FOOD FOR THOUGHT

these three young men of different attire, sizes, and hairstyles, are sitting over tea and juices

under an umbrella on the food patio of the l.a. city art museum, and they are discussing, yes they are, neither girlfriends, boyfriends, art, or sports, but what kind of peanut butter they like best.

THE REVERSE P.R. MAN

over the years toad came to realize that nobody enjoyed recognizing themselves in his poems or stories, even when, as was often the case, he had been trying to compliment them. thus, whenever something new came out, his pleasure was tempered by the need to make sure copies were not circulated at home or around the office, or in the neighborhood, or where he grew up, or where his wife might pick one up, or his kids. or, sometimes, even in certain foreign countries. eventually he found he was spending more time trying to make sure his works weren't read by the wrong people than most writers spend trying to assure that somebody at least would read theirs.

SENDING A MESSAGE

picking up my highschool daughter at her new boyfriend's house i notice a barbell on the carpet of the recreation room.
"pumping a little iron?" i say.
"a few curls," he says.
so i stroll over to position myself in front of it as my daughter cries,
"dad, your back, your heart, your lungs, your everything!"

I lift it properly to the upright position and crunch out two disciplined curls;

then set it cautiously back on the floor. "very good , sir,"
the young man says.
i smile, shake his hand, and
head out to the car, happy that
i guessed correctly that it was a
weight i could still handle,
doing my best not to gasp, and
hoping it looked as if i could have
kept pumping away indefinitely.

ANOTHER SOCIAL INADEQUACY

a lot of times i don't look people in the eyes when i'm talking to them. i can tell this bothers many of them because they will frequently try to force me to engage their gazes. they'll go so far as to move around me, bend over, crowd in, do everything to create an angle at which i cannot escape their faces. they probably think i'm afraid of them. or that i'm staring off into space because i can think up better lies that way.

actually, i have simply found that i think better this way. i'm not distracted by anything about the person i'm talking to. i can concentrate on what exactly i want to say and how exactly i can best phrase it. so i was happy to read in a recent new yorker profile that bill gates, who founded microsoft at the age of nineteen and is, at thirty-nine, the second richest man in the united states, shares this habit of looking away while thoughtfully preparing his responses. and while he reserves the right to guard what he deems essentially private, he has a reputation for candor.

i suspect that those who are fond of mouthing utterances such as. "i like a man who will look me square in the eye," are really just looking for an opportunity to interrogate and to intimidate. they're not interested in the subtleties of