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### The Vehicle, Fall 1987

Rodger L. Patience

Robb Montgomery

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Fall 1987

# THE VEHICLE



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# VEHICLE Fall 1987

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## Sketches in the Sun

### I. The Old Man

sighed as he leaned against the low wall and looked at this work. He gently brushed the dust from his knee, said to himself, "Yes, that's better," and looked again at the row of canvasses propped against the wall. His work always pleased him; he had little else.

The sun's warmth seemed to him a marvelous thing; for years now, he had spent the summer in these mountains, trying to capture in his sketches the vitality he felt, sitting by his stone wall, sketching in the sun. He breathed deeply, closed his eyes, and slept, the grass his pillow, the sun his blanket.

When he awoke, he resumed his drawing, for he was intrigued by the sheep which had joined him while he slept. His strong hand moved across the page with sure, quick strokes, creating a world of sheep and sun, of pasture and mountains, which was wonderful to the old man. When he had finished the sketch, he got to his feet and walked down the hill to a stream, where he had his lunch in the shade of an old oak tree.

By the stone wall, where the canvasses were laid out to dry, a young man was admiring the old man's work. The young man, an artist himself, saw in the sketches a passion, a fervor which he had never captured in his own work; he saw life laid out beneath the warm Spanish sun.

## II. The Sketch-book

lay open at a drawing of a hillside pasture in summer. The young man looked at his work, frowning; he remembered the scene as the old man had sketched it, full of life and passion. His rendering, however was sullenly lifeless, pale and washed out; all of his sketches since that summer had been so. As he turned the pages of the sketch-book, flipping back through the last two months' work, the sight of so many darkened pages was enough almost to make him sick with despair. In a sudden fit of rage, he tore the sketch-book into shreds, throwing the tattered pages across the room. "Damn your Spanish sun, old man, and damn you, too!"

Later that evening as he drove to a showing of his earlier works, the young man ran his auto headlong into a tree; he awoke in a hospital bed unable to see.

## III. The Old Man

was at home now. He worked in his studio until all hours, putting his sketches on canvas, painting his warm Spanish sun. His easel and even his clothes were positively glowing with the fiery paints he used. During these long winter months, his only consolation was the sight of his sunny canvasses and his passionate sketches; in fact, they were in many ways his rejuvenation. He was happier only when he was in the mountains by his stone wall.

After four months of winter had passed, the old man began to prepare for his trip to the pastureland he loved. A heightening sense of anticipation made his step quicker, his mood brighter, and his work ever more full of life. He spent even longer hours in the studio, painting with a fervor and a passion impossible to describe. His canvasses grew brighter and warmer, as though preparing for the real thing, for the spectacle of his Spanish sun on that mountainside.

## IV. The Young Man

was absorbed in his own thoughts as the attendant wheeled him around the grounds of the retreat where the doctors had sent him after his automobile wreck. He saw nothing that the attendant saw, heard nothing that the man said about the awful, pale sky this year; he could think of little else but that fateful day. In his mind, he relived that day constantly, torturing himself, never knowing how he tortured others, both by his silence and by his words.

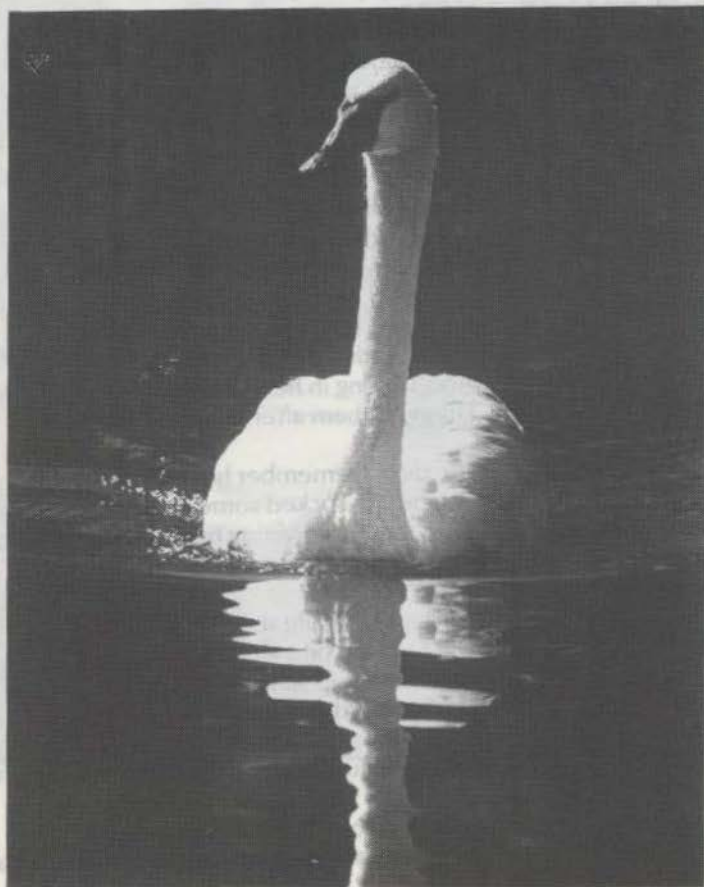
On one particularly washed-out day that summer, the young man and his attendant were passing the low stone wall that bordered the retreat grounds, when a sound, carried by the wind, reached the young man's ears. As he struggled to make it out, a sudden shock of realization pounded his senses, recalling to him that last day in the studio, recalling the words spoken in anger as he destroyed his work. "Damn your Spanish sun, old man, and damn you, too!" His mind reeled with the horror of what he had done bringing back the words of the attendant; the image of a sky gone pale burned forever into his sightless brain.

## V. The Old Man

sat on the other side of the wall, sketch-book in hand, drawing furiously; for the last two days, he had been struggling to recapture the fervor his paintings and sketches once inspired in him. Every time he looked at the

sun hanging dead in the sky, a great despair seized his tired body. His sketches were a reflection of this lifelessness, as they had been a reflection of its past glory. As the young man passed the wall, the old man let out a cry of despair, a cry of utter pain; the sun which had been his life was now to be his death. He watched with tearful eyes as his drawings and canvasses dried, cracked, and were dark forever, images of sketches in the sun washed away with them. He lay down beside the stone wall and closed his eyes for the last time beneath the cold Spanish sun.

**Rodger L. Patience**





## Grandpa's Porcelain Doll

Lying in silence,  
Eyes fixed, transparent. . .  
Grandpa's porcelain doll.

Her lipless mouth ajar,  
Dentures swimming  
In a clouded glass of  
Thickening water.

Swollen, disfigured knuckles with  
Plastic joints put in  
Just last year.

Swaddled in her own  
Hand-sewn quilt,  
Her face folds in and  
Her chin disappears.

**Richard Hall**

## Tintype 1837

She was filled with soot,  
Her elbows creaked with it,  
She felt it grinding in  
Her knees, and sifting down

Between the vertebrae in her spine  
Locking them like gears--  
Some mornings she couldn't unbend  
And humped around like a tortoise,

She felt it heavy in her arms while  
She kneaded dough in the morning,  
And sagging in her feet when she  
Dragged them after her into bed,

She didn't remember how it got there--  
Maybe she sucked some in  
With the dirt covering her fourth daughter,  
And perhaps some seeped in with

The smoke while she watched  
The fire take bite after bite of  
Her home and spit it out fully chewed--  
Maybe she didn't sneeze it all out

With the dust from her husband's picture frame;  
She felt its weight more each day,  
Knowing soon it would pull her down  
Like sand between the cracks in the sidewalk.

**Catherine Friemann**

# Washerwoman's Song

The darkness rubs my days away  
I scrubbed at my sins and my shame  
At noon I stop and crack like clay  
And wait for dusk to paint the stars  
my mother would say



Jayne A. Rind  
Mavis Cook

## Washerwoman's Song

The darkness rubs my dugs away  
I shudder at the break of day  
At noon I chip and crack like clay  
And wait for dusk to paint me gray

I shudder at the crack of day  
On two burnt knees I bend and sway  
And wait for dusk to paint me gray  
I moan until I start to pray

On two chipped knees I bend and sway  
At noon I burn and break like clay  
I moan until I start to pray  
The darkness rubs my dugs away

Bob Zordani

## Scrambled Eggs for D.O.

I carefully walk on egg shells  
so I won't make a mess  
on your meticulously scrubbed floor  
But you and I both know  
that your corners are all dirty  
and your walls are thick with white paint  
Still  
I continue.  
When I'd really like to stamp all over them  
and get it over with  
But  
still  
I continue.

Lynne A. Rafool

## **"my mother would say"**

my mother would say  
"what a cute pregnant lady"  
with her very blonde hair

pulled

tightly back from her  
face.

my mother would say  
"I could never wear maternity clothes so well"  
like this blonde with  
her maroon smock  
and a silk bow

tied

tightly around her  
neck.

my mother would say  
"she takes such good care of herself"  
as dusted blush tries to  
warm her cheeks  
and  
blue shadow  
frosts  
her already  
cold eyes.

my mother would say  
"she's already got her hands full with a little one"  
while the  
pregnant blonde  
heaves  
a two-year-old  
like a sack of groceries  
on her hip.

**Monica Groth**

# Retired by His Children

His feet are up  
and all the change is  
rolling from his pockets.

They've yanked the milking machines  
from the teats, dropped  
them with cows they sucked  
into the trucks of neighbors  
lining the road for the auction—

pulled his loose boundaries  
of hedgerows and quail  
by the drawstrings,  
bunching them up into curbs.

They have brought him here  
to eat the offerings  
of sweet corn left  
from the gardens of daughters,

needled by ease, crouching  
for the grips of udders  
in his haven of streets.

**Dan Von Holten**

## past nebraska

There's a faded photo past the  
curtain panel in the living room.

It's a photo of a young woman  
in a white dress, standing in a field.

### I am the oldest

when my mom was seventeen  
all  
she wanted for Christmas  
was  
a coffee pot.

I know  
because she's told me  
so many times as  
a testament of  
her housewife-mom  
martyrdom.

when mom was eighteen  
she got married.  
there are  
no  
wedding pictures  
of a  
white  
dress,  
she wore a  
green  
suit.

I used to wonder about that.

**Monica Groth**



## Five Minute Jamaican Vacation

It warmed the pale of my face  
as it touched sails sliding  
across white water.

Blue beams encircled  
trees that danced in rhythm  
with air in their hair.

I talked of adult things  
in childish ways  
with an old lover  
where never is never.

As I lift weighty lids  
that cover eyes red  
from work, I step  
out of the circle  
of lighted carpet.  
The sun moves on  
to share its wealth.

Christy Dunphy

## The Angry Poem

I was trying to look behind your black glasses  
and see beyond your black words.  
But you said there was nothing more.  
The waves of your voice shook my hands  
and I grinded my teeth from my gums.  
I wanted to remove your face from your skull.  
My belly began to love when it burned  
its acids in disgust. My lungs wanted to laugh  
in your face hoping the smell was foul.  
My words became black as your thoughts  
coiled around my neck, but I decided  
not to hate before all breath was gone.

Christy Dunphy

## Road, Unfamiliar

Black Monday air rests on the earth  
of a disappearing road  
where old bones of trees lie waiting.

Beyond all walls, this place  
is for sheets that strangle girls  
and for septic tanks that stop growth beneath them.

This is where the stench of dead fish  
is the scent of life unknown. Washing machines  
are forgotten and they hear no sounds

except dogs howling at chains.  
My tires moving me away  
are the screaming, pleading unborn.

Christy Dunphy



## **"raised voices"**

raised voices  
still  
raise goose bumps  
reminiscent  
of that  
child beating  
heart  
pumping  
faster  
with each  
verbal punch  
to the  
bag  
2 boxers  
wearing  
satin shorts  
sporting  
Mother  
Father  
titles  
jab  
in the  
living room ring  
while  
the hidden  
child spectator  
Hails  
Mary  
10 times 5  
on the  
glow in the dark  
rosary string

**Monica Groth**

## Old Ladies & Miniskirts

Down Third and Main  
A-roarin' my speedy jalopy  
Suddenly--a lass  
Battin' them eyelashes  
Faded denim skirt a-swayin'  
Back and forth  
Little too revealin'  
But I likes it  
Thinkin' 'bout courtin' 'er  
Hearts a-beatin'  
Palms a-sweatin'  
Suddenly a pain shootin'  
A-shootin' through my legs.  
Arthritis actin' up

Lookin' down at stiffened limbs  
Screechin' my wheelchair  
A friendly voice a-callin'  
"Medicine time, Mr. Nelson"  
I turns temporarily away  
Swallowin' my pills  
Leavin' my outside freedom

Down a long hallway  
A-guidin' my awkward buggy  
Suddenly--Ms. Benton  
Sittin' in her chariot  
Remindin' of dat denim skirt  
Blue an' faded  
Worn by young-uns  
But I likes her  
Thinkin' 'bout courtin' 'er  
Heart a-beatin'  
Palms a-sweatin'  
Suddenly a pain a-shootin'  
A-shootin' through my heart  
Memories actin' up

**Kara Shannon**

## Freakspeak

Even though I jerk and lunge  
and ride these spasms darkly,

even though I am plane  
without pilot, drooler,

dancer, freak, even if I am  
a freak (and a freak I am)

I speak these plain truths:  
you are the woman who soothes

this beaten back, ices down this  
bloody tongue, fat lip, nose.

Who lets me sleep it off.  
Preens me when I wake.

**Bob Zordani**

## Portrait

I've drawn your face  
with black ash—

soot from a smoother torch  
than wood.

It's dust from me that  
sits rubbed and scratched

into the teeth of this sheet,  
thick and heavy here

in the crease of your eye  
and the shade of your jaw.

Lightest over the slope  
of your cheek.

This charcoal is knees and beard,  
charred from my burning.

**Dan Von Holten**

## Mobile Vacuum

A match in a box ready to ignite  
The packed can of humans mounts the highway.  
The iced window froze my cheek  
Smashed against the glass helplessly.  
Desperately gasping for air.

Lack of oxygen, heart races.  
Struggling limbs fight for space.  
New perm asphyxiates  
sardines mated against locks of yellow curls.

'71 Impala ignores foot on the gas.  
Needle continues to point at 55.  
Aren't new laws in effect?  
Publicity only to those with modern diseases.

Cheap hotel signs, fast foods, detours,  
exits, someone has to pee?  
The air in the car thins. . .  
my breath starts getting selfish  
Why is my heart in my mouth?

The veins on my cheekbones are pounding in  
the percussion section of a big band.  
The car shrinks.  
Did Alice share her Wonderland discovery with a Chevrolet?

I grab for the window handle  
Anxiously seeking oxygen  
A safety window deceives  
The green vinyl melts fast.

The blonde thrusts at my nose with her elbow.  
She obnoxiously giggles with bright red lipstick.  
Her crooked tooth has a brown patch.  
My throat begins to sweat.

A radiant glow of red catches my eye.  
The imprisoning hell slows.  
I push the door open.  
My nosehair cringes at the prospect.

**Kathleen L. Fairfield**

## Rev. Fermus Dick

the mail came today  
an invitation to the ball  
Keith Richards and Hunter Thompson  
will be there  
with leather tuxedos,  
psychedelic high-tops

stepped into the zebra house  
like a pony on ice  
as Kevin put on his XTC pin  
and laser contacts  
did a quick dance step  
to an old David Bowie tune

Kevin was alone in the room  
a leech for your company  
followed you around  
cursing me, threatening me  
under his breath, and I could  
not pull you away in time

when the music changed  
and the crowd arrived  
I looked for Richards and Thompson—  
nowhere in sight—  
I looked for you and Kevin—  
same story

**Steve Hagemann**



## What's the Name of That Flower?

My mind was fighting to find the answer. I could see all those little men inside my head pulling out files, trying to get at the solution. Galapagos Islands, red, beautiful, large, red petals, about seven or eight inches in diameter—the name was closer to the tip of my tongue. It was silly, I had work to do. Now was not the time to try and think of a flower. Ugly! No, it wasn't ugly. I could see it in my mind. It certainly wasn't ugly. It stank as the pit of hell. No not the flower, but the place where I was standing. That was it. The fragrance of the flower did stink. I think they said it "stank to high heaven." But what was its name?

Here I stood, in what was probably Satan's trophy room, trying to think of a flower. The smell was about to knock me over. The fetor of old urine mixed with air that reeked with the smells of feces, rotting flesh, and open running pus from boils and bed sores, made a pig sty seem absent of fragrance.

I had one more observation to do. Who was this now? The name on the chart matched the name on my list. I sat down next to the old iron bed and looked at him. My eyes began to water. Here, a forty-three-year-old man lay in restraints, wearing a diaper. He had no arms or legs; and, as if God thought that wasn't enough, he was deaf and blind. Membranes of skin covered the holes where his eyes and ears should have been. He had never uttered a sound. He wasn't much larger than a one-year-old baby. He was found in a garbage can.

I was that baby next to me—that baby who was forty-three years old, that baby who has never known love. The ink on my paper was running together. My paper was wet. I sat in the midst of hell, in the most foul air, weeping. A man who had nothing, could not see or hear, had never uttered a word, was sharing a gift with me. He had moved his head to rest on my hand.

As I was leaving Ward D, new smells seemed to emerge. I remember finding comfort in that new malodor. I started to hurry. I walked into Ward C, through the hallway, then into the breezeway where there was fresh air. I was just about to the exit door when someone said, "Hi, Richard, you got a minute?"

Beside me was a wheel chair. I remember first noticing the ulcerated sores on the legs. And then came the odor that was the now familiar foulness of stale urine that always accompanies a dehydrated condition. The voice was sweet sounding and educated, like an Oxford graduate.

Before me sat a woman whose trunk and legs together were less than three feet long. Her arms were no more than ten inches in length. But her head was at least thirty-six inches in circumference. She was born with a condition known as hydrocephalus. Her head was so heavy that she had to have it strapped in place so it would not fall and snap her back.

I still hadn't said anything to her. Then she told me to sit down. "You look like you need to talk." I remember wondering why she said that. "Close your eyes for a while. We can talk better that way." I closed my eyes.

The darkness seemed good. Then the smell seemed to be getting stronger. She had moved her chair closer to me. Her hand was on mine. It was so little, like the hand of an infant. I wanted to pull away. The odor was suffocating me.

I don't know how long we talked. It didn't seem long, but it must have been over an hour because I missed a scheduled meeting. Her voice was so

soothing and calming that I found myself looking into her eyes. In all that time, her hand never left mine. The odor was gone.

I went away feeling that I had been blessed twicfold on that day. How many times do we get an opportunity to shut out the smells in our lives? The name of that flower still eludes me; but if I can shut out the smell, I know that it will come to me.

**Richard Jesse Davis**

## **Request**

Let me remember the skin on your hands  
and lie here, as I stroke you like a harp.  
Gentle your surrender under the cream blue sky.

Stay here in the Gold March  
and let a new sun feel the pale of my skin.  
Let the winter grass scratch your feet.

As breezes share their touch  
on our shoulders and hair, love me  
as you do this day's air.

And when shadows stalk this yellow day,  
we will force goodbye through grinding teeth  
letting March turn cold.

**Christy Dunphy**



## What's the Name of That Flower?

It was a long time ago, but I remember the first time I saw a flower. It was a small, white flower with a yellow center, and it was growing in a field of tall grass. I was walking through the field, and I saw it. I was so young, and I was so curious. I wanted to know what it was. I asked my mother, and she told me it was a daisy. I was so happy. I had found a flower, and I knew its name. It was a small, white flower with a yellow center, and it was growing in a field of tall grass. I was walking through the field, and I saw it. I was so young, and I was so curious. I wanted to know what it was. I asked my mother, and she told me it was a daisy. I was so happy. I had found a flower, and I knew its name.

Here I stand, in what was probably the same room, in how to think of a flower. The small was about its knowledge of the world, and I was standing with all that roared with the winds of change, and I was standing with all that roared with the winds of change, and I was standing with all that roared with the winds of change.

I had seen many other flowers, but this one was different. It was a small, white flower with a yellow center, and it was growing in a field of tall grass. I was walking through the field, and I saw it. I was so young, and I was so curious. I wanted to know what it was. I asked my mother, and she told me it was a daisy. I was so happy. I had found a flower, and I knew its name.

I was that baby who had never known a flower before. My paper was wet, I sat in the rain, and I was so happy. I had found a flower, and I knew its name.

As I was leaving, I saw a woman who was sitting on the ground. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her.

Behind me was a woman who was sitting on the ground. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her.

I still hadn't said anything to her. Then she told me, "What's the name of that flower?" I remember wondering why she said that. "What's the name of that flower?" I remember wondering why she said that.

The darkness seemed good. She was sitting on the ground, and I was sitting on the ground. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her. She was looking at me, and I was looking at her.

I don't know how long we talked. It didn't seem long, but it felt like a lifetime. I don't know how long we talked. It didn't seem long, but it felt like a lifetime.

## Leaving: Two Views

By the way, you're on the glass.

Environmental to say against.

Pay to drink my coffee.

Customized to your taste.

Personalized to your needs.

Designed to fit your lifestyle.

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The Point

## Experienced

the man came to me,  
i was afraid.  
he was big and tall,  
and his eyes looked hungry.  
"i need you baby,"  
he whispered into my ear.  
i didn't want him,  
or need him.  
i tried to resist him,  
but the weight from above,  
crushed me.  
then he left,  
and i was ashamed.

Marilyn Wilson

## Leaving: Two Views

### I. The day past broken glass

Embarrassed in my ugliness  
I try to drink my coffee.  
Confused, abandoned;  
surely everyone knows.  
*If you don't shut up I'll hit you,*  
he said, so I shut up, and hid.  
I can't go home; I might speak!  
The baby might make a noise.  
Embarrassed at my emptiness  
I try to talk. The friend  
is in love, too stunned to  
understand. *If you do this*  
*you're screwing up our lives,*  
all our lives, he explained.  
I have no right to anything else  
as I spend the day shuffling  
just out of reach.

### II. Of great importance

As a chicken sticks its neck  
out over the chopping block, let me  
remind you: I'm going.  
The pork is in the oven, mango  
oranges in the deep freeze;  
you'll survive. An icy wind  
is blowing and I admit to  
becoming unstuck. One more  
crusty cereal bowl  
and I'm dead.  
So I'm leaving.  
As I said before,  
it is a matter of great importance.  
Remember—the garbage is yours.

Tina Phillips

## Antaeus

My sleeping here  
has caused the boards to creak.

My body breaks  
planes, has a way of

pushing through surfaces  
to reach dirt.

I have pressed past  
sheets, deep into my

mattress like a cocoon.  
Now this floor won't hold.

I'm too high, feel dizzy  
separated from earth.

I should move to the basement  
where the carpet lies on rock.

I want to sit,  
testes in the dust,

pound my fist and  
hear no echo from walls.

I want to shake the leaves  
from my head, sleep

with a twist of root  
digging at my back.

Dan Von Holten

## Misogyny at 19

My name is Prufrock and  
I hate women, worse than me.  
My life is spent on the narrow  
street and seldom do I  
meet one such as you.

The vitriolic components which are  
my inheritance from Franco-Prussian  
men of good will and little else  
burn and churn, slop, simmer  
at the edge of my frothing mouth  
as I stare freezing glassy fire  
And scream I hate women.

It is right and just to say so  
for I hate them with passion  
unparalleled and unrequited,  
more than me.

Bitches aren't bad. They're  
like a swift slap in the face,  
aftershave in the morning.  
Its reeking is righteous,  
clean-cut, no misconceptions or  
misunderstandings to drag dreams  
from my gut and shove them in  
my face. No time or money  
wasted, no regrets.

If my head is to be borne to me on a platter,  
may it be borne to me by a bitch.

I almost like fat chicks. No,  
I do like them. I like  
fat chicks that stay pale  
and sweat all year and wear  
clothes like tents and pavillions.  
They know pain and idiocy  
and would, discerning, pass  
by either for diet drinks, a  
small salad and six bags of Frito-Lays.

Someday I'll marry a fat  
chick, as ong as she wears too  
much make-up, whines a lot,  
cooks, and has relatives  
over for the holidays. And  
the relatives must whine and eat  
noisily and laugh at my trite  
idiocy, "C'est la vie!"

It's nice girls I hate.  
God, I hate them! Suffer this sin  
for I hate, hate, hate them.  
Noble women, their niceties and  
kind hearts overtake me;  
they corrupt all that I would be.  
Pretty girls, seeming fragile  
before stone souls that  
smile and want to be  
friends. They never ask  
too much and never expect it,  
never indebted and regretting  
only for others.  
Women with smiles of God's grandeur,  
flashing as foil;  
smiling ivory gates sending  
dreams to slice, dice, molest, belittle.  
I hate women's slim bodies  
and sweet words structured  
to preserve the jelly of  
my soul; can it.

Bloody bloody shit! I'm no Shakespearian  
fool, no one's tool, no one's someone special.  
In God alone I trust and  
He's the first I fail.  
Shall I roll up my trousers?  
Shall I walk along the beach  
and pine for you beyond me?  
I hate lovely ladies, nice girls, good girls;  
I will read them with gloves.  
They corrupt me, the most divine,  
the most quiet sublime and beautiful  
mock me.  
I would read them with gloves  
and burn them with bottles.  
I would cast this wax against  
bronze and see it tremble,  
impressed with my hand  
Mine! Were anything only  
ever mine.

## Associat

I want to go on lots  
of short dates with sensitive girls and tell them  
that we're just friends.

I want to not want involvement  
right in the middle of it.

I want to make up reasons  
for not calling someone, for not being there.

I want to look blank-faced  
at their every little joke  
and yawn at their every concern, or,  
failing that, to regard each as some lost lamb,  
slouching, with acne and buck teeth;  
some poor child that needs the whole  
but can have only half.

I want to just walk away  
and be sorry that  
they're alone.

That alone,  
I want.

I have helped widows,  
old women with nothing but a good will held helpless.

I have loved with their sole good  
and hurt with their cries.

They call me a son, wistful,  
lie about my face  
and talk about the sweet girls I should know,  
who should be glad to  
find a man like me,  
but aren't. They think me dashing  
but I'm dashed, disregarded; one with insides  
too vitriolic, violent and silly  
for those for whom I long  
so long.

So selfish of self.  
God, you know it, know me  
who'd love to see every woman  
alone with hunched  
back, old, stale skirts  
and pied memories  
of the time she is out of.

I'd knock at every door  
with flowers, beams and sad eyes.

Selfish sin, I would pity  
but be not pitied ever.



This pump of blood, slightly tensing,  
Huh! This beating bowstring  
broken leads to sin,  
to doubt even Him.  
It offends me that is me.  
Cut it out or spoon it out,  
I must cast it aside.  
It cannot live inside this man  
of the Franco-Prussian land who  
finds no help, no mate,  
no answer but the cursed pity  
and strange scrutinizing regard  
of a world that cannot understand.

**J. D. Finrock**

## **A Mental Cripple**

stumbled in about 3:00 a.m.  
your mint-flavored toothpaste  
on the floor  
you were sound asleep  
sprawled out on the bed  
put my mouth close to your ear:  
"Sorry to wake you  
but I thought you should know  
I've been to hell this evening  
and none of the record players have needles  
all the girls there are extremely intelligent  
only one joke is told over and over  
and the Cosby Show plays for all eternity

I didn't have to travel at all

I've been to hell this evening  
and it looked a lot like you."

**Steve Hagemann**

## Associations

A ragged stuffed monkey,  
The kind made in nursing homes  
By precise skeletons  
Pursing pins in their tired mouths,  
Holds my grandfather in his belly.  
I unwring his cramped body,  
Lift him from the cedar chest,  
Mothballs clinging to his armpits,  
Hold him away from me  
And look, and see. . .

When Grandpa gave him to me  
I must've been three, maybe four.  
We flew the faithful blue Buick  
With the plane on her hood  
(He called her Bessie.  
"Come on, Bessie-old-girl."  
The inside of her smelled like butter.)  
To visit his mother,  
My great-grandmother,  
Little shrively cornflake woman.  
She made me cold,  
Her scaly cheek against my soft one,  
So I waited outside.  
Oh, I was scared of the rest of the home, too.  
The old people reached for me with their dead limbs  
And once a lady had called me Alice  
And said that she loved me.  
Grandpa came back.  
He had the monkey.  
It grinned hideously at me.  
It smelled of the home.  
I insulted it by leaving it nameless.  
It wouldn't stop smiling.  
That night, I took it home  
And cut the bleeding red pompoms from its feet.  
It didn't look so happy then.

My grandpa, a saint now,  
According to my Gram  
Who didn't like the live version half so well,  
Died when I was ten.  
I was painting my nails in the intensive care waiting room  
When they told me.  
I went down to the gift shop and bought polish remover.  
My nails would look perfect for the funeral.

.. Suddenly I am crying,  
Crying for a stupid gray monkey  
And the man who taught me to write.  
I pick the mothballs from Jack  
(He is named, a good name—my grandfather's name.)  
And put him to rest back in his box.

**Rhonda Ealy**

## Banana Bread

I bake banana bread these days,  
(Cream shortening, mix with sugar)  
Even though I give most of it away.  
(Add eggs, beat until light and fluffy)  
Never had extra bananas before,  
(Mash the soft fruit, leave no lumps)  
There were always kids around,  
(Sift flour, soda, baking powder, salt)  
Eating everything, right out of the grocery sacks.  
(Add dry ingredients alternately with bananas)  
Didn't have much time to bake,  
(Stir just enough to combine)  
With P.T.A., Scouts, cooking, cleaning, washing.  
(Do not beat)  
One by one they grew up and left,  
(Turn into greased loaf pan)  
Ripe fruit gone from the tree,  
(Bake at 350-degree oven)  
Leaving me with time and bananas.

**Gail Bower**

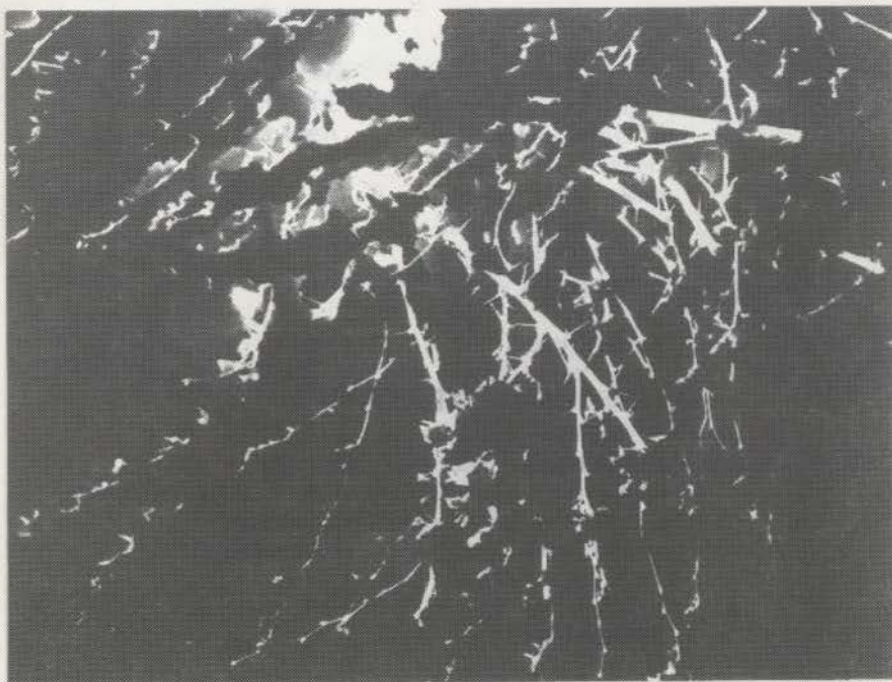
## BILL AND JACK

Bill was once a brick-layer with an inferiority complex. He fathered eight children, two of which were goats. Well, one day Bill bought a gallon of two-percent milk. He paid a great deal for this milk, so he thought the only thing to do was to buy insurance for his milk. Bill went to see Jack who just happened to be the best insurance salesman in the land. . . .

When Bill got to Jack's office, he saw Jack lying on the floor with nothing but a chicken suit on. Bill began to vomit uncontrollably. You see, Bill's father, Huey, was killed by a hypothetical hypochondriac dressed in a chicken suit. Well, after Bill cleaned up the puke, Jack apologized for his actions. The two men took off their clothes and began their discussion. . . .

Bill told Jack about his milk problem and Jack was very understanding, at first. . . . Then Jack pulled out a microphone and began reciting poetry very violently. He was talking so loud that Bill raped Jack's secretary. When the police got there, it was too late because the asteroid had already crashed into the building and everyone lived happily ever after.

**Bradford B. Auten**



## Vrrooom

In the back seat  
of his '75 blue Cutlass

Wristwatch snapping off his arm,  
Sliding down the gear shift

A heart on the fogged window  
Drawn the night before

Rain dripping down  
like the sweat on his face

Seat belt against my thigh, pressing,  
Faded blue velour crushed beneath us

Distant headlights and an urgent  
Thrust of the key ignites the engine.

**Beth Goodman**

## Banana Bread



## Mr. Modern Lover

It must occur at least every other day,  
Involving the same amount of emotional commitment,  
And it's over when he pulls his pants up.  
Modern Lover, making love or taking a shit.

**Molly Madden**

## Travelogue

The back of her neck  
reminds me of a  
valley I once crossed—  
the thin silver strand  
of her necklace  
a tiny bridge for my  
fingers.

As I traverse the pass  
between her shoulders,  
my fingers follow a trail  
familiar and quiet  
down the long slow  
ribbon-like river of  
her spine.

I turn and return  
ambling down paths:  
slender arms,  
branches marked by  
traces of my presence,  
a pathway, a ring of  
kisses.

I stop and listen,  
the silent scene before me;  
begin wandering again  
breathe in the heady scent  
that lingers, nestled in the  
shrouded valley between  
her breasts,  
and move away.

Turning, I cross again the  
high ridges of her  
cheekbones, travel  
along the lush valley  
of her lips and  
pause to rest again,  
weary with travel-heaviness.

The Tibetans have a  
name for her. . .  
Chomolungma, they say  
Mother Goddess of Earth.  
Feeling her warmth  
beside me, I whisper love  
for the earth-mother,  
love for her,  
and then sleep.

**Rodger Patience**

## Down the Highway

Steven pulled into a parking spot in front of Dobie's Diner and turned off his engine. He pushed the stand down, then jerked the handlebars back hard until the bike stood by itself. He combed his short curls with his fingers, took his sunglasses off and hooked them into his chest pocket stamped with the little crossed golf clubs, and walked inside. The odors of bacon grease and rotten apples made him flinch and turn one shoulder forward as if to ward off the smell. In front of him a long counter of whitish gray formica spread across the length of the diner with chrome and plastic bar stools spaced evenly in front of it. At the far end a man in a crumpled gray suit and grass-green tie sat biting his fingernails, spitting each one into his empty soda glass.

Steven sat down at the counter and picked up the menu that was balanced between the salt and pepper shakers. The menu was a piece of lined stationery, hand-printed in large block letters and covered in some sort of plastic that looked like saran wrap. He put the menu down and looked up. No one had come out of the back to wait on him.

"Excuse me," Steven called, "is anybody around?"

No answer. A bee buzzed outside the window, every few seconds bumping into it with a little pop.

"Anybody around?" Steven called again.

"Hey, Duke," the man in the crumpled gray suit yelled, "your customer's getting antsy."

Steven looked over at the man as if to protest his impatience, but was interrupted by the sound of breaking dishes.

The man laughed.

"Hey," Steven said, "do you think he's all right back there?"

"Sure," the man snorted, "just woke up too sudden-like." He now had his shoes and socks off and was cleaning under his toenails with one thin blade of his fork. Steven's stomach gave a lurch as he looked away, forehead crinkled and eyes squinted shut.

"Chuck, ya damn fool, get your own soda. You know it's my nap time," said a gray-haired man as he came out of the back. He wore a white undershirt and dark blue shorts covered over by a spotty white apron that reached to his knees. He was barefooted.

"Um, sorry to disturb you, sir," Steven said after clearing his throat, "but I was wondering if I could get a banana split."

"Banana split, ya say? Well, Sheila's not here. How about a soda?" he asked.

The man in the crumpled suit winked at Steven. "Duke here lost the use of his arm in the war. Didn't you, Duke?" he asked.

"Damn right," Duke said, sliding a frosted mug of 7-Up three feet across the counter and into Steven's hand. He hated 7-Up. "And it was worth it, too. Them damn Japs thinking they could crush democracy with a few small bombs falling right in the U.S. of A. Well, we sure showed them suckers." He pulled over a chair that was leaning against the wall and put it across from Stephen.

"You fight in the war?" Duke asked Steven.

"No, sir," he replied, "although my mother was part of Bob Hope's entertainment crew. She was a dancer."

"Well, I'll be damned." Duke whistled.

"Tell him about your Purple Heart, Duke," the man said with a smile. He moved over a couple of seats until just one separated him and Steven. Steven glanced down and saw that the man's socks were back on.

"That's when I got wounded, ya know, Chuck," Duke said. The man nodded in agreement.

"Them Japs were all over a hill that we had to take. That hill was the key to the lives of ten of our men who had gone over it to set bombs on the airstrip on the other side. Well, they got stuck there. So, the captain, he turns to me and says, 'Duke, you and Joey gotta go up that ridge and behind them rocks so you can shoot cover fire until our men can get back.' Then he looks me straight in the eye and says, 'Duke, you're our best man, you can do it.'"

Here Duke put his hand over his heart. "So he pats me on the back and then me and Joey go running up the ridge and behind the rocks. We see our men caught in some cross-fire so we throw some grenades until the Japs start shooting at us. That's when I look at Joey and say, 'Hell, we want them pussies to pay attention to us so's the others can get back.' Well, Joey, he kinda looks scared, but I say we're gonna be fine. I guess the captain sees us doing a bunch of shooting so he sends more men out who get to our guys and they get back safe.

"But then I turn and see that Joey got one in the chest. He's bleeding real bad and kinda gurgling air, but I say, 'Hell, Joey, hang in there 'cause I'm not gonna let them damn Japs get us.' I knew he was going fast, so I grabbed him, slouched him over my shoulders, and started running toward our guys. That's when I got it twice in the arm. Shattered my elbow bone. I kept running, though. Hell, I wasn't gonna let them damn Japs get me." He took a drink of Steven's 7-Up.

"Hey, you got a picture of your mother?" Chuck asked Steven. "I bet she had her some long, thin legs, huh?"

Steven saw the bee, a bee, hitting the window. It left tiny yellow dots each time it pulled away.

"No," Steven said, "she left when I was two. My father burned all her pictures."

"Bet she had some nice legs," Chuck said. Steven shrugged.

"Was your Pappy in the war?" Duke asked.

"Enlisted man. Had a desk job in the States. Asthma or something," Steven apologized.

"Military life is best, no matter what ya do," Duke muttered.

"Yessir," Steven answered.

"So you're in the Army?"

"No. Navy two years. Stationed at an airstrip in Danang for a couple of months until I got shrapnel in my side. Then it was back for rehab in the Veteran's Hospital for a year," Steven said to satisfy their curiosity.

"Are you one of those Nam crazies, or maybe an Agent Orange crusader?" Chuck asked while shifting his weight so he leaned away from Steven.

"If you're asking if I'm employed," Steven said as he twisted the straw he had taken from the 7-Up, "the answer is yes. How much for the soda?" Steven got up and was reaching into the front of his jeans for change.

"Hold on there," Duke said, "Chuck didn't mean anything by it. It was an honest question, right, Chuck?"

"Sure," Chuck mumbled, "I didn't mean anything by it." He was biting his



fingernails again.

"Sit down for another soda," Duke said.

"OK. But cola this time."

Duke got a clean glass form behind the counter and put it under the spout marked Coke. He pushed the button and the Coke spurted out, dark and frothy. He set it in front of Steven.

"Thank you," Steven said, tasting the sweet drink.

"Sure. Where ya headed?" Duke asked. He was back in his chair.

"I was down in Miami on some business. Got a letter that my father died, so I'm heading back up to St. Louis," Steven answered.

"Sorry to hear that. What happened?" Duke asked.

"Heart attack." Steven glanced at the window. The bee was gone.

"Gotta be careful of the old ticker," Duke said, "or it'll get ya every time. Now me, I stay away from red meat, eggs, and beer. I plan on watching my grandkids grow up."

"Did he leave you money?" Chuck asked Steven.

"What?"

"Did he leave you any money? You know, in a will or something," Chuck said.

"I doubt it. I haven't seen him in ten years," Steven said.

"Then why you going to the funeral?" Chuck asked.

"What?"

"You haven't seen him in ten years, so why go to the funeral?" Chuck elaborated. He was trying to get the dead skin of a callous from off his palm.

"He was my father. The rest of the family will expect me. I have to." Steven brought up both hands, flinging out his fingers in a quick flick of his wrist.

"Well, sure ya gotta," Duke said soothingly.

"When's the funeral?" Chuck asked. Steven saw Duke look at Chuck and slowly nod his head back and forth.

"Tomorrow," Steven answered.

"How you going to make it from Florida to St. Louis—overnight—on a motorcycle?" Chuck asked, lips pouting as if some difficult question weighed him down.

Steven was looking at the window again. Still no bee, although a fly on the inside was scurrying over every inch, trying to find a place to escape.

"You won't make it," Chuck said.

"What?" The fly was getting slower but still kept searching. It moved down the window in circles, each one smaller than the one before. Then it would fly straight back up and start its circles down again.

"Hey," Chuck said with a little laugh, "you won't make it. Even if you leave now you won't make it."

"Yes, I'll leave now," Steven said. "How much do I owe?"

"On the house. Say it's a thanks for listening to me talk all afternoon," Duke said.

"Thanks." Steven slid off the stool, pivoting back and forth on one leg until he heard it crack.

"Sign of good bones," Duke said, watching him.

"What?"

"When your bones crack it's a sign that they're healthy," Duke explained.

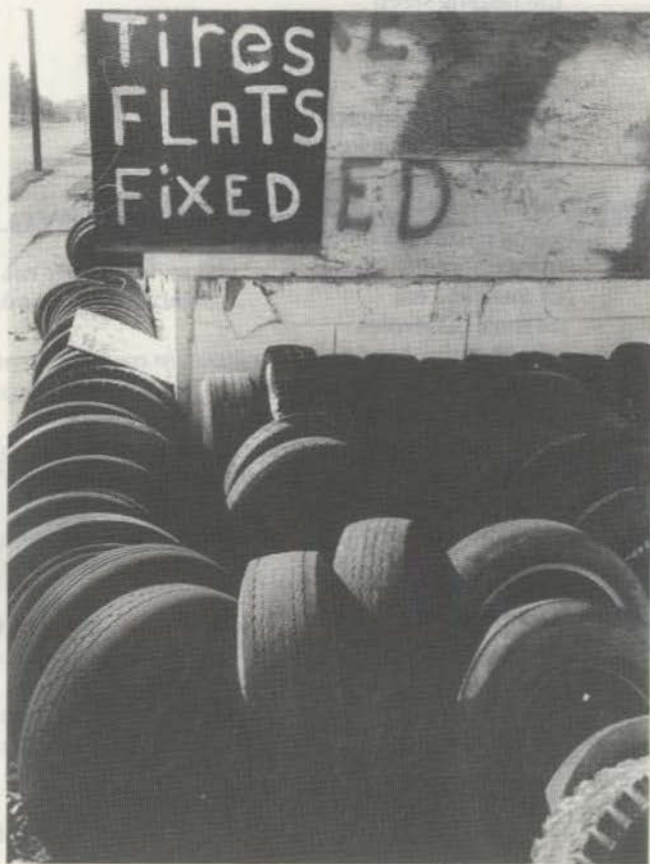
"Right," Steven said, walking to the door. He looked at the window one last

time. The fly wasn't there. Steven's eyes roamed across the floor, stopping at a small, unmoving object. It was the fly. Steven put his hand on the door and gave a push. He pulled his sunglasses out of his pocket and put them on, pushing them up the bridge of his nose.

"You're not going to make it," he heard Chuck call one last time.

He rocked his bike forward until it rolled free of the stand, then swung his leg over and started it. He smelled gas for a minute and rubbed his thighs where the hot sun struck. He saw himself mirrored in the window, hair softly moving in the warm breeze. He backed his bike up and pulled out of the parking lot.

**Joan Sebastian**



## The Stupor

CHICAGO (AP)—Evelyn Lowry, 35, died after giving birth at 3 a.m. Wednesday at Perry Memorial Hospital. She is survived by her husband, Kevin, and her newborn son.

Lately things have come  
to sounds and beats.  
The flashing of weeks  
in the slow strobe  
of lights and darks,  
the rasping sleep  
in a baby's mouth  
too fat for breath.

Meaning in all speech  
slips from the backs  
of words—just air forced up  
through necks. Tongues  
going narrow to blunt  
in incoherent shapings  
of muscle. I eat  
all their casseroles  
of sympathy, hear only  
"I's" in "wife"  
dying in childbirth."

This boy has words for wanting  
my mouth won't form  
language of cheeks  
and unbroken gums.  
I'm mute with  
a wide jaw  
too full of teeth.

**Dan Von Holten**

## Love Poem After a Seizure in Your Bed

I am afraid of the night,  
afraid of the sadness

breaking from my skull in  
convulsions, afraid of the terrible

light dawn has thrown upon me.  
This morning, blind, unable

to speak, I hear your hands  
stir the dead air

that is this morning, feel  
your breath pull

stiff pins from my back,  
taste blood in my mouth.

**Bob Zordani**

## Palsy

I had been thinking  
my body was plastic,  
that leaked tears through cracks,  
when people who balanced  
their walk perfect  
would stare  
at these crooked legs  
which trip over  
broken stones, how they  
didn't touch these spasms  
in my hands which scratch  
letters on paper, and didn't  
talk with words slurred in saliva  
until he was kissing  
me through matted hair,  
cradling my chin in his hands.

**Christy Dunphy**

## Interview: William Matthews

William Matthews, Visiting Resident Poet at EIU this fall, has published seven collections of poetry. His latest volume is entitled *Foreseeable Futures*. The following is a portion of an interview which took place in Charleston on October 30, 1987.

**Why did you start writing poetry, and was there a major incident that sparked off your writing?**

I'm not sure. There is certainly not a single incident. When you phrased that question it occurred to me that maybe one form of a true answer is someone who started writing because of the lack of major incidents. Life was rolling along in this way that seemed to have to do with its momentum, of it being in charge of me rather than the other way around. And I felt there was something missing. There was something I wasn't in touch with, and it was part of reality, part of the world, the larger world outside of me, mostly that. And even if there were things inside me that I wasn't in touch with, and in some peculiar and wholly superstitious way, I assume that poetry would be for me a way to get in touch with it. So, it was a lack of incident, and lack of focus; a kind of blurred rather than a precise attention. Something missing.

*Is it simply because of the brevity of poetry that you can work on a poem, you can go on to different things, whereas writing a novel or a short story takes a much longer period of time—a much more concentrated effort than sitting down for an hour and working on a poem?*

Well, that surely would be part of it, though when I was considerably younger, I at one time spent long hours trying to learn how to play the clarinet well, which I was never able to do, and I had spent some time trying painting. So I had some evidence that I was willing to be patient in one way or another. I think, probably, however much the brevity of poetry is a factor, the largest factor would probably have been a sense that whatever I was missing was something that poetry was particularly well-equipped, compared to those other genres, to apprehend.

*Why poetry as opposed to any of the other genres of writing?*

Probably I don't know the answer to that. It's like whom you love and not somebody else. There are reasons for that, but they are usually unknown to oneself. In any case, with some strange sureness, I knew that, for me, it was poetry; and it's probably the case that if you believe something firmly enough, it then becomes true, so that by hindsight I was right. At the moment, I think I was just making one of those irrational connections that we make in love and friendship. I thought that poetry would be a tool by which I could do whatever it was I felt I had the need to do.

*What are some of the common problems for beginning creative writers, and what kinds of things (i.e. writing exercises and the reading of contemporary writers) do you use to help students improve their writing?*

I think there are really only two ways you can improve your writing. One is to write a lot, and the other is to read a lot. Whom it is a young poet needs to read is a question that produces—ideally—as many answers as there are young poets. There might be certain poets whose work would appear on the vast majority of those lists. But, basically, each person needs to find a list for herself or himself, and if the young poet can find from peers what are they reading, what are they passionate about, whose work are they arguing about, that's clearly one way they find such books. Read, read, read and read. It's like getting better as a dancer or an athlete. I mean, you just have to do everything you can. You work out a lot. Reading is one way, and writing is the other way.

*What are some of these problems for the beginning creative writer, the common problems that you see in, say, beginning creative writing classes?*

There are certain kinds of problems that pop up in those poems. The kind of problems which it may be the job of young poets to embody. It may be that part of their work may be to write poems with those very problems in them, so they can work their way through them; that they are not mistakes, but problems susceptible of solution and therefore a normal step along the way. And depending on who the student poet might be—too much abstraction, too little, too flat a language, too florid and poetic a language—they're often failures of taste, and taste is developed by reading a lot and writing a lot, and the "failures of taste" you mean would be failures of taste for someone who had been writing for fifteen years, and not necessarily failures of taste for someone who has been for two. They may just be a step one is passing through. I think the biggest problems such writers can have are larger ones that don't have to do with problems they get down on the page. To the extent that they can get something down on the page, and it's identifiable as a problem, then you can go to work looking to see what the solutions for it might be. And the big problem that you're likely to face, if you're a writer in that situation, is that you need to be able to take on your own devotion to the activity seriously, without being wholly arrogant. That's a hard one to do. Under some circumstances, you're likely to run across teachers who want to colonize you and make you one of their students so that they can feel good, which is a terrible thing to do to one's students.

**Interview by Bob Zordani**



It is simply because of the pressure of deadlines that some writers will write for a long period of time and then stop for a long time. I have known writers who have written for a long time and then stop for a long time. I have known writers who have written for a long time and then stop for a long time. I have known writers who have written for a long time and then stop for a long time.



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