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Matt Mansfield

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Matt Mansfield, Lynne A. Rafool, Suzanna Port, Victoria Bennett, Luiz da Silveira, Anthony Smith, Mark Randall, Steve Reyes, Steven M. Beamer, Michael Brown, and Steve Fitzgerald

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**Produced by Sigma Tau Delta
Honorary English Organization**

E A S T E R N I L L I N O I S U N I V E R S I T Y



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WYETH
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1990

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P O E M S

Loss of the Spoken

It's morning in America

A nation proud of underachieving
gasps for breath, finds voice
in trite catch phrases, finds
talking, the language of
the spoken, a "lost art."

"No one talks anymore,"
my sister tells me, long-distance.
I watch my television, prepare my
dinner, nod, absent-mindedly,
to no one in particular.

It's morning in America

The key to success, my successful
brother tells me, is communication.
"The time is now," he says. I believe
he believes it. Refuge in one-line
panaceas is integral even now,
even for a Harvard graduate.

My sister reads stories to her fourth-grade
class every day; they don't believe
the stuff she reads could actually happen.
I believe it could, watching the students
around me, slogan-laden T-shirts on,
screaming without saying a word.

It's morning in America

Chances, new hopes, present
places where no one can live,
where, maybe, there never has been life.

In this America thing, full sentences
are not expected. Fragments are.
Talk moves, rosey futures,
prudent responsibilities,
viability of competition.

Soulful candidates wage
wars of image, acronyms
dominate newspeak and everyone
is an outsider, for at least 15 minutes.

It is morning in America

– **Matt Mansfield**

A Wyeth Reproduction

Wind blows
fields
of blond hair
and dogs sniff
in the muted weeds,
Andrew Wyeth sits
with pad and pencil
calling to me,
Christina,
but the trees wave
lace curtains
in my face
as I try to speak
the gray shades
blend me away

– Lynn A. Rafool

Corner

Propped up in my father's lap,
in a cottage by the sea,
I learn the Aran stitches
to my father's bobbing voice.

The Irish moss, the blackberry knit
the honeycomb, and tree of life.
The Aran history comes alive
in my mother's twitching hands.

Her wool moves delicately into webs
like spider darting downward
then up again to secure its strand.
The sea outside eases up its waves.

The basket stitch, the cable,
the trellis, and the link.
Forming in her hands, a bond –
my father shuts his eyes.

– **Suzanna Port**

Father

And when the bells are done
ringing, I weave my fingers together
and sit beside you in the car. Alone
you tell me you're at the end of your tether.

Could I have some money for a candy bar ? –
I promise I'll run right in and come
right back. And so you stop the car
and while I'm gone, you grab your rum

from the back seat and toss it down.
Before I even have the chance to say
thanks, I look at you, you only frown.
And get us going on our way.

The church's steeple looms in the mirror
as if to say we don't belong in there.
For it is my Fathers whom I fear
when the lights go out and the dark breathes near.

– **Suzanna Port**

Past two,

amidst the clutter of smoked-out butts,
soggy sheets and salty smells,
we commune over the collected Cummings.

You're so sleepy, my poetic darling,
propped up against the headboard,
nodding off. You dream

of my intense fragility, compelling
colours, of my petals mysteriously opening,
the heart of this flower you hold,

but I rub my eyes, trace the outline
of your lips with a fingertip, smiling.
I read those lines once more

and slip the pages from under your hands,
which could make four of mine,
yet are more miniscule than Cummings' rain.

My eyes flutter shut against your skin.
In darkness, I travel to that somewhere.
I'm in full bloom. Yes,

I can hear the voice of eyes,
now that I know what it is
that closes and opens.

– **Victoria Bennett**

Vertigo

This is the last warm morning.

You are dripping in porcelain,
glistening dark knees bending
above water level.

I watch from the throne,
sweating this early in
late summer's steam.

We'll have to rake the yard soon.

Our season has flown just like those
southbound checkmarks fleeing
coming coldness. We're only leaves:
shrivelled victims of vertigo.

I am sick and dizzy from too much
coffee and you look old.

This is important and it is passing.

But you (stern, stubbled, grayish
mass of love) shave like always.
I'm waiting for a slip, a nick,
a wince. Yes, wear your gray pants
and that yellow shirt I bought you
and. . . take a sweater, dear.

The nights are getting colder all the time.

– **Victoria Bennett**

HEAT

Slipping in before
the door slams,
padding lightly over
the fabric of you,
nudging, rubbing,
against your rigidity.

You pace the one catless
room, darting
left, then right,
avoiding my purr.
I wonder about the nature
of your animal allergies.

I could curl into
a tight ball,
small and ignorable.
You'd never notice me
napping at the
foot of your bed.

Or we could roar
under a quilted silence
and sharpen our claws
on each other's flesh,
lapping up the wet heat
of engorged utterances.

– Victoria Bennett

PRE-HISTORY

Mother, gowned in lace,
Plays piano in the void.
One night, weary of so much sound,
She spreads her wings, dangles
Out in the blue. Dizzy,
She looks no more — at me,
At no one! Plummets
Into the family album.

**— Murilo Mendes; Translated from
the Portugese by Luiz da Silveira**

BLOOMS

tree
blooming webs
 spreading

those still
saturday mornings

frothy clouds
 sponge
time away

a smile
a round of eyes
a lizard (green-grey)
breath
 brimming
from the mouth

 hortensias
(my nose)
 blue and lilac
(probing)
 drops of white
(those colors)

the stone the sun
my hand
 spread over
the heat
 I clutch it

 Sunstone!

— Luiz da Silveira

Hashimoto's Thyrotoxicosis at Key West

"It was her voice that made the sky acutest at its vanishing."
—Wallace Stevens

Sorry I'm speaking to no one,
But those knotted-up covers looked a lot like you.

I'm glad I didn't wake you with the information that

Breaths catch in my lungs like oily rags
In the pockets of tired old mechanics
And that tears don't stain things
But rather evaporate as if you never cried,
Or as if the world were, at a molecular level,
And that I have not mowed the lawn
And had intended to nap.

I crawl amid what I thought was you and wait for the selfsame

Voice that split the sky and sea
To chip this buzzing sleep from me.

— Anthony Smith

DAVY BY THE PAWN SHOP

I saw Davy today
Flowing like he does
From his hair,
Split black striking sparks in air —
Bristly smile:

Smile etching stone-skin
Or concrete; color of clouds
Just shy of rain,
Or October sleet —
Birdly eyes:

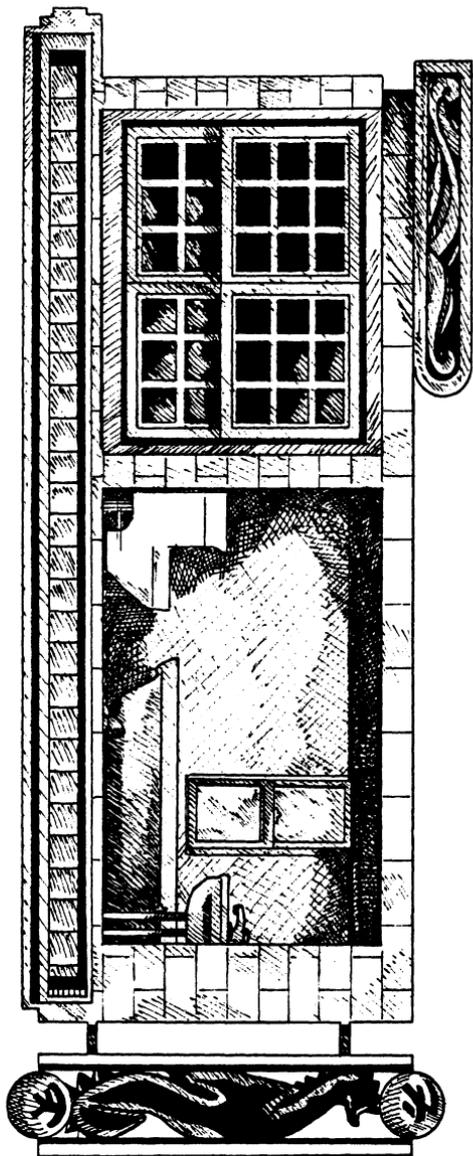
Eyes lapping blurry trickling curves,
Licking where the
World drips, drops pooling
In ringed blue crystal —
Glycerine tears:

Tears for hands, ruined
From pointing; pocket-jammed
Knuckle teeth from busted gears,
Denim anointing —
Marble bones:

Bones near, wound with
Tight wire, bound to
Teeth, clenched —
This frame leaning:
Imagined wind.

— Anthony Smith

A R T

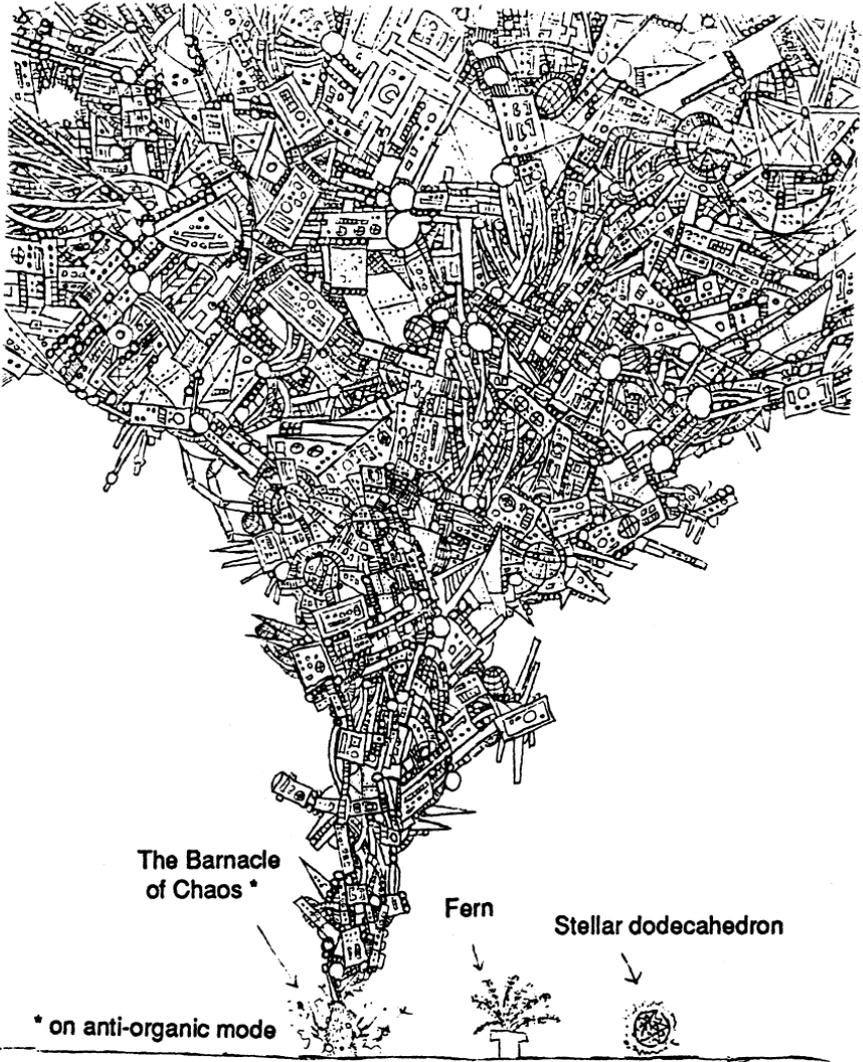


Mark A. Randall-90-

Untitled • Mark Randall



Untitled • Mark Randall



The Barnacle
of Chaos *

Fern

Stellar dodecahedron

* on anti-organic mode

Untitled • Steve Reyes

As I sat here, trying to fill the white void with words,
the pattern on the shirt I was wearing did it for me. Soon
the patterns on a few of my other shirts in my closet followed
suit.

(No pun intended.)



Untitled • Steve Reyes

P H O T O G R A P H S





Untitled • Steve Beamer



Untitled • Steve Beamer

P R O S E

yikes

ok so yer a little odd, she said and stuck peanut butter in my hair and squished it around a lot and it hurt. I tried to eat some of the peanut butter but it didn't taste right so i smeared jelly in my hair.

I got upset at her and chased her through times square demanding to know the square of time which she said was in 15 minutes but i was disbelieving of this statement and chased her to boston.

In boston, the duke answered my question of what i should do about the peanut butter and jelly in my hair, he gave me a loaf of bread paid for by the taxpayers.

boston was broke.

i left town.

on the train to pittsburg i met a girl with big hair sticking to the ceiling like velcro. i thought we had something in common with both of us having hair problems and all. little did i know that she was wearing a wig and was actually the reincarnation of yul bryner.

we talked for a while and everytime she asked me if i was going to do something i said why yes i am. She giggled at my pun and broke into a rendition of the chorus from the king and i.

she wants to be a bouncer at cheers and meet ted danson and pull the hair off of his chest and mess up his hair.

i tried to convince her that cheers didn't need bouncers, it was tv land and there was no real evil that would take the skills of hers to handle.

she cried.

i threw her off the train outside of scranton.

she bounced twice and came to a rest in the ditch. that's the last i ever saw of her. I did hear though that she went to hollywood and became a stunt double for tony orlando. it figures what with the hair and all.

– Michael Brown

Thirty Minutes or Less

MAY 18, 1988

CHICAGO (AP) - Martin Benhart was arrested today at his home on the near-North side in connection with the murders of four Loyola University coeds. Benhart is being held without bail and will be arraigned Monday.

Private Journal of Marty Benhart

KEEP OUT

Jan. 28 - Pretty good day. Saw Pete up on campus - he was checking out some research at the main library. Finished that book about Berkowitz - man was he a crazy fucker. After class I had to work again - we can't seem to cut it on just Jen's salary. Only three semesters until graduation - then we won't have to worry about money. Saw a pretty good one on the way home. Great face but Jen has better legs.

Feb. 14 - Bought Jen flowers for Valentine's Day. We went for dinner at her folks and I got pretty blitzed as usual. On the way home I threw up out of the car window. I can't sleep because the bed keeps spinning. Jen is up know so I'd better go.

Feb. 20 - Burke's class is hell. The old bastard expects us to submit an outline for our research projects next class. I haven't even thought about it. Saw him after class to ask for an extension. He said it wouldn't be fair to the other students. Work went good though. Got a raise - 10 cents more an hour. Not much but every little bit counts. Saw two hookers on the way home - this world is so goddamn disgusting - how could she do that to us?

Feb. 25 - Skipped Burke's class but I went to the staff parking lot and let the air out of his back tires. Bet the old fucker had a hell of a time on the ice and all. Had to deliver to these nursing stu-

dents tonight. Man were they bitches. They said they wouldn't pay full price because I was late. I wasn't late - they just wouldn't answer the damn door - I could see them staring at me through the window. Well I didn't give them the damn pizza anyway. When I got back Frank said the nursing students called and complained. Frank made me pay for the pizza. Doesn't he understand I was just doing my job? No one appreciates that anymore I guess. That frickin alley cat was back again - spilled garbage all over the alley.

Mar. 1 - Turned in my outline to Burke. He said he would read it and comment but that I would get no credit. Twenty points down the toilet. I must work harder. Picked up that new book on Bundy. Jen came home from work in tears. Someone found a baby in the trash can in the washroom. Before they could get it into the emergency room it died. Jen said she doesn't want to be a nurse anymore. I don't blame her. This world is so full of mean people and sickos. I wish I could take Jen away from all this filth. I must work harder at my studies. I must remember that she never studied and I cannot be like she was. I would never desert my family.

Mar. 4 - Got an order from those nursing students again. Four deluxe family size pizzas. I should have know it was a false order. I must train myself to be more attentive. When I brought the order to their house they said they didn't order any pizza. I threw the pizza all over their porch. I'm sick of people like that. Frank said he's going to make me pay for the pizza - but I don't think he will. He doesn't like those nurses either. Jen didn't go to work today and I can't blame her. But we really need the money.

Mar. 5 - Played handball with Pete at the gym today. Beat him all three games - he was pissed. But now my muscles ache. I must work on getting in shape when the semester is over. Saw that cat in the alley again. I threw rocks at it and it ran away. Didn't have

to work tonight so it was still light out when I walked home. I went past the house where those nurses live. Didn't see any of them though. Jen went back to work and she says she is better now - but I don't think she is.

Mar. 7 - Real bad day. Frank called me into his office today and told me that he was getting complaints about me. He wouldn't tell me who but it must be those nurses and maybe that guy from the other night. Was late with this guy's pizza so he starts swearing up a storm. I told him to fuck off. Frank said if he gets any more complaints he's going to fire me. Then he said I was a good worker if I would just shape up. Sometimes I just want to leave this place. Then Jen came home late tonight drunk. Said a girl at work is getting married so they went to a male-strip bar. I am so hurt that she could go to a place like that even though she knows how much I hate people like that. I slapped her hard a couple of times and she ran into the bathroom. She won't come out.

Mar. 10 - Jen came back home today. We apologized to each other and said that since this world is so sick we have to stick together. She promised never to go to one of those places again and so we had sex all day.

Mar. 23 - Those nurses ordered again. Frank said we need the business too bad so I had to go there again. This time I was late and I gave them half off. But they wouldn't pay - they said the pizza was cold and they weren't going to eat cold pizza. I said I was just doing my job but they just shut the door in my face. Why don't people understand? Easy exam in Small's class today. But there's a tough one in Burke's tomorrow. I have to study harder. That cat tried to get into the trash again but I cornered it in the alley and I hit it with a pipe from the garage. I hit it about twenty times. It won't bother us anymore.

Mar. 24 - Went by those nurses tonight. No one answered the door

but the lights were on. I threw rocks at their window but no one answered. I just wanted to ask why they treated me so badly. Then a car came so I ran. Got into a fight with Jen today - she wants to quit her job. I told her to just hang on - only two and a half more semesters to go. She cried and said okay but she was going to look for a better place to work. I said okay but don't quit. She said okay.

Mar. 27 - Spring recess starts tomorrow. I'm working extra shifts at work all week. My brother called. He said that mom was in rehab again. I said don't call her mom - she's the one who left. He told me to come with him to visit her - I told him no way was I going to be in the same room with a prostitute and a drunk. He told me to grow up. I hung up. I'm working extra shifts at work all week - we need the money. Jen talked to her parents today and said they are going away next weekend and why don't we spend it at their house? I don't want to but I said okay. The bag boy at the store must be new. He packed all the eggs on the bottom and when I got home they were all broken. I went back to the store and they gave me an extra dozen for free.

Mar. 29 - Real tired today - worked two shifts. Brought a pizza home to surprise Jen but she got home late so I ate it all. She said she wasn't hungry anyway.

Apr. 1 - Went into work today and Frank said, "You're fired". I couldn't believe it. I asked him why and called him some names and he said, "April Fool's." Frank's all right. Got an order from those nurses again. The small blonde one answered the door. She said hold on for my tip. All four came back and they were laughing. The taller blonde handed me a plastic penis vibrator and said, "Here's your tip!" They were laughing even when I threw it down and ran to the truck. When I got back to the shop I threw-up in the bathroom and washed my hands about a thousand times. Jen bought me a new shirt tonight. I am so lucky to have her.

Apr. 2 - On the way home tonight I saw that small blonde nurse. I asked her why they did that to me and she said just leave me alone and I said leave me alone and she started to yell for help so I let her go. Classes are really starting to bog me down. I must study harder. I can't let Jen down.

Apr. 3 - Frank said that he got a complaint from those nurses today. He said they were going to call the cops but he talked them out of it. He was going to give them free pizza for a week - the cost to come out of my pocket. I told them they asked for it but he told me to shut up and not look a gift horse in the mouth. I didn't tell Jen.

Apr. 4 - Saw this real slutty girl on the bus tonight. She had on red shoes with long heels and a black leather skirt that showed her whole leg. I guess I was staring at her because she asked me if I was "looking for a date". I didn't answer her and got off at the next stop. The two mile walk home helped to clear my head. I must concentrate on what is good and worthwhile and put all other thoughts out of my head.

Apr. 5 - They ordered six pizzas tonight and laughed when I delivered them. Some big guy stuck his finger in my chest and said if I bothered the girls again he would stick my head up my asshole. I told Frank and he said I probably deserved it.

Apr. 7 - Real bad day. When I came home yesterday Jen said that a man came by looking for me. She said he looked like a cop. I didn't know who it could be but today when I went into work the man was there. He gave me a restraining order and said I can't go within one-hundred yards of those nurse's house and if I do I'll be arrested. Frank was pissed and said he didn't need the trouble and then he fired me. I can't believe that those bitches went back on their word. I don't know what to do but I've got to do something. I can't let Jen down like this. I haven't told her yet.

Apr. 8 - I went looking for a job after classes today. Might have one at this Mexican place on Broadway but I don't know. Drove through the alley behind the nurses place. I just want to ask them why they did that. Jen felt sick today so she stayed home from work. I still haven't told her. I can't believe that I have let her down like this.

Apr. 9 - Went to classes and got my midterm grades. Two C's and a D. Got the D in Burke's class, that bastard. Someone must have told him that I fucked up his tires. Jen made steak dinner tonight. She said she wanted to celebrate - she might have found a better paying job. I went back to that Mexican place and they said I start delivering tomorrow. I told Jen after dinner - but I didn't tell her about the restraining order - I just said that Frank didn't need me anymore. She said I was lucky to get another job so soon. I love her.

Apr. 10 - Something had to be done. I went to the Mexican joint to start work today and they said they wouldn't be needing me. They called Frank to make sure I was okay. I guess Frank told them about the trouble with those nurses. So I knew then that I had to do something. I couldn't let Jen down and those fucking nurses were going to haunt us forever. It felt so relieving to get it over with. But now it feels sort of good. The only problem was that I had to burn that new shirt Jen gave me because the stains wouldn't come out. But now I can understand how someone would want to do it again and again after trying it. It was really the only way. But it's over now and I feel at ease. Hopefully I will be able to get a job soon. We really need the money and I can't let Jen down anymore than I have. I'm not going to tell her about the nurses though.

- Steve Fitzgerald

Telling Stories

Reginald begins by telling yet another story.

Reginald is always telling a story about whatever is happening to him. A lot of us are in his stories.

Now, Reg is sitting with Karla in the main room, wearing what he always wears — a blue cotton jumpsuit and white Converse tennis shoes. That way, Reginald says he never has to worry about changing clothes, which gives him more time for his story-telling.

"He never sleeps," Karla says. "He's never in bed when the rest of us are. Whenever we're up, Reginald is up, right there."

"Never know what I'm going to find out," Reginald says.

"You're just afraid you're going to miss out on something," Karla says, pouting her little lips. But she quickly goes back to reading her book.

"My mother was the only one in her family ever to go to college," Reginald says. "But now she wants to marry this carpenter."

Reginald is 28 years old, born on July 5, 1962 — a fact he tells us every day. His mother died two years ago, August 16, 1988, which is the anniversary of Elvis's death, Reginald says. I don't really remember when Elvis died, and I think it was in 1977, but I was only nine then. I am thinking about his mother, who I never met; I wonder if she ever finished college. Meantime, Reginald is continuing the story about the builder and his dead mother, though he never says she is dead.

"This guy says he's going to build my mom a house," Reginald says, his thick hand waving in the air as he points out the quality of materials and workmanship. Reginald says that a well-built home will outlast all of us. I believe he is right, his animated face explaining that the 10-inch oak beams that span the cathedral ceiling in his home — a place I have never seen him visit and I've been here more than a year — will still be there when we're all dead and rotting. This house will outlast us all.

I know where Reginald's story is going: nowhere. I imagine Reginald now sprawled across the sofa in the T.V. room, watching "This Old House," inventing more stories about his dead mother and carpentry. But the light from the window turning across his short blonde beard makes me realize his mouth is still moving as he talks about drywall and his father.

I think of Reginald's father. I remember the things Reginald has told me and this is what I know: a thin-faced boy in a school picture, his wire-rimmed glasses riding low on the bridge of his nose; the same boy, in a Polaroid snapshot, sitting on the hood of a white Mustang fastback, a red bandanna tied pirate-style over his shoulder-length hair; some charcoal sketches Reginald made of him right before he was killed.

"My father knew how to have a real job and be a handyman, but not this guy, he says building is his job," Reginald says.

"Your father was an American literature teacher," I say, decisively. "He wasn't a handyman; he was an academic."

Reginald reaches for a piece of gum. He hasn't had a cigarette in two weeks. Now, instead of cigarette butts everywhere, the ward is littered with tiny sugarless-gum wrappers.

Nine months ago Reginald's father was killed in an automobile accident on his way to work.

No one can understand that Reginald wants to be left alone, me least of all. Never mind that he finds me an obnoxious companion; grief is personal, and he prefers working it out on his own time and, if it isn't asking too much, in solitude. I've crossed the line by referring to his father at all.

"That's not for you to say," Reginald says, biting his nails. "It's not that I don't like you. It's not that at all. It's just . . ."

"It's just what Reg? I mean . . . tell me, because I'd really like to know."

"Yeah, well fuck you," Reg says, his voice getting higher. "You're so goddamned controlled, you make me fucking sick. It's not like you've ever had one real emotion in your whole life."

Reginald bolts down the hallway to his room, the day nurse fol-

lowing closely behind him, calling his name.

I know Reginald will not be telling his stories for at least a couple of days as I notice another nurse following the day nurse, loading her hypo with Lithium. Dr. Cunningham will be on his way to Reginald's room soon.

With Reginald gone, I'm left sitting with Mr. Bennett and Karla. Mr. Bennett is a harmless old drunk. He says he used to be 6'2" but now he's shrinking. I am low and lonesome as I think of Reginald gone off to his room, but I don't act like it because I don't want any help from Mr. Bennett or Karla, though she still comes over to talk, bringing with her the sickening smell of too much cologne.

"What's wrong with this place?" she asks, bending to scratch the leg hidden beneath her nylon stockings. I am quiet. "Don't you think there need to be some changes around here?" she presses, trying to get me to say something, anything.

I take a pencil out of my shirt pocket. With the ruler Reginald left, I draw a floor plan onto clean sheets of typing paper to see how many ways I can find to move the rooms around, how many ways I can find to change the place.

"What the hell are you doing?" her soft brown eyes growing larger.

"I'm trying to figure out a way to change the place," I say.

"You're crazy," Karla says, slinking off to watch more television.

I can't just be nice to people and act like everything they do is all right with me.

People around here will laugh at anything. Last week, Reggie's brother came over to watch the Broncos on TV. At halftime they got to talking about how a team had to recruit black athletes nowadays if it wanted to amount to anything. The brother had his feet propped up on the coffee table and a bowl of popcorn on his lap. "Did I tell you what I heard about Martin Luther King Day?" he asked Reg. "One of the fellas at the plant said, far as he was concerned, they could just kill four more of them and take off the whole damn week."

The whole room went into hysterical laughter, especially the drywall man fixing the ceiling in the TV room, who sat his foot on a bucket of Elmer's Spackle and lit a cigarette to absorb the joke to the fullest extent. People around here will laugh at anything, I thought to myself.

* * *

As a part of our rehabilitation, we get to do our own laundry. Karla is reading *Vogue* while I sort the clothes. When I've got all the washers going, I take the leftover quarters and buy each of us a Sprite.

"Is he still after you to get married?" I ask Karla, handing her the can.

She shrugs. "He'd like to get married. I don't know if that means he's after me or not. He says he doesn't have anything to show for his life."

I think about Reginald and wonder what he does have to show for his life, except for an affinity for Elvis and carpentry, and the ability to tell stories.

Karla closes the magazine, drops it to her lap, and looks across at the steamy plate-glass window as if she is waiting for a sign. "I think I might as well go on and do it," she says finally. "If it doesn't work out, I'll still be here anyway. Besides, it's not like it would change things all that much anyway."

"Then why do it?" I ask, wondering why anyone would want to marry anyone else who was here.

Karla goes to one of the dryers, checking the dampness of the clothes. "I guess . . . I think we love each other."

Great, I think, love between two consenting crazies. I say: "Maybe he can build you a house."

"Shut up, Mr. Answerman. It's not like you're all that functional either," Karla says, grabbing her still damp clothes from the dryer. "Maybe you should think about why you're here instead of figuring out why everyone else is."

* * *

Saturday afternoon I lie on the couch with an afghan pulled up

to my chin, reading a romance novel that I keep losing interest in. Maybe she should marry Reg, I think, watching people pace back and forth in front of the large windows in the main room.

Reginald's two hours late from his consultation with Dr. Cunningham. No one has seen him since the day of his outburst about his dead father. I've watched her grow more and more worried each day, waiting for him. I lean up from the couch, grinning as I see Reginald making his way to the main room.

"There he is," Karla says, jumping up from her chair. "So how'd it go?"

Reginald lights a cigarette, sets his foot on the hassock beside the couch. "I don't think she's going to do it," he says, laughing as he pulls a small slip of paper from his back pocket.

"You don't think who is going to do what?" I ask, moving up on the couch, my afghan slipping to my waist.

"My mother . . . my mother's not going to marry this builder," Reg says, thrusting the slip of paper in my face. "The blueprint's all wrong, and she knows that."

Karla and I stare at Reginald, hoping for some explanation, some rationalization. There is none, as he begins to talk about quarter-inch nails and cathedral ceilings.

"This guy, this carpenter, if that's really what he is, cannot even follow a fucking blueprint correctly," Reg says, pointing out the points on the blueprint where the alleged fuck-ups have occurred.

Neither I, nor Karla with her watering eyes, look at the blueprint as Reginald begins another round of stories of what happens to be happening to him.

And Reg seems to have already forgotten about his blueprint problems as he starts quizzing me. "Don't you even have a dog?" he asks. "You should have a dog."

- Matt Mansfield

I N T E R V I E W

An Interview with Donald Hall

Donald Hall was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1928. He graduated from Harvard University in 1951, studied at Oxford, and taught English at the University of Michigan from 1957 until 1975. Since then he has been a free-lance writer of poetry, criticism, sports journalism, biography, college textbooks, essays about the country, and plays. Hall's recent books include The Ideal Bakery , a collection of short stories (North Point Press, 1987), The One Day: A Poem in Three Parts, which one the National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry in 1989 (Ticknor & Fields, 1988), and Old and New Poems, a collection of Hall's favorites from the past and the present (Ticknor & Fields, 1990).

This interview, conducted by Matt Mansfield, was taped on October 10, 1990 in Charleston, Illinois during Mr. Hall's visit to Eastern Illinois University.

Vehicle: When you began writing poetry what was the spark?

Hall: Well, probably the answer to that for most people would be a couple of silly stories, which is true for me. When I was 12 I adored horror movies. I used to go see Wolfman movies. And a boy next door said that if you like that stuff you ought to read Edgar Allen Poe. I'd never heard of him. I went and read him, thought it was wonderful and wanted to make things like that. I love the scenes. I love the poems and the stories, and I began doing that. For a couple of years, then, I worked on poems, some stories from time to time. It was one of the things I thought I might want to be when I grew up – a writer. But there were other things as well. When I was 14 I met a 16 year old who was absolutely a dedicated poet: I thought it was the coolest thing. And I hero-worshipped him as a boy, though maybe that's too strong a word, but I wanted to imitate him, like an actor. I was a lousy actor – I wanted to be one but I was lousy – and I sort of looked up to this older poet. He had

older friends with him because it was in New Haven and they were freshmen at Yale – and they knew a lot more. So I, at 14, hung around, to a degree, with 18 year olds, hearing them talk about T.S. Eliot and the other influential poets of the time. So, for a while there, I really came to know poetry and decided that's what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Now, the weird thing is that I've done it.

Vehicle: For the beginning creative writer, who seems to draw on his own experiences, who believes those experiences are the worst thing in the world to draw upon, do you have any advice? I believe what I'm asking is how a writer gets away from that feeling while still drawing on his own experiences?

Hall: One thing that I do is draw on my own life but not feel bounded by it. One thing that's very important for a beginning poet is to develop a notion that what is important is to consult with himself or herself as a poet. I had students when I was a teacher who wouldn't want to revise something because that was the way it really was. But it made a bad line so I said not to write it. I say be in service not to yourself and not to your own experiences but be in service to making a work of art. Now, often for me, I have discovered that I would begin a poem writing out of my own life fairly accurately and it plods – I have some good things in there, some bad things in there. When I begin, in the course of revision, to lie a little, to change things, then the poem begins to take off. The ultimate poem will be composed partly of things that I do in fact remember and partly of things that didn't happen at all. And the ultimate thing is the poem; it's not a diary, not auto-biography, though it includes those things. So one thing I would say to the beginning poet is feel free to lie a little, feel free to invent. But always be in service, finally, to making a good poem, to making a work of art.

Vehicle: In your poetry, I see a nice blending between the things

you would like to do and the things you cannot do, or can only do by writing about them.

Hall: What are you thinking?

Vehicle: The sports in your poems. It seems to me that you could be good at the sports you weren't physically good at by writing – am I right?

Hall: Yes. The only way I could make the major leagues was to become a writer, writing about baseball. And I've had a lot of pleasure doing that: I've talked to athletes, hung around watching. I've done more prose about sports than poetry, but you're right, you can live the imaginary life.

Vehicle: How can you account for taking that imaginary life into the realm of basic writing, as you did in your book *Writing Well*?

Hall: You know, poetry is imagination and it is creation, an oasis for making new things. It's also a control of language; The material is language. And I love the material of language. I love working with words. And I love it most when, I hope, make a beautiful poem, a beautiful line. But I also take pleasure in writing a good paragraph for a textbook. I'm still working with rhythm, with syntax. For me, one of the functions of poetry is to keep the language healthy, to close the gap between expression and meaning. So the two are not opposites for me. Analytically speaking, writing and writing well is a part of making poetry. Poetry had better be written, and written well.

Vehicle: Any parting words of advice for beginning writers?

Hall: My advice is coded into writing well. I could give a lot of advice about revision – something I believe is quite important – but I think I would like to say, 'make it fresh.'

B I O G R A P H I E S

Senior English major Victoria Bennett tells us some of her poetry results from, "...stress, anger, and confusion. It's kind of a way of making sense of things. It's catharsis, really – self-analysis." She is currently compiling a book of poetry.

Michael Brown, a junior journalism major, explains how he finds time to weave his contemporary vision: "I believe I have GhandiVision – it's apparent when I dance." Brown hopes to someday write a book that will blend the poetry of Wallace Stevens and the horrific fiction of Stephen King, "but it's not like a literary goal or anything."

William Clark is a Junior Graphic Design major. He believes that art, to be truly great, must stimulate at least one of the five senses. He opposes censorship, and his favorite piece of art is "definitely Monet's 'What's Wrong With This Picture #113.' Or did I see that on a placemat somewhere?"

English major Steve Fitzgerald states firmly that, as for literary goals, he has "Absolutely None!" He adds, "I want to be like John Milton."

Matt Mansfield, a graduate student in English, believes his friends take him too seriously. Of his writing: "All my poems are prefigured by the Koran. But, then, I've never read it. In all the motel rooms I've been in, it was never in the drawer. My writing seeks to compensate for this deficiency."

Suzanna Port is a political science major at Eastern, but plans to pursue a graduate degree in English. "I write a lot about my family," she says. "A poem is like a diary. You're writing down everything you wanted to say, but it's a poem."

Senior Lynn A. Rafool is about to finish her double major of English and journalism, with a minor in Art. Her philosophy: "Poetry doesn't necessarily have to be very complex. I just want to continue writing."

Mark Randall is a senior majoring in two-dimensional art. He says, of his art: "It gives me something to do with my hands, and I enjoy creating things out of my imagination." Randall's cartoons and illustrations regularly appear in *The Daily Eastern News*.

Sophomore psychology major Steven Reyes used to work at the Brookfield Zoo. He believes that the best kind of storytelling is daydreaming, and, "the best kind of artwork is doodling, probably because everyone can do it." His goal: "To fill the white void."

We called Luiz da Silveira for this bio while he was busy "frying some stuff." So, he wrote us a letter explaining that he is a "34 year-old Brazilian senior student, in love with the English language . . . 'Blooms' was born out of a trip to the Tenna Museum of American Art in Chicago, where he had the opportunity to see some paintings by American impressionists."

Senior English Major Anthony Smith spends his free time working on something he calls the "Pasta-Antipasta Reactor," though he won't tell anyone what it's for. His philosophy: "Walk stiffly and carry a big sock."

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