. A flagman in blue overalls waved gloomily from the last car.

It is interesting how long it takes for a freight train like that to pass by.

Then they parted us.

My hand was cold too, as if I'd touched the Milky Way.

So that a freight train without a schedule exists. So that a spider on a stone exists. So that a hand alone and a hand per se exists. So that a meeting without meeting exists and a person without a person. So that a tunnel exists — a whole network of tunnels, empty and dark, interconnecting the living matter which is called poetry at festivals.

So that I may have met Ezra Pound, only I sort of did not exist in that moment.

translated by Dana Hábová and Stuart Friebert
SO THAT: ON HOLUB’S “MEETING EZRA POUND”

Time is a violation, someone once remarked in a lecture hall, and then went on to say that the time in which one is born is a violation, that time itself is a violation committed against everyone alive. It makes us finite, and therefore the violation is always personal: its final form is both banal and intimate, for it is simply one’s death, but finally all of us get the idea, an idea which is actually the absence of any idea, and, therefore, unimaginable. About as close as one can get to a statement of it is: “The meaning of life is that it stops.” And there it is: the empty, white, blank, unblinking center of it all.

It was an elaborately lovely way of saying the most obvious thing of all, and the pleasure was in the elaboration, and that, I think now, was the whole point of doing it, saying it there, in the first place, the pleasure of reformulating it.

Holub’s poem is, among other things, an elegy, and maybe the remembrance above isn’t inappropriate, especially because one theme Pound introduces and repeats in his Cantos is this one: “Time is the evil.” And Holub, if we attend to the precision of what is supposedly a vague phrase, and isn’t, concurs: “only I sort of did not exist in that moment.” For “sort of” is precise, at least in the American idiom of the translation. It means that condition, common to all of us, just beneath all possible explanation of that “moment,” that violation.

*  

But what first fascinated me about Holub’s poem had nothing to do with any of this. What I first noticed was a little riff, an echo, a variation, or so I thought. But it wasn’t an echo nor any real variation. It was repetition. It was two notes from someone else’s music, the two notes repeated no less than six times toward the close of Holub’s prose poem. As if in answer to something. But to what? To this, I think:

Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, orichalchi, with golden
Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids
Bearing the golden bough of Argicida. So that:

Ezra Pound, *Canto 1*

So that what? I still wonder. In Pond’s odd finale to his opening *Canto*, those two notes, that spondee, are not closure at all. The phrase leaves us looking off into space, at the cliff’s edge, with only a colon as a guardrail. Pound violates, as in fact he has already interrupted, his translation of Book XI of *The Odyssey* from a Renaissance Latin source, itself a translation, so that . . . But that’s just the trouble with it. “So that:” is just *left* there, staving off closure on the way to Hell so that everything might continue, so that:

So that a freight train without a schedule exists. So that a spider on a stone exists. So that a hand alone and a hand per se exist. So that a meeting without meeting exists and a person without a person. So that a tunnel exists, a whole network of tunnels, empty and dark, interconnecting the living matter which is called poetry at festivals.

So that I may have met Ezra Pound, only I sort of did not exist in that moment.

But does every poet go to Hell, just because Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton and Pound have? Is Holub going there? Or is that just Holub’s problem, and, in a way, our own, that it isn’t possible for us to get there anymore, that Hell has become the sound of chalk screeching on a blackboard in an auditorium, someone else’s paradigm, bundle of connections, history’s abandoned spiderweb with its cockeyed embroidery you can look right through? Look through to what?

* 

The riptides and gnarly surf that *The Cantos* are so famous for, all the discontinuities of the polyvocal, spatial, juxtaposed, referential form, conceal the larger quest of the poem, which is pas-
sionately involved in a dream of *continuity*, not its opposite. And critical terms, like those above, try to protect us from a poem that is, therefore, passionately involved in its own failure. Pound said of it, at the end, “It won’t . . . cohere” and “I botched it.” And certainly what moves us in *The Pisan Cantos* is the poet’s awareness of just how wrong he has been, what moves us is how the poet endures the tragedy of his name.

Holub arrives at the scene, intent here on restoring what continuity he can to the meeting, and yet ends up in a place at once too similar to Pound’s, and too different, a place that becomes space: “So that I may have met. . . .”

*So that.* If we take the occasion of the poem seriously, it’s impossible not to hear that insistent repetition as anything less than an answer, even though it is an answer that fails.

* O.K., so what happens? Holub takes Pound’s hand. But then Pound won’t let go of his hand. Or isn’t able to let go of it. Or forgets to. Pretty soon Holub is holding hands, not with Pound, not with anyone, but with space itself, which has a surprisingly tight, light grip.

“How is it far if I think it?” was the question Pound asked in *The Cantos*. For Pound, for the Modernists generally, it was never far. But in this curious scene, Holub is by now holding hands with the Milky Way. Pound is dying and his death is inevitable. He is alive and he is not alive and Holub is with him and not with him in this moment.

Holub brilliantly avoids the kitsch of a delusional *ars poetica* here, for it might be consoling to think that “living matter” is, categorically, poetry. But Holub is too tough for a kind of thinking which overrates all things. His qualification is searing: “the living matter which is called poetry at festivals.”

At festivals.

One need only to compare a literary festival with an ancient one to note, with Holub and Pound, what has been lost, or what we all assume has been lost. After all, we have little way of know-
ing what those festivals were like, and so we invest them with a vanished vitality. Who knows? Maybe the dancers on Crete were bored out of their minds like adolescents in a catechism class. Since we can never know, we speculate, we "invest" in the ancient ritual, and invest it with significance. How could we do otherwise?

World War II destroyed the Modernists’ paradigms, their systems, mythical methods, their luxuriant organic forms. Time is a violation. "It's a faster game now, and a ruder one," said Ransom at the dawn of our era. If one wants to see the difference in sharp relief, he should listen to first lines on tapes Harvard has produced, first to Wallace Stevens: "This is where the serpent lives, the bodiless"; and then to John Berryman: "Life, friends, is boring." The idiom travels a long way between the two.

* 

What typifies the era, the one we live in now?

For Pound, it was never far if he could think it. For us, what is near is often far away from us, what is far off remains remote even when we erase the distance between it and us, Heidegger thought. Heidegger thought our anxiety about the atom bomb was strange considering that "the terrible has already happened." It isn't that we can't get "there" from here; we can. What is terrible is that we simply can no longer get here from here.

And this I think is why Holub and his translators, who are brilliantly comic, absent, and relentless in this elegy, have chosen to represent the age in all its paucity, its frailty, the neutral modesty and honesty of the concluding figure in which "sort of" is given its full range at last, the idiom reminding me of those in wet suits, surfing off Capitola, spinning out just as the gray wall of rock looms up suddenly in front of them.

"Sort of" isn't glory. "Sort of" isn't tragedy. And that is the point. That is also the trouble. Holub's imagination, which does typify our time, seems to move at the speed of light. It delivers us from history, so that, in this way, Holub's elegy becomes a kind of birth. Everything comes rushing back into his poem but it's all without history: a train, a tunnel, a hand per se and a hand alone.
And even though it is a birth in a world that is now a vast orphanage, there's something familiar about it, "homey" even, for it's our vast orphanage. What would we do without it, and the irony of its ceaseless catcalls and whistles? I like to think that the poet who will write its epitaph is three hours old at this moment, only I sort of doubt it.
HALF A HEDGEHOG

The rear half was run over,
leaving the head, thorax,
and two front hedgehog legs intact.

A scream, cramping the mouth
open: the scream of mutes,
more horrible than the silence after a flood,
when even black swans
swim belly up.

And even if a hedgehog doctor
could be found in a hollow stump,
under leaves in a stand of oaks,
it would be no help
to a mere half, here on Route E 12.

In the name of logic,
in the name of teachings on pain,
in the name of hedgehog god the father,
the son and the holy ghost amen,
in the name of children’s games and unripe berries,
in the name of fast creeks of love,
always different and always bloody,
in the name of roots that grow
over the stillborn baby’s head,
in the name of satanic beauty,
in the name of fresh-dressed human skin,
in the name of all halves
and double helices, purines
and pyrimidines

we tried to run over
the hedgehog’s head with the front wheel.
This was like operating
a lunar module from a planetary distance,
from a control center seized
by a cataleptic sleep.

And the mission failed. I got out
and found a heavy piece of brick.
Half a hedgehog cried on. And now
that crying became speech

repeated from the ceilings of our graves:

And then comes death
and he will have your eyes.

translated by Dana Hâbová and David Young
Humor may seem to distract and irony offer emotional distance when a topic hurts; in the exchange between author and reader, the author acknowledges that possibility and hurts both of them anyway, using irony instead to intensify the emotional content.

One of my favorite illustrations of ironic perception in Miroslav Holub’s work is the passage in stanzas six through eight of “Half a Hedgehog.” Having accidentally run over the animal, destroying the lower body, the driver(s) — notice that the speaker says “we” in stanza six to maintain intellectual distance and indirectly disengage from responsibility — must kill the screaming hedgehog. Intentionally driving the car over the other half of the animal is impossible.

The driver tries, but the mechanics of the process require moral and physical coordination beyond human abilities. Also, the car seems to insulate one further from the deed. How difficult to run the wheel of a car, whose actual position the driver can only guess, over something as small as the head of a hedgehog. Ironically, it was easy to run over the lower half of the animal — what does that say about conscious control as a characteristically human feature?

Note the change from the safety of “we” to the “I” who must take responsibility and, through the crude instrumentality of the brick, kill the suffering hedgehog. A “lunar module” is, on the contrary, technologically sophisticated. There is “planetary” distancing — separation of instrument from directing mind — does scale change responsibility? Is the hedgehog an even smaller life because of the human technology of the car? The hedgehog, dumpy and inconsequential in human terms, lives on the fringes of human habitat. The car extends human influence but also separates the two realms by providing protective metal and larger-than-human-or-hedgehog size. Scale is acknowledged distance.

“And the mission failed. I got out . . .” — the extended comparison ends as a transition. Puck-ata, puck-ata: one cannot continue as Walter Mitty or the hero of an astronaut newsreel. Pro-
jection is evasion. The suggestion may be that substitution, or even the kind of substitution and distance that metaphor and simile provide, will be inadequate. The poignancy in "Half a Hedgehog" comes from the acknowledgement that the driver cannot totally lose guilt nor proficiently kill — he must soil his hands and his human feelings (a different approach to a similar situation in roadkill poems by Gerald Stern).

In coming to the hedgehog’s level, the speaker acknowledges kinship. We knew that kinship from the start. The development of the poem has prepared us for surrendering to that recognition. That’s why the last stanza’s twist works. In the Cesare Pavese poem ("Death Will Come with Your Eyes") which seems to be quoted here, one looks into a mirror to see death. There is an ambiguity in the original Italian poem: one could translate the line "death will come wearing [or using] your eyes." Before a mirror we can’t equivocate, using what we think we look like — death is the way in which we are mirrored, conjoined image and self, the point at which illusion cannot distort vision.

The first stanza gives us a picture to look at, a summary of parts, an inventory to show what constitutes a hedgehog which has just encountered the human — one term of the hedgehog-human comparison. An establishing shot. The delivery of the poem changes from stanza one’s orienting description, feeling for a mode because the event is too horrifying on the flesh-and-blood level and too trivial on the human scale. Stanza two reaches for tragic parallels. Is stanza three’s tension relieved by folktale references, the sort of Disney whimsy of giving animals human characteristics? No, one is more disoriented. After an accident, one behaves erratically, searching for a true, personal response, or an excuse. This reaction is manic.

All the listing of the interpretive arguments in stanza four, the human wish to mythologize, even through the scientific terminology which seems factual in that it recognizes the make-up of matter itself, remains a retreat or distancing from hedgehog flesh. All these interpretations still leave a human at the steering wheel.

If irony is distancing, it is also a way of looking at both sides
of a proposition at the same time and not a way to avoid responding. Is the observer's distance in a Holub poem ever great enough not to be able to feel? Later in *Interferon, or On Theater*, the volume in which "Half a Hedgehog" appears, a "lousy egghead" is caught under a streetcar much as the hedgehog is crushed by a car. "Collision" is one of Holub's most powerful poems. But there is an interesting reversal: the street-car driver won't move the streetcar because he won't assume responsibility — he wants to be "directed" to move by an official who will absolve him, free him before the driver will free his victim. The "lousy egghead" — actually, a scientist friend of Holub's, his mentor — coincidentally dies because the streetcar isn't moved.

The situation in "Collision" parallels stanzas six through eight in "Half a Hedgehog." Ironically, the "lousy egghead" dies apologizing, ashamed for forgetting the traffic rules though he "almost understood the approximate universe." His dying is a pattern in the universe like the "loneliness of the first genes/ accumulating amino acids/ in shallow primeval puddles . . ." or the process followed by the "mortal migrations of birds/ obeying the sun's inclination/ and the roar of sexual hormones . . .," the girl in the leukemia ward who keeps sliding into the toilet as she uses her hands to show what a mustache her doctor has. The list itself does not distance us from the "lousy egghead" or from our self-consideration, but the changing scale, the diversity of patterns in kind and urgency, the delay in storyline — all these notions make the effect greater when we return to the dying professor, now called "lousy egghead" rather than "he," as he had been earlier in the poem. There is pain for the speaker in using what might've been the streetcar driver's term, "lousy egghead." The list accumulates power as it comes to focus on the leukemia patient just before the dying professor comes back into the poem. The streetcar driver's attitude is the other side of the professor's humility, the perceptions of both are askew. And the driver would be horrified at the idea of using a brick to finish the professor.

Animals are different enough from human beings but close enough in certain qualities that Holub can use them as human substitutes, gaining perspective because of the effect of distance.
His animals are not exotic. What is the destiny of the fish in "Brief Reflection on the Butchering of Carp"? Is destiny purpose? Meaning? Can the carp intend anything? The poem suggests a human also stretches out, waiting for the mallet blow. The mallet appropriately indicates the completion of a commercial transaction, the matter-of-fact conclusion to an ordinary life. More seemly than using a brick.

Holub's flies are flies, and if the dogs suffer, long for companionship and are victims of doggy angst, they are still dogs in spite of human parallels and the ironies that shadow them — the way humans may enact higher dramas of which they are not aware in their own dogginess. "On the Dog Angel" is the apotheosis of roadkill dog, comic and rueful. This poem prepares us for the later poem "The Dog That Wanted to Return" — both poems are from Sagittal Section (1980).

The Dog Who Wanted to Return" is a longer prose poem about a universal innocent, a lab animal the storyteller traces through episodes of dog-life so close to human routine that the storyteller (the use of point-of-view is important here) doesn't have to forsake distance. As a lab animal, the dog finds solace in the communality of lab-dog fate. When by chance he escapes, the experience is not transcendent — he becomes a "dog-as-such," a reduction to dog-essence. He can't find a way to belong to the life outside his former kept-dog experience, nor can he have the freedom that not belonging should bring.

The dog returns to the pens in the first of several cycles of dog-confusion, but "such is the natural disposition of things: it's impossible to reenter one's destiny." He can't get back into the "cage" that was his. The distance here is alienation. "His flight became a circular pilgrimage from the non-existence of freedom to the indubitable existence of the cage." He's an "experimental dog" — as all life is testing — and cannot go back, "for such is the natural disposition of things: even though it's impossible to go back, it's imperative to keep going back."

At night the dog stays under the rabbit hutch, the closest he can get to his original condition, his eyes radiating "the red, reflected light of lamps and planets and the canine supernatural
life” until, in the cycle of his pilgrimage, he is hit by a car, becoming an “experimental dog angel.” His experiment is a testing of what living is. The poem has a development and complexity that “On the Dog Angel” can’t have because of its size. The poem also has a philosophical distance that “Half a Hedgehog” can’t have because the poem concerns existence as such.

“The Dog That Wanted to Return” is poignant because of the bemused tone in which the storyteller dramatizes “Everydog,” distancing himself through the conventions of the point-of-view — a different approach but as effective in its way as the involvement of the narrator-driver in “Half a Hedgehog,” who gives up distance, puts himself inside the mirror by coming close.

Holub is a master poet in every respect. His background as a research scientist gives him a vocabulary and philosophical inclination unique among poets. His precision, his economy of expression, makes other poets seem windy and self-indulgent. No other poet can startle in the same way with metaphor and console with wisdom. Who could not love his work and humbly salute him? Happy Birthday, Miroslav.
A child encounters a mirror and looks. 
The child grins and waves. 
The child droops the corners of its mouth 
and hunches its back. 
The child pulls down its eyelids 
and sticks out its tongue. 

It plays the fool 
and the sad sack and 
it plays Jack-in-the-box. 
Not yet, says the child. 
It’s not me yet.

Cronus the gravedigger used to get drunk after funerals and 
sleep it off in the morgue. Kids threw old wreaths at him through 
the broken windows: Goodbye Forever, Rest in Peace, and We 
Shall Remember You. The gravedigger tried chasing the kids for 
a while, then went back to his digging. At last he crawled into the 
grave and looked at the walls. He grinned and pulled down his 
eyelids. Not yet, he said. One day he went instead on his bike to 
get another bottle, fell down and broke his cranial bone. He was 
lying on the asphalt, his blue eyes wide open and his face sandy 
and rigid: he made no faces. Any more.

Mirrors come in October 
and stroll through the city. The images 
of images enliven November.

Pedestrians pass each other. 
Wait, says mother, 
Santa Claus won’t find you.

The child is happy, because Santa Claus 
prickles. The child mistakes him 
for a hedgehog. But it can see him.
Once in the highlands, on a dry, grassy hill, I met a blind horse at dawn. The horse began to follow me, taking quiet, regular steps. A huge owl sat on a bush and turned its head. We went down to the valley. When we reached the road, I sat on a stone and waited, wondering what one could do with a blind horse from the highlands. The horse stood humbly behind me for a long time. Then it turned back and walked uphill until it disappeared in the skies. The sun was high and a rawboned wind began to blow.

We are passing a suffocated pond.
I don’t want my gloves, says
the child, and searches with its little hand
resembling a tame finch
for my hand.

I observe
the meeting of hands
in the glassy December light.
I guess it’s not me yet.

translated by Dana Hábová and David Young
A GAME WITH FACES

Where to begin? No one word is better than any other, says Mandelstam. Let me begin from a seeing — from a vision: When I was a child I once saw, on Christmas Eve, a golden piglet. It ran across the roof of a house opposite ours, gleaming brightly. There’s an old belief in Bohemia: if you fast all Christmas Day, you’ll see a golden piglet in the evening. I fasted, and I saw it. But how did I know what it would look like? What information could I have had about Christmas piglets? This summer, having returned to my parents’ flat for a few days, I found the answer: way in the back of the desk I found an image of a golden piglet, in profile, stuck on the side of an old box of Christmas cakes. And that’s it — images of images enliven November. And December. And . . . What we can see and recognize are only images of images; we’re imprisoned in them, and they don’t belong to us.

The image of Santa Claus lived in a small basket on the wardrobe and prickled. It’s interesting that images can prickle. But Santa Claus isn’t a Santa Claus for Czech children, he’s little Jesus — “Ježíšek.” Which reminds one, of course, of a hedge-hog — “ježek.” Ježíšek and ježek. But the basket in which little Jesus lived was so small that I was afraid, every Christmas, that he wouldn’t be able to carry enough presents for me. If there weren’t enough, maybe it wouldn’t be me, then.

Miroslav Holub writes extremely beautiful and strange poems about children. Speaking for myself, I prefer them to his strictly biological and medical ones, and to his historical poems that set up parallels, explicit or implicit, based on an analogy. Analogy presents us — as spectators, readers, auditors — with a world of correspondences, maybe complicated and sophisticated, a world bound together with incredible and wonderful ties that is nevertheless clear and understandable in its principles. In short, a world that is calculable. “In analogy there sleeps a fiend,” an old saying maintains. It is the fiend of our eagerness for simplicity, smoothness, order. Naturally, Miroslav knows all this. In his poems analogy usually cracks, breaks, and falls like a dead leaf, like a weak tea that is of no use to those of us who need different drugs, different explanations, different images.
But the gravedigger Cronus constitutes no analogy at all. He is just you and me, any and all of us who unceasingly, morning to night, are buried with old wreaths by the others, our beautiful friends and non-friends. Rest in peace. We shall remember you. Or: Are you fine? Are you okay?

But we won’t rest in peace, we say. We aren’t fine and okay. No, we prefer to go for another bottle of wine or of eternity, and to break our cranial bone. Having such choice, we’d prefer to make no faces after all, as a newborn baby does. Maybe then, under no face, it’ll be us in the end.

In Kundera’s *Immortality* the hero Agnes hopes that after death there will be no faces. Not anymore. Her question comes to: “What does this game with faces mean? Where does my individuality really lie? How to shape it, how to escape it?” Miroslav Holub’s guides in this game are very often children, who play it not because they must, as adults do, but because they want to. They want to play mommy and daddy, a doctor, a death. They know that after awhile they can stand up and go get a sandwich. Look: the oldest passion play . . .

But soul has no face. You can’t play a soul. Confronted by the soul’s game, the children’s stops. Images of images are silent. Suddenly, they are nothing at all. From this point on you’re like the blind horse from the highlands, looking for its guide, at dawn, in the rawboned wind. But no guides are available now. Maybe the word, the poetry, stops here too. Maybe the word is like the face. Maybe not. And we are or we aren’t companions of the Muses. Holub’s poems, even when they contain nostalgia, give us a sudden hope and strength and hidden energy, that which we need most. And in any case, the rest doesn’t belong to us. As Miroslav wrote some thirty years ago:

Go and open the door.
  Maybe outside there’s
  a tree, or a wood,
  a garden,
  or a magic city . . .
  Maybe you’ll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture

of a picture . . .

Even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing

is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

translated by Ian Milner
HEMOPHILIA/LOS ANGELES

And so it circulates
from the San Bernardino Freeway
to the Santa Monica Freeway and
down to the San Diego Freeway and
up to the Golden Gate Freeway,

and so it circulates
in the vessels of the marine creature,
transparent creature,
unbelievable creature in the light
of the southern moon
like the footprint
of the last foot in the world,

and so it circulates
as if there were no other music
except Perpetual Motion,
as if there were no conductor
directing an orchestra of black angels
without a full score:

out of the grand piano floats
a pink C-sharp in the upper octave,
out of the violin
blood may trickle at any time,
and in the joints of the trombone
there swells a fear of the tiniest staccato,

as if there were no Dante
in a wheelchair,
holding a ball of cotton to his mouth,
afraid to speak a line
lest he perforate the meaning,
as if there were no genes
except the gene for defects
and emergency telephone calls,

and so it circulates
with the full, velvet hum of the disease,
circulates all hours of the day,
circulates all hours of the night
to the praise of non-clotting,

each blood cell carrying
four molecules of hope
that it might all be something
totally different
from what it is.

*translated by Dana Hábová and David Young*
LIVES OF A CELL

"Considering how common illness is," Virginia Woolf wrote in "On Being Ill,"

... it [is] strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature. Novels, one would have thought, would have been devoted to influenza; epic poems to typhoid; odes to pneumonia; lyrics to toothache. But no; ... literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and, save for one or two passions such as desire and greed, is null, and negligible and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night, the body intervenes.

Of this "daily drama of the body," Woolf went on, "there is no record."

Miroslav Holub's work contradicts that last assertion. For forty years now Holub has contributed, as a poet and as a research immunologist, to the "record" of the body's "daily drama." Surely Holub knows as well as any poet alive the extent to which "All day, all night, the body intervenes." And while "Hemophilia/Los Angeles" exists somewhere in the interregnum between "epic poems to typhoid" and "lyrics to toothache" (though who better to write such epics and lyrics than the author of "Interferon" and "Teeth"?), it, like many Holub poems, serves as a lens into the unexpected richness of the body's interventions.

I should acknowledge at the outset that "Hemophilia/Los Angeles," as the title's slash mark suggests, can be read from two distinct angles. From one angle it is a poem about the fractured city at the end of the Open Road: hemophilia as emblem of cultural and social hemorrhaging. From another angle it is a poem about the "hum" of hemophilia: Los Angeles — or at least its freeway system — as emblem of the disease's complexity and turbulence. The "LA poem" and the "hemophilia poem" interweave in important ways, of course, but I have emphasized the
latter, for reasons I hope will be clear. It's worth noting in this context that the poem's first publication was in an English translation — in FIELD in 1985 — and that the original title was simply "Hemophilia." According to the translators, "Los Angeles" was later added to the first Czech publication, to help Czech readers place the freeways mentioned.

The language of "Hemophilia/Los Angeles" is densely metaphorical. This raises a vexed issue — vexed, that is, in the wake of Susan Sontag's masterly Illness as Metaphor, in which Sontag discloses the dangers of using metaphorical language to speak about diseases. Hemophilia, one would think, could easily provoke what Sontag calls "punitive or sentimental" metaphors: metaphors that use a disease as a commentary on a patient's psychology or character. Two prejudicing metaphors associated with hemophilia, for example, are that a hemophiliac's character must be effete — one isn't sufficiently "hot-blooded" — and that hemophiliacs must be of royal ancestry (which is related to the notion of effete character). But "Hemophilia/Los Angeles," while certainly embodying metaphor and metaphorical thinking, does not give in to this prejudicing impulse. The poem uses metaphor not as a comment on the patient but as a means of articulating the disease itself, its idiosyncrasies, its strangely autonomous life. Holub does not address the patient except briefly in the fifth stanza (a stanza I'll return to). Holub's decision to approach hemophilia "clinically," from the cellular and vascular level, gives the poem a remarkable imaginative freedom.

The poem begins — to state the obvious — by establishing its central metaphor of the bloodstream as a stream of traffic on the Los Angeles freeway system. The whole poem, appropriately, moves with a heavily-trafficked breathlessness. It consists of one sentence: four images of "circulation" interrupted by an extended digression (beginning "as if there were no other music"), which contains within it several further digressions. Acceleration is crucial. The first stanza accelerates from 0 to 60 mph, as it were; it has the dizzying "fast-forward" quality of certain sequences in Godfrey Reggio's film Koyaanisqatsi. In Koyaanisqatsi, Reggio offers the reversal, a negative, of Holub's image: cars slipping through
the LA freeway system, filmed over hours and then viewed in fast forward, look like nothing so much as blood cells slipping through capillaries. One half expects to hear Philip Glass's mercurial soundtrack while reading "Hemophilia/Los Angeles." But where Reggio and Glass offer a hymn to "Perpetual Motion," Holub offers an anti-hymn.

I say "interrupted by an extended digression" matter-of-factly, as if I weren't astonished by the strange and confident metamorphoses the poem undergoes! Like other Holub poems, "Hemophilia/Los Angeles" views its subject through a microscope and, paradoxically, finds within that circumscription of vision the scale necessary to perceive otherwise hidden affinities and transformations, to take the long view. And yet the poem is anything but dry or coldly intellectual. The images are by turns comic or irreverent ("an orchestra of black angels / without a full score"), straightforwardly serious ("no genes / except the gene for defects / and emergency telephone calls"), or even, in its most characteristic moments, both irreverent and serious:

out of the violin
blood may trickle at any time,
and in the joints of the trombone
there swells a fear of the tiniest staccato,
as if there were no Dante
in a wheelchair,
holding a ball of cotton to his mouth,
afraid to speak a line
lest he perforate the meaning . . .

The unusual mix here of antic invention and profound human sympathy is Holub's signature, and brilliant. Moreover, these lines are exacting in their description of the experience of hemophilia. A moderate to severe hemophiliac may not know what instigates a bleed: one is indeed watchful for "the tiniest staccato" which may break a blood vessel in a joint. (Such fears usually center on the joints, the most persistent problem area for many hemophiliacs.) Some bleeds, in fact, begin "spontaneously," without any vis-
ible cause. It is not surreal hyperbole, then, to note that "blood may trickle at any time." For all the poem's antic invention, which I love, it is quite realistic about the phenomenon of hemorrhaging.

I want to linger a moment over the fifth stanza, the stanza beginning "as if there were no Dante. . . ." Underlying these lines, or informing them, is a striking and resonant pun. A joint is said to be "articulate" when it has available its full range of motion. A hemorrhage inside a joint fills the joint with blood, first diminishing and finally occluding the range of motion. In other words, a bleed makes a joint "inarticulate." But the body — let alone the hemophiliac — desires articulation. It works to break down and absorb the blood in a joint, engaging in "a raid on the inarticulate" (to quote Eliot in "East Coker"). The hemophiliac's role in this process is "Dantesque," fraught with purgatorial uncertainties and terrors: if he (hemophilia occurs almost exclusively in males) tries too hard or too soon to articulate a joint, he can start another bleed. So he waits, "afraid to speak [articulate] a line / lest he perforate the meaning." That Holub is able to address this event so deftly, with such intricacy of design and yet with such a light touch, is another occasion for astonishment.

The word "perforate" is a microcosm of this intricacy and precision. It is a word I see often in the literature on hemophilia. It suggests seeping, penetrating, boring through. Blood perforates a joint; if not stopped, it can perforate cartilage, permanently obstructing full articulation. Holub's integration of the word into his ingenious and experimental (in all senses of the word) context is so satisfying that I wondered if it was the result of inspired translation or if the Czech original was similar in sound and meaning. Given the opportunity, I asked Holub about the word, and he confirmed both the precision I suspected and his good fortune with translators. He wrote: "The Czech word for perforate . . . is almost the same as in English, perforace. David Young's translations are very accurate even in sound."

Granted, my experience with hemophilia makes me a conspicuously interested, rather than disinterested, reader of the poem. Perhaps I take Holub's felicity to the particulars of the disease too far. There is the poem's rich play of invention, its wonderfully outlandish side. But it is the poem's balance between play-
of invention and scientific exactitude, as well as its compassion, that I find so unique. Wallace Stevens’s idea that “The real is only the base, but it is the base” has rarely found more convincing embodiment.

The poem’s ending gives further evidence of that embodiment, that balance. True to form, those “four molecules of hope” can be read as both the four globin chains each red blood cell carries and as a typical number of commuters in a car on the freeway. To say that each blood cell hopes that “it” — non-clotting, endless circulation and perpetuation of the disease — “might all be something / totally different / from what it is” is not to commit the pathetic fallacy, as some readers I’ve shown the poem to have suggested. Or rather, it is to commit the pathetic fallacy but not in the sentimental way we might think on a hasty reading. The lines get at another of the body’s interventions. Hemophiliacs, even those severely affected, have some percentage of factor VIII, the factor responsible for clotting, in the bloodstream. Just as the body “desires” joint articulation, the bloodstream desires or “hopes” to clot in the event of a trauma. Mild to moderate hemophiliacs, in fact, can be treated with desmopressin acetate (DDAVP), a synthetic drug which capitalizes on the blood’s “hope” of clotting by stimulating what active factor VIII the bloodstream carries. Each blood cell is an unregenerate overachiever; each refuses to be lulled by “the full, velvet hum of the disease.” But without a certain amount of factor VIII, or without help from a stimulant, such cellular “hope” remains frustrated. Once again Holub is able to incorporate complex clinical information — which a less resourceful poet might rule out as aggressively unpoetic — with remarkable agility and energy.

The mind at work in “Hemophilia/Los Angeles” is supple, daring, humane, exacting. What Seamus Heaney said of Sagittal Section, Holub’s first collection to be published in the United States, is true also of “Hemophilia/Los Angeles”: “It is a very nimble and very serious anatomy of the world, too compassionate to be vindictive, too sceptical to be entranced, a poetry in which intelligence and irony make their presence felt without displacing delight and the less acerbic wisoms.” It is a sensibility of which many of us could use repeated infusions.
DISCOURSE

Still night. Still
stars. But the chart
is mechanical, tin turned

in a tipsy circle, the point
of departure is unmarked, the line
of demarcation rusted, smudged.

Okay, so your wished-for one
did not appear. But a letter
came, flew in on wings, and news

is still who knows, a little bird.
And it’s not, from morning
egg shells on, all garbage. True,

we aren’t climbing stairs or holding
hands, and the signature in the grass
is just grass: we haven’t signed.

But once I saw mating skates,
two pliant triangles fluttering
through the waves. Of course

there are many ways, counting
counting. And angles to consider:
between sides, without apparatus

of any sort. Either is a side
you could take, you could even
take the underside. But better

not to think of hitting the target.
Better to think of the arrow,
and the bow. There, that’s the way.
FOREST FOR THE TREES

You think trees you think green. But the weighty stuff is dark and leaves

are fallen; only needles color the air, and a few pale coins of beech. One

large bird disturbed two afternoons, one by flight, one by a clumsy walk. Never to make another mistake: no crossed-out lines in the front

of the book, no retraction in the back, no stammer/blush. One self-conscious moment,

said my friend, but how to choose? Heavy the body, flightless bird, but

see how the earth absorbs the forest, the water absorbs the stone.
CLOUD-PLAY FOR FOUR HANDS

One
Let's play clouds.
Let's play Clouds.

Let's play, clouds.
Play, clouds, play.

Clouds play.
Could play cloud?

Two
Play-clouds roll
when play-clouds play.

Play-cloud's role
in Play-cloud's play
was Cloud.

Three
Clouds play for four hands.
CLOUD PLAYS FOR FOUR HANDS!

Cloud-plays for forehands.
Foreplay for cloud and hands.

Three clouds play for four hands.
But four hands play for two.
Four

One day a cloud came down to play. Everywhere it saw hands. But the hands didn’t notice the cloud.

What could the cloud do? The cloud was good at play; perhaps if it just played, the hands would notice. But the hands had their own play, and it didn’t include the cloud.

At last the cloud had a thought: it could play hands! But just as the cloud was shaping itself into hands, the hands began to drift above the cloud.

Good-bye! the cloud-hand cried as the hand-clouds rose.

Five

Hans’ hands play on handy clouds.
Handily Hans handles clouds.

Hans unhands cloud after cloud.
Hand over hand Hans plays clouds.

Six

The first one handed down clouds.
The others handed them on.

Clouds in hand, they plowed clay.
Clouds in place, they employed hands.

Plan had a hand in it. Also place.

*Seven*

He was an old hand at play.

My hand, he said, displaying his clouds.

He played into her hands.
NOTHING DOING

Dull afternoon, summer sun, it doesn't have to work/have a clue, a string bikini'd look great, he said, it must be fun writing things down. His TV lay on its side beside the bed, videos under.

Up to her. Into it. A handy hanky, pair of shorts. Junk, from middle English, old rope. Oh yes it's, but where oh where? Bunk beds, pair of beds: on her mind, or in it? As for X, he came

up short. Pair of shorts. Then the long feature. She lost interest, as at the bank. Bled, blurred, a dictionary of. And what if, if she had to choose. Construction paper. Yellow slips. Leaves

by the back door. If it's not in this then what's it in? Listen people are screaming out there, the street's on fire. What it's in is what. Something's brewing. Front burner. Something's up.
RED REED

Nothing exists except atoms and emptiness
— Democritus

Look within these words to the rough, yellowing grain of the page that herds them on all sides, and drives hard in-between each letter: sinkhole of the u, the locked cavity in the head of each e . . .

Everything insubstantial —

Like words, atoms are mostly empty: the nucleus the proportion of an apple in a baseball field, with the rest of the stadium all but vacant . . .

Look beyond the page to your hand, so limp, so powerless there, a hooked birthmark, maybe, under the thumb, or a wedding ring wedged in the heat-swollen flesh —

And again, beyond words, to the room, say a white string hanging beside a bare, 60-watt bulb, or a world sliced by venetian blinds into dogwood and porch column, pink dogwood and cracked porch column, woodwasps nagging at the peeled white paint.
It keeps
growing particular: what this
ink would have you witness —
Mayday and mayfly, catalpa,
folded beach umbrellas
lined, like gravemarkers, by the sea.

Look down at this page, look hard,
until you can notice
nothing
but your own gaze,

and give up what that gaze can’t reach:
the pale green lines on this white pad
in Ohio, in 1992, in May,
the sweetgum’s green through the window,

or whatever image of green
you recall as you read this
and forget
as you do
the pounding under your ribs,
the insuck of air
that keeps drying the rough grain of your tongue —

or the reddish
reeds on the creekbank, here,
now, through this window, the ones
you read, homonyms, or real
reeds, thick-rooted in mud, that swarm
greenflies the moment you part them —
Little puffy settee
of the lotus — I’ve seen pictures
of such White House furnishings.
Up between desires
of small saw-leafed rose shoots,
bird’s-foot even has
a sparse Confucian beard
finger-whorls can’t feel
on its bracts and leaf-edges,
hairs of no one
length, of assorted crimps.
Five horses are so quiet
stepping by. Is it this
they stop to eat? Its head
is stocked with a dozen
sateen carseats in overchurned
canary. Several
red eyelashes customize
each backrest.
But my fingers are too coarse
to “see” this texture’s terrain —
moisturized, not wet. . . .
Dialing the combination to a blackberry,
they only generalize a petal.

Up between those berries: cucumber, beach silverweed,
and this white morning glory,
it's organs sugary.
It looks confident, held only
by a green burst bubble.
Its gores have been joined
by a microscopic furrier —
in dwarf ermine.
The sheen on the whole fabric's that of an underslip. Under highest power, material becomes a spinning of silver and yellow twill. A tiny orange life rambles a swizzle stick, bride climbing into her excessive dress. The train is a shot of smoothest vodka. Morning glory — it is the seagull of flowers. Not the kite. White, ubiquitous, undrooping for as long as we ignore it. Upside down, it puffs and falls, fullskirted friend sitting down fast. Later, her wedding ring slips and drops through a bowl of flour.
I lost my delegate's badge in the Willy-Willy, the night the convention rented a waterpark for a luau with our own impromptu orchestra from circus and casino playing its one repertoire of incidental music from great black and white comedies of brotherhood and accident.

In the Willy-Willy I could hear the waves and splashes toppling with the force of incidental music. The night was dry. I flew with almost no one else around. Now this is peace, or one round of it. Distant lightning spiked sierras on the edge of sight. And down the sky along a seven-story waterslide the large conventioneers plummeted. But it was a daughter who had floated from her father, the powerful little girl who had run the bases in the morning, who tossed my way in the rapids, the white speed that made the peace flow faster, rushed the peace and hurried her to tumble over, under, so that I found the sweeping footing of this confection and shoved upstream, slipped below downstream, surprised that we have arms and we forget them, that we have lift and it commandeers us, that we hold above ourselves a ring the young should fly in. I am uneasy afterwards. Water unpinned my proof. And the amusement commenced again, from the slow meander to the swirl, spiralling to this preposterous music, clash-chorded, kick-in-the-pants.
ONE TIME

When I was a child being taken home from the circus
very late in the rumble seat of the old car
in which I had never ridden and my head was afloat
in the lap of a woman whom now I would think of
as young who then was fragrant strange and hard to believe
as Christmas who went on agreeing in a low voice
about how late it was and I could watch her breath
flying away into the cold night overhead
in which the naked stars were circling as we turned
away from the river and came up along the dark cliff
into our own echoes that wheeled us under the black
leafless branches here it was already morning
and a figure whom I have known only bent with age
was taking the cows out in his sure youth onto
the untouched frost of the lanes and his burly son
my neighbor was an infant and the woods furred the ridge
all the way down to the white fields with their pencilled walls
the one cowbell rang cold and bright before him and crows
called across the blank pastures and early shadows
OLD QUESTION

Can anyone tell me what became of the voices that shimmered here in the land every morning at the beginning of autumn those mornings those autumns if there were more than one and that was the way the autumn morning was to begin then with a sound somewhere between bird echoes and brook water over pebbles coming closer a flight of high bells the small girls from farther along the ridge walking to school some of them still with their hair clear down to their waists or whatever happened to the voice of the head mason quarreling later in the sunlight at the house below the long field he kept rasping No No over the rasp of the shovels mixing wet mortar I tell you no and they all kept right on at what they were doing knowing that that was simply the way he always talked and the wall rose into the day and a silence where it seemed to have been longer than anyone remembered or in what country now is the sound of the gate that never went away
BELIEF

From promontories, from low walkways, from faint paths becoming rock, refreshed, revised, appealing to ourselves again, my townsmen enter spring. Yet there’s a diffidence, a distance unabsorbed, a feeling like a set of cold white flags unexplained sunk into a spit of land the tide encroaches on; it takes every flowered tree, bushes lighted yellow in the fields, lush grass, elaborations vividly expressed in flower beds and climbing vines, a bunch of daffodils jammed into a jar, moistened, stinking ground thick as pitch, to convince us, to excite our senses, stir us into little jerks and hitches of the soul, exotica of luxury, an overflow, for any of us now, beaten up and tied to chairs inside our heads, threatened by some dark asides that became belief, to give an inch toward this fancy clamor in the trees; you see us, dressed for Easter, staring at the river showing off its shiny, lacerated back; the expressions on our faces say we’re confused, edgy, stunned by light, and don’t believe a thing.
THE DISTANCE

Among us no one’s died in a long time; gone crazy yes, failed noisily, wound up ranting in the street, but no one’s gone the whole distance; it’s been twenty years since we put my grandfather in the ground, since my father waked up sharply hearing his name called, saw the old man grinning, claiming heaven was like a bank.

My father’s adamant about it: he doesn’t want to go. He’s got insurance that’ll pay if he lives long enough. He travels around the world, steps out of a bus into Africa, breathes in the acidic grassy smells, the lion stink: another day.

He’s old, his hair looks painted on his skull, but he hasn’t had enough; he knows in this world you can put disaster off — not failure, not the cracked loss of everything, not love become a plaintiff’s deposition, but the real catastrophe, the eyes going glassy, breath scraping the silence. As far as he’s concerned, there’s nothing to worry about but the silence. A sob, clattering fall, the snap of bone are better. Like his own father, when the suck and pull of the last machine he hears grows faint, he will begin to beg, just to make a noise.
To experience a thing as beautiful means: 
to experience it necessarily wrongly.  
— Friedrich Nietzsche

Russeks Fifth Avenue, 1933

My father arranges the window like a stage. 
Tea length gowns, Dior dresses, taffeta fanned 
over driftwood. Faces back-lit by Chinese lanterns, 
the wax women will draw crowds. He fastens a rose 
to a mannequin's hair while in the Millinery Salon 
Mother models the new collection, Joan Crawford coat 
with a swing collar. Hand set on her hip, she poses 
for the customers. The clerks are paid to watch and smile.

At home she hides my books and pushes me 
outside to the street, the world of other children. 
She locks the window eleven stories above the Park, 
the ledge where I stand to look down at the reservoir.

In the evening the parlor is hung with smoke, cards 
laid out next to the crystal glasses for gin. Mother took away 
Alice in Wonderland and I wait out the end of the night 
in my parents' marble bathtub, wait in the dark.

When I step from my dress, I step outside my body. 
I imagine men watching from windows all along the Avenue.

Coney Island, 1959

On the boardwalk Jack Dracula sits stiff 
and straight like a Victorian child. 
Twenty-eight stars are printed on his face. 
An eagle flies across his chest past
the head of Christ. Inside his body the dye will turn to poison in the sun. At Hubert’s Museum I photograph the flea circus and the family of midgets, but what I love most is the failed magic, the box of mirrors holding the girl the magician doesn’t cut in half. Congo the Jungle Creep swings his grass skirt and swallows cigarettes, dances on a row of kitchen knives. On the boardwalk my camera is my passport as I cross the border from one world to another again and again. I am crossing the border. Along Jack’s wrist I LOVE MONEY is written in curving script. I hold the Rolleiflex waist-level to meet his eyes.

Central Park, 1971

Between the trees I watch a woman holding a monkey in a snow-suit, cradling its body like a child. I am photographing people with the objects they love. I photograph myself with my camera. I am studying attachment. I print each image again and again.

On a blackboard beside my bed I list objects to photograph: a pet crematorium, a condemned hotel, the ocean liner from my dream — a world of women, gleaming and white and stacked in layers like a wedding cake
where we drink and smoke and play cards all night. No men are watching. The white ship is on fire and sinking slowly and I can photograph anything I want. Because there is no hope I can photograph anything.

All night I ride the train under the city, studying the faces of the passengers. I want to startle them from sleep.

I want to take them home with me to lie in my bed beside me as I grow smaller. No one is watching.

I want someone to cross over with me as light stains the film silver and the image turns dark, unrecognizable.
Franz Wright

VAN GOGH'S "UNDERGROWTH WITH TWO FIGURES"

They are taking a walk in the woods
of early spring or waning autumn.
In van Gogh, as in the works of most great masters,
al four or five of them,
there are no symbols. (Because
there are no symbols.) Only
things as they are
as he saw them
during visionary states,
normal states, hangovers, etc.
Still, beside an older man
in a formal black but rather shabby suit
and a young woman dressed in what will have been
considered a long pale green dress
from the 1960s, it is hard not to
see a skeleton with clothes on and a woman
walking a little behind him (another
slip: at least he mixed his symbols here).
He has on what looks like a squashed-down top hat:
vvan Gogh, drunk
mad and malnourished
epileptic, no doubt
in the tertiary stage of syphilis,
ever lost his sense of humor.
The young woman's face is dead
white, though. In fact,
she has no face;
and there's nothing, incidentally,
in the least bit symbolic about it.
I can remember seeing this, once,
outside the painting.
Bombed.

Smashed; or fucked up (the rectum presumably, as phrase most often issues from the lips of drunk heterosexual males).

Trashed.

Drunk (a polite self-vindicating euphemism).

Destroyed.


Blackout. Med. Also cf. 
bombed.

Insult. Med. As in a major insult to the brain; or dead.

I did what? Variant: I said what?

Checking your bumper for blood in the morning.
Statutory rape; or sex with a consenting 13 year old child, resulting in 1) a lengthy prison stay during which term *fucked up* often loses its figurative sense; or 2) neighborhood lynching with officers of the peace looking on approvingly.

Brain damage.

Ocean floor sarabande.

Hanging oneself for 40 years.

Terminal cancer of the esophagus.

A really great time.

Blind.

Ripped.

Screwed; ambiguous, nondenominational version of *fucked-up*.

Unconscious (as opposed to sleeping).

Waking up, one's bib covered with vomit,
in an alley of indeterminate location without the slightest idea of one’s manner of transport there.

The spins.

Driven to one’s knees, as if by a blow to the skull with a hammer or deep in prayer, hugging and, to all appearances, drinking from the excrement-filled toilet of the dive around the corner. Also known as puking.

Falling down.

Not waking up as one result of being robbed for 5 dollars and stabbed.

Not waking up.

Happiness.

Beating up a stranger for no reason.

Getting beaten up by a stranger for reasons unknown.

Beating up a beloved wife, child or friend with delusional motives.

Pissing in one’s pants.
Drowning
in one's vomit (cf. unconscious or blackout).

Getting stupid.

Waking in horror
and not being able to sleep.

Visionary and furious joy.

In-patient psychiatric ward;
police cell;
grave.

Homelessness.

Permanent estrangement
from the only individual
who loves you.

Waking up naked in bed with somebody
you have never seen before
and, while said somebody
departs to take shower,
madly searching his/her room
for some form of identification
(you can find your own name
in your wallet,
if you still have it),
an envelope, anything; or
dressing in a burning house and fleeing
through the streets
of an unfamiliar city.

Relentlessly bombed.
FORTUNE

Foursquare & seven years ago
met him, followed, lived
with, had in common
cats, dog, house, bed: now forswear
all — animals dead, house sold,
furniture Mayflowered to his new city,
his proving ground.
Here winter clicks the earth shut
and my front door, fresh-painted,
shudders when it opens: force wears
such ordinary clothing. Each dawn labors
to build what evening will foreclose,
a small lit place amid the dark. Seven years. Too much history
staggers the heart. And mythology,
that imaginary past, is no better:
Cupid's fat forebodes cardiac
delusion, a terminal condition. Hear him
tinkering in the chandelier; consider
the relative sizes of the human heart and his
spears. Oh forbear. No man's created equal,
nor woman, to all this foregoing.
FOGBOW

Morning, we think:
a glow, and the cratcheting of a few birds,
or frogs, an hour back. On deck the light's brighter
but still diffuse, and damp, and featureless.
Current splits around the hull in ripples
that convince us we're under way
but for some unnamed sense, a nudge in the brain
we take to mean *holding*. The mast-top
dissolves; the anchor line runs out taut
and ends in diffidence, pinning us to nothing
but space made visible, all gray foreground
(and recalcitrant, no longer admitting a thing —
not the island we saw yesterday, its live oaks
netted with moss above wild horses and boars,
not its shoreline of exposed roots, not the inexplicable
mailbox on a post or the raccoon
washing his hands of us).

Against the white, a whiter arc
touches its ends to what must be
its own reflection: to starboard, where
the sky usually loiters, cloud-close or infinite,
an oval hovers. I kneel on wet teak to watch
the concoction of light and obscurity — my first
fog-bow, new category of illusion.
CQR
(obscure Brit. pun): plow-type, good for all holding ground except weed (kelpy pods & ribbons in which nothing sets) and drifts of bottles & alum. cans, shiftiest, found below popular watering holes. Mud best. Sea-cue-R.

Selling the boat, sloop, suit of seven sails from spinnaker to (bikini) storm jib, selling her whole-sale, keel to antenna tip, with fenders & lines & inflatable dinghy. & sense organs (as boats have): knotmeter paddle tips protruding, just, into slipstream, & anemometer scoops, sky-backed & squinted at, blurred with speed (but read-out bulkhead mounted, eye-kind). Paradox- ical voice,
(super-soprano aimed low, depthsounding on 2 scales, feet/ fathoms). More:
two-lung primitive engine, rated at 12 (sea) horses, puny by land standards but deus ex machina in flat sun- sets (boom slatting, sails slumped & wrinkled, forgetting the shapes that translate speed to speed). Goddish bounteous windy wandering!
Selling her, fiberglass, dacron, sad.
Because you were unhappy with me, out there. Tell me the story of the oar & baker's peal. Going so far lifelines are social, orange vests are for traffic cops & mastheads two-dimensional. You were (that's right, wave)
never (bye bye) at home at sea. Too impatient to be windborne.
Selling the lot, at a loss (my slicker turned city-), selling hully home
to be inlander, glassy cliff dweller, bank swallow in elevators.

Keeping

the anchor for its shape, 25 lbs. of rough galvanized sheer,
bifurcated, two arcs starting away from each (NW) (NE),
joined & braced, and for its intent:
to hold come hell
GENEALOGY

We were almost unreal.
   If you don't believe me,
       let the wind open the Journals

of the House of Burgesses
   so you can hear it whisper
       lessons of the soil

through maple & birch.
   We buried ourselves in holes, the only shelter
       we could wrestle free of earth

& wood held in place by snow,
   this last door nailed shut
       with icicles.

Rations dwindled to eight ounces of meal
   & a pint of peas a day, working
       with maggots & cobwebs.

That winter a man salted down
   guilt, feeding upon his wife
       till she was only a head.

You can erase Sir Thomas Smith
   from your genealogical charts;
       our ancestors stole handfuls

of oatmeal & were chained
   to trees, starved or
       broken on the wheel,

& here's our coat-of-arms.
   This crossbone. This boar
       wreathed with hemlock & laurel.
SLATTEES

Dust clouds followed
  bowed heads along trails
  that snaked out

from ravines beyond a river
  converging at the point of no return. These slattees,

go-betweens & middlemen
  sold images of themselves
  for rum, bolts of rainbow

cloth, beaded trinkets, & “good strong water” — Asiento, the New World:
  “. . . marked on the breast,

with a red-hot iron, imprinting
  the mark of French, English
  or Dutch companies.”

There were no drums or thumb pianos,
  no dance — these stations of the cross
  along the Guinea Coast

where petrified dung glazed dungeon
  floors. These slattees, did they envision a world where

a slave couldn’t marry into the tribe,
  & did the European traders know
  it was easier to teach a hawk

to fly backwards than break
  a man who had one happy memory
  left inside him? A glimpsed
vista of Africa swelled in the amino
water where broken promises were fed
ninety-nine years & one dark day.
NO-GOOD BLUES

1.
I try to hide in Proust,
Mallarmé, & Camus,
but the no-good blues
come looking for me. Yeah,
come sliding in like good love
on a tongue of grease & sham,
built up from the ground.
I used to think a super-8 gearbox
did the job, that a five-hundred-dollar suit
would keep me out of Robert Johnson's
shoes. I rhyme Baudelaire
with Apollinaire, determined
to get beyond crossroads & gopher
dust, outrunning a twelve-bar
pulsebeat. But I pick up
a hitchhiker outside Jackson.
Tasseled boots & skin-tight
jeans. You know the rest.

2.
I spend winter days
with Monet, seduced
by his light. But the no-good
blues come looking for me.
It takes at least a year
to erase a scar
on a man's heart. I come home nights
drunk, the couple next door
to keep me company, their voices
undulating through my bedroom wall.
One evening I turn a corner
& step inside Bearden's Uptown
Sunday Night Session. Faces
Armstrong blew from his horn
still hanging around the Royal Gardens — all
in a few strokes, & she suddenly leans out of
a candy-apple-green door & says,
"Are you from Tougaloo?"

3.

At The Napoleon House
Beethoven's *Fifth* draws shadows
from the walls, & the no-good blues
come looking for me. She's here,
her left hand on my knee.
I notice a big sign
across the street that says
The Slave Exchange.
She scoots her chair closer.
I can't see betrayal
& arsenic in Napoleon's hair —
they wanted their dying emperor
under the Crescent City's double
Scorpio. But nothing
can subdue these African voices
between the building's false floors,
this secret song from the soil
left hidden under my skin.

4.

Working swing shift at McGraw-
Edison, I shoot screws
into cooler cabinets as if I were born
to do it. But the no-good blues come
looking for me. She's from Veracruz,
& never wears the dead colors of the factory,
still in Frida Kahlo's world of monkeys.
She's a bird in the caged air.
The machines are bolted down
to the concrete flood,
everything moves with the same big rhythm Mingus could get out of a group. Humming the syncopation of punch presses & conveyer belts, work becomes our dance when the foreman hits the speed-up button for a one-dollar bonus.

My hands are white with chalk at The Emporium in Colorado Springs, but the no-good blues come looking for me. I miscue when I look up & see sunlight slanting through her dress at the back door. That shot costs me fifty bucks. I let the stick glide along the V of my hand. I know men who'd wager their first born to conquer snowy roller coasters & myths. I gaze up at my opponent, just as the faith drains out of my right hand. It isn't a loose rack. But more like — well, I know I'm in trouble when she sinks her first ball.

I'm cornered at Birdland like a two-headed man hexing himself. But the no-good blues come looking for me. A prayer holds me in place, balancing this sequinned
constellation. I've hopped boxcars & thirteen statelines to where she stands like Ma Rainey. Gold tooth & satin. Rotgut & God Almighty. Moonlight wrestling a Texas-jack. A meteor of desire burns my last plea to ash. Blues don't care how many tribulations you lay at my feet, I'll go with you if you promise to bring me home to Mercy.
ALL’S HOLLOW

To any trick-or-treater with the time,
I say I am a veritable dearth
of information, but they all run screaming

when I forget the r.
Car door, they cry. Or is it corridor?
No, hospitals have corridors,

not houses. Mine has a hallway
leading to where the ghosts are.
So says the mystic who lived here

thirteen years until she was
transferred to Philadelphia.
I knew Philly in a former life,

I tell her, meaning my first
marriage. Her eyes widen:
She knows how it is.

Soup is good food, I tell
Tinker Bell and Cinderella, offering
them cans for their baskets.

They politely decline; they’ve been
warned about bachelorism.
Oh, Lover of Oracles,

time is standing still;
the power outage has made my clock
more of a tired jack o’lantern

than a moral owl. When it comes
back on, it will be midnight
and noon for the rest of my life.
When a husband weeps over a dead wife . . .
in spite of this, in his innermost soul he feels a
secret joy.

—René Descartes

What of a father for his daughter?
She was a baby, barely
able to separate her own body
from mine. I remember
the day she discovered her nose;
she twisted it in her fist

as if uncorking a wine bottle
until — coming to accept it —
she patted it like a kitten.

She was your impossibility:
the only time one plus one
equalled one, and you

studied her the way
I’ve watched you study those
Dutch still life paintings.

If you could, you’d set right
every tea cup precariously
balanced, every spoon, crust

of bread, skull, pheasant,
pear, wine glass. You’re troubled
especially by the red brocade

rug that fancies itself a wall,
swallowing the room’s
contents — chair, map, vase,
telescope — troubled, too,
by tiny limbs restless
to hold and be held,

by wails which could mean
hunger, a dirty diaper, fear.
Sickness. If you had known

her as a small child, perhaps you
would have seen that perfection
can come from things

imperfect. Perhaps you would have
 teased her: I think therefore
 I’m a yam, or a ham, or a jar

of jam. You think therefore
you’ll scram, my little apple
of the earth, if you know what’s good.

You can doubt everything:
the sweetness of honey;
a bee’s sting; a pencil

bent in water; the pool
of candle wax from a night
of love; the universe

dancing around Earth,
it’s sullen partner; the smell
of roses wafting through

your window while you,
at noon, are still
in bed, your meditations
scattered about you
like handkerchiefs
after a night's fever.

But can you deny
a body swollen with you
to a lop-sided circle,

or the womb of sweet earth
that buries our child,
my love?
CLARE AND FRANCIS

Sister, you knew his thoughts as he thought them. You understood the circle of ashes and how he could only empty himself with prayer. He is not a bridge to the other world. He is not. He disappears the closer he gets to you. Standing before you he doesn’t exist.

Sister, what smells more like him? The stench of a leper, or the wildflower growing off your muddy hut?

Where do you go at night when your body slumbers on the dirt floor? And the visions! Visions and voices! What comes together, this circle of sound and light passing like the ring around the autumn moon and you pregnant like the moon with this love, what comes together passing from him to you through the forested night?

Did you understand when you saw him as a child on the streets of Assisi? Did the sharp wool under your lush garments keep your mouth full of God?

These bodies shake off what you fear. Come meet him in the woods. The angels fall from trees, faint from hearing him speak like this. The simple dirt catches fire. Miles away a bright burning, the grove secreted by birds’ songs overhead. If you hadn’t been praying almost since your birth, wouldn’t this love have killed you?

When he is ready, the word of God will write itself into his flesh. You will feel it. You can’t help yourself that way. It will be as loud as life budding out of a cold, bare tree. God in your icy fingertips, God in the bird droppings, in the fog walking the hills, the pebbles under your feet. Sister Clare, this love gives the animals something to feed on. Just look at Francis, their plump, furry bodies taking up the flesh he throws off.
Charles Simic

THE DEAD IN PHOTOGRAPHS

They were all mere beginners.  
They stood still for the camera,  
Only a few thinking to move  
And make a blur at the right moment.

Others held their smiles seemingly forever.  
It was their wedding day.  
Here they were by the side of the road  
On the way to California.  
The groom had a wide tie on with green parrots.  
The bride wore a straw hat  
With a topping of strawberries.

In Los Angeles it was Sunday morning.  
The photographer took a picture  
Of a closed barber shop,  
A black cat crossing an empty avenue,  
A tall palm tree in the wind.

Then the dead reappeared.  
A blind man stood on a street corner  
Playing the guitar and singing  
Soundlessly.  
The little boy walked up to the camera  
And stuck his tongue out at us.
THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

The poets of the Late Tang Dynasty
Could do nothing about it except to write:
"On the western hills the sun sets . . .
Horses blown by the whirlwind tread the clouds."

I could not help myself either. I felt a joy
Even at the sight of a crow hovering
As I stretched out on the grass
Alone now with the silence of the sky.

Only the wind making a slight rustle
As it turned the pages of the book by my side,
Back and forth, searching for something
For that bloody crow to read.
They didn't answer to repeated knocks,
Or perhaps they were in no hurry.
On the eighteenth floor
Even the sunlight moved lazily
Across the dusty floor.
A year could pass here, I thought,
As in a desert solitude.

Unknown parties rarely seen,
The elevator operator described them.
He wore a New Year's party hat in August;
I was looking for work.

Inside, I imagined rows of file cabinets,
Old desks, dead telephones.
I could have been sitting at one of them myself,
Like someone doused with gasoline
In the moment before the match is lit,

And then the elevator took me down.
THE BEGGAR ON HOUSTON STREET

He is Prometheus,
He tells me,
And has scars and burns
To prove it!

Gene Tierney, what ever
Happened to her, he asks?
Now, there was fire
To steal from the gods!

Back then there were cockfights
On tenement roofs.
They shed blood
For the fun of it.

The sunset today confirms it.
The laundry on the line
Like flags flying
In the battle for Catalonia.

And in the movies very dark.
You could barely find your seat,
Or see that woman on the screen
They call Laura.

Beauty is always dying, he says.
She, if he remembers correctly,
Didn’t appear to be in the least
Surprised about that.
WHITE CHRISTMAS

My list of birds I saw in the winter. Robin, Spotted Towhee, American Widgeon, Surf-Scoter —

Herring Gull, Woodpecker, Oregon Junco — who appears here in the bushes, inside the flowering camelia at the door. Once I wanted to see White Christmas. No one else wanted to go. But my mother let me off in the dark above the Rialto: the neon, but only the street, dark, and other cars. Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Buffle-Head —

Hooded Merganser, Heron, Hawk, Wren — White Christmas was fine. Only the worn gummy carpet, the curtain that slowly flung open and the Technicolor. I was in junior high, but there was nothing wrong in being alone at the movies. We never ascended the levels at the Roxy to the stained glass. Western Grebe, Cormorant, Sparrow, Crow —

Goose, small tit inside the many blossoms of the flowering quince. They restored the Roxy, the old Pantages. In the dark we never noticed that the curtain was magnificent.

Now during the vigor of arms at violins we glance up at a sculpted muse with sheaves of grain. And the Rialto, too, is restoration. And on the street of stores a chickadee
might try the new branches of the saplings. Today was tree day. Blocks I walked from school are anchored by them, eight each way, small pears and they are flowering. And a sparrow,

the sparrow who would greet you kindly at the bus stop, who would stop and stand and look from concrete that I thought went to the center of the earth, but that was not,

perhaps, that deep, but only a thin shell over top soil. The Mallard, the Pigeon. The others I could not recall. Or could not name. Adn the Varied Thrush, the Flicker, the Golden-Eye,

and the Eared Grebe, and the Sparrow with the stripe, the dark one.
ETHNIC

*Use your best standard English.*
Advice from Charles Johnson to African-American writers, *The Seattle Times*

In lights in a wood-brown stepped-down interior lecture hall, an auditorium, three girls stood at the back high doors. They wore natural afros and batiks,

their harmonics
a chord that varied and repeated in chords of colors.
My sensual head and eyes filled with high huge light about joy.

We walked down cement steps.
Winter rain ended.
The cherry trees blossomed.
Change is like that — not like these shifts in life and time that happen now.

My sister was patient. *Sometimes I think you don’t want anything to change.* But I said,
*these changes don’t seem like they’re better.*

Our most careful English is all it has ever been.
Our most careful English I see now is ethnic.
A stage light switches
filters and pours light onto a performer:

In San Francisco she is forty
in a snap, snap shutter
of shock renewed by grief.
In a bungalow of woodwork furniture
emptied, crowded with quilt stacks.

In rain to a bookstore
book racks burnt and charred at the edge
from a fire-bomb through
an upper window.
And her perception of the whole is unshed tears.

They shutter out hesitations
in her readings, hesitation
in exhaustion
as though it drained her
not to cry. Past Fisherman’s Wharf

she sits above the swimming beach —
a corner of red bridge,
and big boys and big girls
into the waves in their cut-offs.
She plays the Steerman’s Waltz

on her recorder.
Then she can cry.
Long ago with Standard Oil
her father passed under the bridge.
The water was the stormiest.

Her father in a galley
with the vegetables.
Later the pharmacy diploma.
So nothing
is ever that simple:
People were not
what they were. I am not
what I am now, nor will I be tomorrow.

With eyes wet with my tears
I watch many waves of blue —

Med våta ögon ser jag
på billorna de blå —

Another song in the book
of folkvisor
that are mine now.
And the hand-scored books
of my mother’s dance band tunes.
ROTARY

At an earlier apartment I was in another precinct and went to a grade school to vote. Once their glass foyer cases were occupied by collections — gracious for children and fingerling the scales of curiosities, of facets of the precious to the view of the errand-visitor.

Oh, some would say I lack facility to extend myself to adventure. Yes, when I interviewed I did not see much of Maine. But just after dawn a Druid invocation — the flag salute below my floor at the bed and breakfast, for the Rotary, out the window going off to their cars separately, a display for the errand-visitor.

Down on their piano their spiral book of necessary songs had the black notes of Vårt Land. And I chorded out the tune. At the large table the Finnish workers population entered a description of that part of Maine. But one bone in me knows a stubborn tongue and would not speak of it. I do not speak much Swedish.
Trees hide the shadows of their leaves,
cut off from hands, pieces fall into sawdust
and a deaf cat
steps on glass.

Pines are swaying
in that country idyll
somewhat more to the sides than they should.
The wind’s funeral, blue catafalque,
will show the landscape
the hill’s other side.
There along the border
black saliva will flow
into the middle of the forest’s chapel:
among the crosses and vials, and an aspersillum of rabbit blood.

The country god
draws on a blue chalkboard
the plan of things.
And the line, in which he’s incarnated the world
for greater precision
of his hand,
runs along the edge of the hill,
a fissure, an abyss, endlessly bitter
a black herb.
A TOTALLY NEW TIME, A COMPLETELY NEW ERA

For a long time we've been saying to ourselves: between night and morning.

And then: between non-time and time.

And we began to build clocks, little ones and big ones and bigger ones, until someone built a house inside those clocks, his own house,

and we built clocks in clocks and houses in houses, houses in clocks and clocks in houses so no one knew where he really lived and the monstrous clocks no longer showed anything and everywhere we looked for mirrors when we woke to quiet chimes, but it could have been marches too

and we said to ourselves, how amazing it is to finish the first little lie, how heroic to be consistent.
LAND OF MUD

(Warsaw-Leningrad Express)

And it wasn't till the middle of the night we saw
smoke over the locomotive
when all those villages
and their
mud for scarves
straw for shoes
child riding a cow
disappeared

The child ate too many bullets from the war
and is so heavy
it'll fall in a while
into the plain full of Lenins and Christs
but no hill
so mad-prophet children
will be born here again and again
from the mud
and their fathers will wait
until the child finds
an old book in the attic
and it'll begin all over again
in the land of mud
And women stood along the tracks
thinking the locomotive was going to the place
where the reason is
why they constantly give birth
to mad-prophetic children
of mud
and the women waved scarves of mud
at the train
straw women along the fields
in the land of mud

translated by Vera Orac and Stuart Friebert
POEM IN NOVEMBER

Past the fierce Guardians
with their wooden scowls, past
the Great Southern Gate,
behind the bronze Buddha there's a test
for getting to Paradise.
Not sure if they're losers or winners
skinny children line up
and squirm on their bellies
through the hole at the base of a pillar.
One of them is stuck in the middle,
her shoulders won't budge.
Friends push from behind
where her feet thrash, others tug
at her arms until she emerges
red-faced and crying.

Not ready for Paradise, not even
tested, not wanting to lose
the heat of my body, I jog
until my breath slams at my ribs.
Leaves are flying all over the gardens,
tiny fans of the gingkos
spread themselves open and flutter
for the last time, yellow on yellow,
lit-up, as if they have to be
luminous at the end.

At the women's college they're modeling
old kimonos to American rap.
The loose sleeves billow to the beat
of the music. I learn to suck noodles
through my closed lips, and they smile
with approval cheerfully coaxing
their grandmother to eat. Their teacher
whose name means cedar mountain
was a child in Nagasaki before the bomb.
"Even a lion does not eat a lion," he says so softly I can hardly hear the swell of his old grief under the small syllables and the immeasurable emptiness. He sighs like the steppes of Asia. "We don’t say life-and-death in our language," he tells me standing on his kitchen balcony. Sheaves of rice are hung out to dry. He shows me the cut stalks. "We say death-and-life."

Pressed against the dark rail of the war refusing to be reminded or to forget, I look at the buds still wrapped on the ripening kernels. I want to be in there, unhatched and unpolished. There are people who sit all day in their incompleteness gripping the handles of desire. Something is riding on their hunched backs, clawing their shoulders. When they shoot the balls madly into their slots, neon lit marbles, little joy-rides to nowhere along the malls, they are shaking it off.

That’s my face wrinkled in the pond among the hundred year old carp. They drift fat and golden through the lotus. Sometimes I wake up lying on an x-ray table inhaling deeply, letting it out. Strapped between my skin and the surface of things, gold-leaf and lacquer and the lumpish flesh, I’m waiting for the bad news.
If I am happy
in the carefully raked gardens, the studied random, balance of crane and turtle
and fifteen positioned rocks,
or in our bare room where we've fallen between the futons, light seeping through the screen, holding and being held, and if I'm glad
when water flows down the face of the granite into its bamboo channel
the way it was meant to, is it because
I don't trust the unexpected
I used to want more of? Am I resigned to safety? Brimming unseen in the green scrub, the bamboo sōzu empties with a sharp crack frightening the deer.

"Every rock has a being of its own."
The priest says he worked as a bank clerk until he was fifty. Not wanting his emptiness but mine, I try to be still again the way I learned it in the sixties. I try not to try.
To hear the leaves. This one, for instance. The wind nudged it from the maple as I raised my head and already it's a lost thought, all the colors are sailing past me. Not the rock. How stony it is! And weathered, like the old poems. Tilted a little to one side but not unbalanced.

Masako says her mother took the train to Nara with her haiku club to watch the full moon on the rippled sand.
What does an old woman do with the moon in her hair all night? What does she hear in the bright dark when she listens to the sound of no water under the sand?
Lucky elevens, Saturday, November
the marching band and veterans in regalia,
the chipped chrome Cadillacs, cannons strapped to trucks,
the rest of us left button-holed on corners,
children and parents in every baseline color,
the poppies' stiff cheap crepe running in the rain . . .
Why is it always raining?
I look up into the cold clouds blinded,
opening my hands, my cat's-mouth yawn a poppy.
The rain has the taste of ice, it kills
things down to an essential clarity —

Poppies everywhere, horizon to some middle distance,
against the summer yellow of the grain,
in sunlight so bright it burns a violet ash
at their centers, the petals tucked and scored,
their soft blood orange ecstatic rose
wounded at the stem. To pick
them is to have them close and dry up into leaves.
Better to let them labor on their own,
soleitary, terminal, open above the field,
the disc-shaped cups arrayed yet tipped
among the broken pottery of the wind.

In the park across the street
the widow wearing medals from the First World War
sorting with her cane daffodil from crocus.
She pokes at them as if to count them.
This, like every other, is her fatal spring.
And this the year we leave the windows open,
London ocean air alternately heavy, lambent, falling,
the nineteenth-century plane trees
transitional between purple and the foliation,
the new grass wet with ice and fuel exhaust,
each lily of a flower once touched dismissed.
The subject is debility, the wind against the house, my mother at the table arguing happiness, survival, the middle of the night and how our next door neighbor, who’s finished out the war in German boxcars, sometimes walks the outline of his yard, then lies down face up to the few visible stars. His body has no floor. Except for his name it’s understood he disappears in daylight. My mother, insomniac and on the move, as high in the house as the moon, turns out the light, looks down.

Midsummer, south of Edinburgh, cool, the evening fine and pale, the North Sea cumulus clouds moving among the farms at galleon speed . . . Under the weight of light the poppies spread out evenly, while opposite the road the big white Grays browse above their shadows. They drift awhile before they lean against the fence to bob for apples, which eaten whole break in half and flower. Someone who hates his life stands in the road, on one side the dark red distance of the poppies, on the other side great souls.

for William Matthews
Bryan Appleyard says it quite clearly in his book, *Understanding the Present* (1992): science affronts human dignity. "Science is not a neutral or innocent commodity... Rather, it is spiritually corrosive, burning away ancient authorities and traditions."

Appleyard believes that science is — or has developed since Galileo into — an autonomous entity, with a life of its own, progressively detrimental to human existence. No wonder, then, that *Understanding the Present* has been quoted in editorials in scientific magazines such as *Nature*; a fundamental misunderstanding of this kind involving science rarely gets expressed so vigorously — the tone makes one think of parliamentary debates — and seldom achieves such commercial success.

According to Appleyard, science endangers human survival on the planet despite the positive role it has played, together with technology, in the victory of liberal democracy. This is an idea expressed by Francis Fukuyama in his notorious *The End of History* (1989); in Appleyard’s context, given the endangerment, the victory is a paradox.

According to Appleyard and people like him, liberal democracy is no triumph either, since it allows too many things that are adverse to what they call "human essence": embryo research, abortion, animal experimentation, environmental destruction, development of uncreated species and unprecedented polymers, nuclear technologies, the universe without the Big Bang, or with it, the human genome map and other unnatural activities.

At this point someone should define, then, what would constitute a human triumph in the other, anti-science conception, but the critic usually never gets around to that. That side of the argument is *de norma* and probably *de jure* missing from all kinds of anti-science and alternative science, in group orthodoxies and fundamentalist movements.

Of course, the issue is the "natural world" of sense and meaning in which we live as concrete and more or less repeatable beings. The difficulty with the natural world is that it is being addressed and handled both by scholars, competent philosophers of
the Husserl niche, and by simple minds of the New Age style for whom Husserl's book on the crisis of western science is the same kind of trap as molecular genetics. And where the philosopher whispers, the simple mind yells.

A second difficulty lies in the fact that at the individual level of a thinking and feeling man or woman the natural world is supposed to be grasped by the human mind as if the mind itself were a thing apart: this is logically impossible. The human cognitive apparatus is a product of biological evolution and its mission is to guarantee the survival of the species, not "recognition of truth," as the Slovakian philosopher Ladislav Kovac has recently (1992) pointed out. The recognition of truth can be a recognition of the aspiration toward a supra-individual cognitive system. It's a wonderful idea to imagine somebody or something living up to the state of real or final wisdom, wisdom for all of us. So far, this hasn't happened to any individual soul or through any spiritual movement. So far, it has only been the trend of the cognitive networks of modern sciences.

More surprisingly, in all such argumentation, we never really get a definition of the "human essence." If it is something unchanging, at the core of each man, woman and child, why get upset with animal experimentation, since we have always survived at someone else's expense and "natural" cultures have so often enjoyed carrying out bloody human and animal sacrifice compared to which a surgical intervention on an anesthetized animal is a pastoral procedure which the experimenter does not even enjoy, or enjoys much less than a child dragging a frog around in a jar or rejoicing at the successes of Terminators and Ninja Turtles. If there was something invariant in us we certainly became alienated from it at the central point of our self-reflection, in our relationship to death and at the very beginnings of the cultures and civilizations called "European."

If, on the other hand, this "human essence" is a changing quality, which is probably the basis of my faith and hope, then changes must also occur in the content of expressions like "human," "being human," "human dignity," and "humanitarian approach." Then there is no point in regretting that ancient author-
ities and traditions get burned away. It becomes hard to put any trust in the urge to return to any and all kinds of fundamentalism, from the religious one to the ecological saving of all things visible, wistful and sentimental as opposed to things invisible and outside the range of our feelings. We must learn to ask, on a case by case basis, whether a proposed view is a relapse to a more primitive stage of the spirit, soul, or mass mentality, or whether it is a response not only to civilization’s problems and to scientific viewpoints, but also to westernization, which for many societies of the Third World is synonymous not only with economic growth but with survival itself.

In another essay Fukuyama contends that the historical evolution of liberal democracy is a proof in itself of how human nature has changed over the last couple of millennia. Heidegger took Nietzsche’s radical historicism to the conclusion that any traditional ethics or morality sooner or later become impossible. In terms of approach and method, Picasso said: “We always stick with the old-fashioned ideas, with outdated definitions, as if it were not the very task of the artist to find new ones.” And he was well aware of what he was burning away. But what is all right when said by a historian, philosopher or artist becomes an insult when uttered by a geneticist or physicist.

Ultimately, then, how can we suggest that science is an autonomous, aggressive and oppressive force or power? Are we saying that it’s something like a product of mutants from dimension X? The essence of radical historicism is derived from science and science is, as I believe and hope, an integral part of modern humanity, as well as art (though I won’t bet, even if just from professional shyness, as Richard Rorty does, that poetry’s evolutionary chances are better than philosophy’s). Science is part of our spiritual climate, just as that climate is the consequence of our activities, including scientific ones.

The increase in scientific knowledge, wrote Mario Vargas Llosa, undoubtedly influences history. However, there is no possibility of rationally predicting the development of scientific knowledge.

What was wrong with the Viennese atmosphere of the early
decades of this century, where not only new disciplines dealing with the subconscious, with sexuality, and with language emerged, but also new approaches to the demarcation of sciences and pseudosciences? Why should Freud and other kinds of poetism (in Medawar’s sense of the word) be less corrosive for traditional human values than Karl Popper and Ernst Mach? Doesn’t that Vienna atmosphere, or at other times the Copenhagen, Cambridge, or even Prague atmosphere, show that science is not an autonomous entity but a natural component of a creative atmosphere and of human progress, or at least of the process of solving the soluble?

Either we respect even what we do not understand, I would say, or we pretend to understand only what we respect. Unfortunately, respect is not too closely connected to knowledge. Sometimes it is even disconnected. . . . But it makes part of that creative atmosphere when it eventually does appear, somehow, somewhere.

I admit that these are the feelings or opinions of somebody who has been trying to do both science and art for a long time. Maybe my soul has been corroded, or it has refused to be inflated by the foam of some group mentality. Maybe my soul has been lost altogether. But I know at least a few artists with an obviously self-redeeming soul, who respect science as a way of acquiring knowledge and as an integral part of Western culture.

What corrosive forces or what supportive factors have I experienced thanks to scientific work, at least in terms of self-reflection, and if possible, without superstitions and illusions?

The main limitation I’m aware of is that I’m unable to accept any other mode of acquiring knowledge about the world of non-self than the scientific mode, the one that is acceptable for professional scientific criteria in various disciplines, the one about which I know, from my own experience or from literature, that it has not been dominated by psychopaths.

In other words, I am unable, in principle (a humanist would say “intrinsically”), to share the myths listed by Milton Rothman in his book The Science Gap (1992):
Nothing is known for sure.
Nothing is impossible.
Whatever we think we know now is likely to be overturned in the future.
All theories are equal.
Scientists create theories by intuition.
Advanced civilizations will possess forces unknown to us.
Etc.

Neither can I accept the traditional poetic myth “The scientist doubts, the poet knows,” since I know from everyday life and everyday work that poetic knowledge outside a poem is not worth a wooden nickel, and any other teaching of the men of spirit or the men of practice will not last very long, with the exception of several scientific and technical fundamentals of everyday use. In most situations we are impersonating the courtiers from the poem “Seekers After Truth,” by Dannie Abse:

Below, distant, the roaring courtiers
rise to their feet — less shocked than irate.
Salome has dropped the seventh veil
and they’ve discovered there are eight.

The consequence of the above-mentioned scientific limit is, however, that I am not left all alone with my private history, my own mental restrictions, my stupidity and ingenuity, my inventiveness and forgetfulness; I share the notions (knowledge and know-hows, as Vilem Laufberger used to say), gained by observation, experiments, judgment and computations by other trustworthy persons who convince me, correct and complement me, and mostly surpass me by far, which is a pleasant feeling for anyone who does not see himself as Prometheus (usually without the eagle, having cirrhosis of the liver instead).

Another limitation is the loss of “the pleasure of transcendence,” or more specifically the pleasure of personal transcendence. This pleasure, as Harold Bloom writes in his book Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism (1982), is “equivalent to narcissistic
freedom, freedom in the shape of that wilderness that Freud dubbed 'the omnipotence of thought,' the greatest of all narcissistic illusions."

It is of interest that the omnipotence of thought is demonstrated by predisposed individuals much more readily in the sphere of macrocosms and microcosms than in the sphere of communal hygiene or local administration. In politics, the frontiers of free invention are surprisingly much more tangible than in the treatment of rheumatism and in time-space theory. We, the less disposed to free invention, we limited individuals, understand that the Earth is not flat, that the center of the universe is not in the solar system, that Newton with his laws of gravity was much less mistaken than theoreticians of UFOs, that photons are unchanging and permanent entities, that one cannot exceed the speed of light, that life is based exclusively on biochemical principles such as the self-perpetuating information systems of nucleic acids, that even spiritual existence is based on impenetrable complexity and on the Order-out-of-Chaos principle, that a swan cannot be crossed either with Lohengrin or with Leda, not even with HIV, and that there are only two surpassing, transcendental categories in life: the genome and the extracorporeal heritage that is sometimes called culture and sometimes civilization.

In addition to these tough limitations, all else is everyday routine, psychological and physical, at which any careless vagabond is better than an intellectual is, routine which is dominated by an interplay of instincts, including the Basic Instincts, depicted by the recent box-office hit film, instincts at which we were, forget the film, undoubtedly more efficient some 200,000 years ago.

One of the essential limitations imposed by science is the fact that one feels old enough to want to be 200,000 years older.

There is, however, the inner circle, the dark world of the Self, located within reach of our knowledge, know-hows and decision-making in the same way as the secretions of glucocorticoids and the reserve of stem cells in the bone marrow. That is, they are located within reach, but we are not very good at reaching them, although we need not make a virtue out of our
difficulty. The darkness of this inner world is demonstrated by the fact that the same description applies to it as the one Lewis Thomas offered in his 1974 essay on the autonomy of organs: "Nothing would save me and my liver, if I were in charge. . . . I am . . . constitutionally unable to make hepatic decisions. . . ."

It is also demonstrated by the fact that as for these "selves," as the same scientific, lyrical author says, there are quite a number of them, and they come one after the other, with others waiting in line for their turn to perform, and the worst moment comes when one wants to be just a single self: some manage it — at least Thomas does — only when listening to music.

As I know from my own experience, the trouble is that there is very little of that Self in the dark inner world, but there are a lot of events and images from the outside. A solid soul expert naturally calls them archetypes and makes them part of some tribal subconscious, when in fact what I have in there is this year's kangaroo from Wilpena Pound in Australia, the frightened face of an elderly lady across the aisle on the plane, tumors in the satin lung tissue of an unknown young man I dreamed about last night because I had digestive problems, the hardly audible violin music in the garden during sunset yesterday evening, the outline of a girl I once loved, the mobile statue of my mother, who later in life lost her pedestal of faith, hope and love, the chirping of happy children, the quiet voice of a girl without a daddy, who cut her face with a kitchen knife — it's nothing, she says, you just press it to your cheek and slice —, obstacles to the publication of this scientific study, ways of surmounting them, the voice of Dana H., melodiously interpreting a film on the sexual habits of ground squirrels. . . . In fact, I even have in there — and I don't regret it — the paradox of Schrödinger's cat, several NK cells, a couple of nude mice, the anthropic principle of the Universe with Doctor Grygar's profile, and the TNF mice probe with the black eye of Doctor Marie L., four unanswered letters, a mess involving my phone bills, confidence in justice even in the course of the ongoing Kafka trial, the first eight lines of the Iliad, and a spot on my beige jacket.

My dark inner circle comprises a few minor miracles, gentle
howling, short-term fairy tales or myths, anecdotes, and several sharp-edged surprises, never mind whether by Magritte or Stephen Hawking. Naturally, in view of scientific limitations, I would not compare my dark inner world with the transcendent or transcendental cystic soul, the hypertrophic soul (Milan Kundera), but I guess each of us has a soul just the right size, as life goes on. Maybe it is that corrosion. I was somewhat relieved after reading E. C. White’s essay, “Contemporary Cosmology and Narrative Theory” (1992), in which he states that “. . . As a radical departure from expectations and habits, the sublime (Kant’s experience of spiritual transcendence) pertains not only to those moments when thought transcends itself but to those other times when reality takes the self by surprise, traumatically disrupting an existing system of meanings.” So the scientific background or foreground gives my dark inner circle of myths, stories and illogical shifts and feelings at least an awareness of what a real surprise is, as opposed to an accident, in the personal network of the world, and what is, on the other hand, a mere function of half-remembered secondary education.

I do not think that my personal myths, feelings, shifts and illogical urges are great fun, as the popular metamyth goes, and I don’t even know whether they are good for anything. They are here, they are strictly personal, they do for a sort of poetic attitude, and they have nothing to do with collective paranoias, which periodically appear in the form of short skirts, long confessions and commercial clairvoyance, preferably Indian with an Afro haircut. They are just, in the literary application, private idiosyncratic metaphors, some sort of black, symbiotic plants in the “secret gardens of self,” in William Carlos Williams’s term.

In view of these secret gardens I have no doubt about the role of poetry (in the broadest sense of the word) in my life, in every life, in the average human inner world governed by principles of uncertainty. I do need poetry as a sort of consolation, a temporary relief and limited hope about the personal immediate and distant future. I do not need poetry or religion (or New Age or new anthropology) to explain the past or the present of the Self or Non-Self. I do need poetry as the last possibility for saying some-
thing against the inevitable, against gravitation, against the degeneration of nucleic acids and arthrosis, although I know that it is no good. That is, I need a little nonsense for my deep and transitory and maybe futile sense. But I do not need nonsense, yes I honestly hate nonsense as ideology, artistic ideology, fundamentalist ideology.

Another substantial limitation given by science or scientific work is the awareness of real, good-sized absurdity, awareness of an ingenious leap of the playful mind in the history of leaps and play. This is the true counterpoint to the rational, known and compulsory binding. It is the limitation that stems from knowing or suspecting the borderline between the anarchy of thought and its opposite, the jump and courage of thought, as long as it isn’t wrapped up in mumbo-jumbo until it is beyond recognition. That’s nothing against puns, verbal or otherwise; I have always liked them especially since I began reading and reviewing scientific reports in our so-called soft science.

Ultimately, there is the limitation or pressure of science on the soul in the technical sphere. When you are doing something in the laboratory, perhaps something mechanical like weighing, or something magical like seeking fluorescent cells in black darkness, you are outside the inspirational sources of art or any other inventiveness and creativity. All your mental activity is simply a little digital counting or simply being in the dark. You are totally devoted to figures or to darkness. If you do it forty hours a week, there is not much time left for creative mental activity. A soul craving other levels of experience must simply wait. It must get used to an economic way of acting and, if experiments are to be concluded and formulated, to the fact that all the energy and all the capacity for ideas will have been consumed by the first scientific plan. That is how a specialized economic system of individual poetry is created, involving the conscious and the subconscious, the system of “maybe I’ll get an idea some day.” I will, I won’t. Given that, writing poetry or anything else presents itself as some sort of recreation rather than as some sort of obsessive neurosis. Such a view may appear to be a terrible limitation to some artists, but it does not appear so terrible to me, especially
when I consider how many authors have set out to write with such intransigence, how many painters have set out to paint plausible commercial painting, how many former researchers have embarked upon careers as entrepreneurs, money-makers, or, most horrifying of all, democratic big-shots in our turbulent, and hence morally revealing, conditions.

The set of personal values and the set of daily activities must form a closed circle, and I can only add that intoxication by work is for me the simplest and least harmful type of intoxication or poisoning, although it’s still intoxication. If there’s an English word I intrinsically and principally abhor, it is the expression “workaholic.” It is almost the same as intoxication by profit.

Science teaches us some discipline. It forces us to concentrate on a single problem and a single approach to it at the given moment: only then is there hope of achieving some tiny success in any research, including art. In an activity aimed at something, which could lead somewhere, there is no room and time (today) for free-floating and vague hesitation. Scientific practice has taught me: That there is a big difference between real involvement of the mind and hand and an internally pretended creative effort. That lengthy social exchange of monologues based on “what about me” cannot replace “what I have done.” That ten minutes are ten minutes even at a lecture or a poetry reading. That we are basically transparent and this transparency cannot be talked away. And finally, that criticism is not sublimated violence or a plot by depraved individuals to destroy someone’s progress; very often it is a qualified assessment of what others think of us, naturally in the conditions of the existing climate or paradigm. Or dogma.

There’s a moral component to be derived from science, and most humanists don’t like this at all. Alas, most humanists are defined mainly by never having worked in science. They have never read Jacob Bronowski saying that science nowadays requires a rigorous way of thinking and a scrupulous code of conduct in the laboratory, library, operating theater or at the control panel. Science and technology, the new one and the older one. A rigorous code of conduct is not very satisfying in terms of the free human soul,
but the soul does not have much fun even during the daily routine, for instance when replacing a fuse or using some means of public or individual transport, not if it ever had real fun in the arms of Ondine, as can be seen in the third act of Dvorak’s opera. Today, the scientific mode of conduct and of asking questions presents a model and condensed mode of behavior that will gradually become more and more necessary, even in the non-scientific sectors of our dense civilization’s time-space.

I don’t mean that one doesn’t acquire a rigorous attitude in the pursuit of the arts and humanities. But in science and technology you simply develop an exacting attitude more quickly, and you are aware that deviations will be punished. We know of many cases of fraud, error and human failure in science and technology, from somebody copying other people’s work and publishing it under his or her own name, to experiments like Chernobyl. By contrast, I don’t recall so many frauds and failures in the arts, maybe because they are noticed very rarely and by very few people.

It is sad, but today we don’t learn the norms of life among people, machines, CFCs, and the whole dance of information from philosophy and from poetry; we learn them from technical instructions, which have a linguistic and esthetic quality that approximates the level of communication among social insects. Their influence on the soul is undoubtedly negligible, but it’s better to have some norms than none at all. Science is not to blame; the norms do not so much reveal the shortcomings of science as the shortage of it.

The impact of the soul, those dark blossoms in the secret gardens, on science itself cannot be left out or neglected. It too is an integral part of the existing atmosphere and genius loci, and I have eulogized them elsewhere. Public and private metaphors, fantasies, civilized myths or myths favored by common sense — all these affect the time and the place, and through them the way we are tuned and our half-conscious affinities for judgments, hypotheses, estimates of probable and possible events. They have contributed to the fact that the evolution of science tomorrow and in ten years cannot be assessed by rational methods. As Mary
Midgeley says in *Science and Salvation* (1992), "it can hang around like a fog, changing the atmosphere of thought and influencing ideas quite strongly. It tends to be the part of the book people remember. In particular, it can be expected to have a strong effect on students."

It is something like the Zeitgeist, composed of little individual idiosyncrasies and group mentalities and paradigms. "The objective spirit," says Norbert Bischof in a book on Konrad Lorenz (1992), "has a human dimension in addition to the material dimension, and it has always been known. But we did not like psychology to get too close to the human factor. . . . When searching for hidden motifs of creativity, they were evaluated in terms of morality instead of being analyzed in terms of causality."

If it were true that "the reason is basically just the effector of our emotions" (L. Kovac), then the collective mind and reason of science might be one of the few ways out of the comical state in which the individual reason is able "to transform any common hormonal disorder into a metaphysical concept."

However, it is not necessary for the inner gardens, Zeitgeists and other human factors to darken, or even influence, the self-confidence of entire scientific disciplines, to substantially influence collective processes of questioning and procedures that lead from the insoluble to the soluble. It is not necessary to relativize those few scientific certainties we have, and to force researchers to apologize for being here and for having achieved something.

They are certainly aware, just like Karl Popper, that scientific realism is a metaphysical, which is to say untestable, notion. . . . And they share Popper’s belief that we have to learn how to do our metaphysics more scientifically, more critically.

The above-mentioned book by Mary Midgeley, who is a professor of moral philosophy by profession, is directed against the scientific and would-be-scientific dreams, among which she includes all the degrees of the anthropic principle of the Universe, utopias of intelligent Marxism and poetic recastings of quantum mechanics, so enormously successful in practice and so ambivalent in theory. No matter how popular, these compromises do not endow the sciences with soul, nor the souls with science. As for
me, I keep the final anthropic principle in my secret gardens, not in any everyday practice, including poetry, and if I keep it, then only a little bit, to have a common language.

Midgeley's book ends characteristically with the words: "For the general sanity we need all the help we can get from our scientists, in reaching a more realistic attitude to the physical world we live in." She means the help of professional science, not science fiction or scientific paraphrasing or parascientific balderdash.

I would like to share Mr. Appleyard's complaint, but I have nothing to complain about. Science has taught me to say "although" and "but," and it has made me fall from the symbolic world of language, myth, religion and art to the more human "natural world" and physical reality, immediate reality and meaningfulness as written about by Mr. Kant and Mr. Cassirer, a neo-Kantian, according to whom science represents the last degree in the spiritual evolution of man, the most characteristic and highest product of culture.

Anything that opposes the universal tendency of accretion to human knowledge (not simply personal, individual knowledge) is a deviation, an evolutional deviation and a positive moral deviation, says Ladislav Kovac. Doubting organized science in the name of the "natural world" is endangering the survival of the natural world.

And Wystan Hugh Auden, the American poet who always knew what this is all about and what he was saying, once in New York reminded me of his definition of art: Art is spiritual life made possible by science. I took it very personally.

translated by David Young, with the author
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DENNIS SCHMITZ'S About Night: Selected and New Poems appeared this summer as the inaugural volume in the new FIELD Poetry Series. Ask your local bookstore to stock it!

CHARLES SIMIC'S most recent book of poems is Hotel Insomnia, from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

CHARLIE SMITH'S most recent books are a collection of poems, The Palms (Norton), and Chimney Rock, a novel, from Henry Holt.

FRANZ WRIGHT, who has appeared many times in these pages, has recently completed his fourth collection, Rorschach Test.
WILLIAM STAFFORD

With all his friends and many admirers, we mourn the passing of William Stafford in August. Bill was a contributor to FIELD from its very first issue, and a loyal supporter through all of our twenty-five years. Typical of his spirit and generosity is the way he continued to let us collect reprint fees for an essay that is now a classic, "A Way of Writing." He could have claimed full copyright, but he was happy to be able to provide a small but steady source of income for a magazine he always enjoyed reading and contributing to. We will miss him greatly.
A customized view from the edge of the infinity of the Mandelbrot Set. © 1990 Strange Attractions