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GASKI, MICHAEL. Magical Mythical Men. (1976) Directed by: Fred D. Chappell. Pp. 51.

This thesis is divided into two sections, both of which center on myth and mysticism.

Polyphemus: Book One is the opening section of a lengthy prose-poem. The young cyclops, overwrought with adolescence, not only is confronted with the new-found knowledge of his own monsterhood, but also learns of the threatening existence of mankind.

His two friends, Telemos, the seer, and Palos, the Lotus-Eater, are both mystics and priests in their respective religions; and though they can and do provide Polyphemus with knowledge of the past and the future, the ever-present questions of blindness, helplessness, and godlessness are left for the monster to solve.

The first chapter of Magicians and Brothers is one of five "portraits" that will appear throughout the novel, of and by different characters. The novel itself is based on an American Indian myth. In this chapter young Philip Kysela is immersed in the mystery of a religious ceremony that he cannot understand.

Chapter two begins the narrative of the novel, as an older and highly educated Philip struggles to free himself from the priesthood and guilt of one religion only to become involved with one more mysterious.

MAGICAL MYTHICAL MEN

by

Michael Gaski

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1976

Approved by

Fred Chappell
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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Fred Chappell for his patience with and criticism of this manuscript. I would also like to thank Steven Lautermilch for all his help in the final preparations and Lee Zacharias for her careful reading.

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POLYPHEMUS: BOOK ONE

No One Heard Him

It was night (there were no shadows),
 and the surf pounded hypnotically
 against the white beaches. Polyphemus
 sat quietly on the rock, gazing at the
 Mediterranean and drinking wine
 from a blood-stained
 sheepskin bag. (It was a good one.) "Shit!"
 he cried rocking back and forth. No one
 heard him.

"Why me?" he challenged the universe. "Why?
 Why me?" he called to the pervasive darkness.
 He leaned and waited for an answer.

But only
 the gulls screeched and Polyphemus fell
 drunk and dreamless
 face down on the cold sand.

Medita

"Wake up, Polyphemus." It was his half-brother Medita
 shouting from the rocks. The same boulders he shouted

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shouting from the rocks. The same boulders he shouted

from morning after morning.

"Wake up, you bastard!" Cutting more deeply than intended. "Get up and milk those fucking sheep before I kill every last one of them." Polyphemus rolled lazily to his side. Anyone else would have squinted from the sun's glare reflecting off the sea--but his face felt

the heat. As his mouth opened to speak his muddled mind minced and his words of rebuke were forever lost. Medita

continued. "I mean it. I'm tired of those little shit-makers waking me up every morning."

Polyphemus sat up and faced him. He was shallow--lacking mental force as well as meaning and both he and Polyphemus knew it.

His threats--although loud--were hollow. Everyone knew that. What he needed Polyphemus had decided was a moment of violence. A time when he was the shark destroying a dolphin, when he was the eagle plucking a rodent off the desert ground--or a lioness

crushing a fawn in full stride. A time in which he would be overwhelmingly victorious. A moment of madness. He had had chances to be sure, but he hesitated and in that hesitation his life was shaped.

Polyphemus hated him--hated him for his hesitation--and for himself.

"Medita," he shouted.

"Yes--"

Waves crashed to the sandy shore and Medita waited.

"Eat shit and die."

Dying at Your Life's Work

Polyphemus never ran anymore.

He felt ugly and old. He walked blindly back to the cave--his head hurt and in the distance he could hear the sheep crying. It would take him over an hour to milk them and each one would cry until it was relieved.

Once Medita had failed to wake him and he came back to find one of the sheep dead with an exploded bladder. Dead at his life's work.

But today-- they were all alive and anxious to give their juice and go out to make more. Polyphemus hated milking the sheep; but if he was

to trade with Palos the Lotus-Eater for
wine and weed then he needed something.

So he milked.

Not because he wanted to but because he had to--
he had to buy his escape--

from the future and to the past.

The Horizon

The sheep knew where
to go as they left the cave--better than the shepherd.
They would cross the small rocky courtyard
in front of the cave
and follow the
narrow
mountain
gaps

away from the sea
until they reached the grassy plateau
and hillsides.
There they would graze, sleep and at times
mate
with the two great rams.

Polyphemus

stumbled after them, shoelessly stepping
in their droppings, cursing and killing yesterday's wine

with today's.

The sun burned high in the heavens
causing sweat to drip steadily from his brow and arms.
He rested before climbing the hill
to cut some of the Lotus
that Palos had given him last week. "Palos should
arrive tonight," he thought. Sweetness filled his head
as he consumed the flower.

"I wonder what stories he'll have. What hell the
men and gods have been causing. I must remember
to ask him
if Galatea and Odysseus
are still alive."

Then the giant one,

with closed eye,

extended his legs,

leaned back

on the rocks

and into his mind.

The blackness that had surrounded him

turned softly to stone-gray and

then

into the blue-gray horizon of

the deep Mediterranean

as it touches the endlessness of a

Western Sky painted only by a few clouds.

This was the same horizon that
each evening endured
the sun's fiery heat as light curved into darkness
and from which all things
would enter his life
and eventually
leave.

* * *

Palos

Palos had been the first
to visit Polyphemus.
Arriving late at night (as was his constant practice)
the eldest of all Lotus-Eaters
was sleeping soundly on the beach
when the young cyclops discovered him.
"Who are you?" the child asked.
"Why are you?" the smallish black figure responded.
Polyphemus was troubled. He had never before seen
a non-cyclops--other than his mother whose form
was determined more by cycloptic nursing than by
birth itself.
The child
misunderstood the question.

"I am Polyphemus, son of Thoosa and the Great God Poseidon."

"No, no, Polyphemus. I did not ask you

who

you are?--I asked

why

you are? It matters little what name is given to you

if

you give nothing to that name. So I ask you again

Polyphemus--why are you?"

Though still a child at eleven years

Polyphemus was full grown and towered over the black being.

Knee-cap level with his head, in fact.

And

in his frustration might have crushed him, but for the eyes.

Two eyes--not one--

set deeply in what Polyphemus would later learn was the common place.

Eyes that were flames. Small black dots engulfed in terrifying circles of redness.

Miserable eyes.

Eyes that have been rubbed, clawed and scratched.

And yet at the same time

stone-dry. Incapable of shedding the slightest tear.

Saltless.

The giant stood there mute.

"Do not worry, Polyphemos--the question will keep.
I am Palos from the land of Lotus, sailing homeward
to prepare for the arrival of men."

"I have heard mention of men
from Telemos and my mother. Why do these men visit you?"

"No man wants to arrive on the land of the Lotus,
but then
no man wants to leave."

"You talk in circles, Palos."

"And you see in circles,

Polyphemos. But tell
me, little giant, what do you know about men?"

"They live in distant lands, sail in the seas of my father
Poseidon,

and know the gods to be powerful. That's all."

"Have you ever seen a man, Polyphemos?"

"No! What do they look like?"

"They are in many ways like me, Polyphemos,
but

the circle they move in

and

the circle that moves them
is much smaller."

"Tell me more, Palos."

"Not today--you are too young and I am too late."

"If you are too late, Palos, then how can I be too young?"

"Very good, Polyphemus. Your circle grows. But the tide and sailing winds are right and I must leave."

"When will I see you again?"

"For you, Polyphemus, it matters more what you do not see

than

what you can see.

I will bring you Lotus next time I arrive, and you will begin to understand."

The Cave of Telemos

Blackness

filled the child's dreams that night.

At daybreak Polyphemus raced across the island

toward the cave of Telemos

on the fruitless side of Loks.

Wild mountain goats

standing steadily

stared as the young giant

climbed clumsily over the pathless

slopes of their domain.

Twice he slipped:

blood dripped from his elbow and rushed from his knee from the first fall.

His hand cupped his crotch from the second.

(Mountains

are never hurt.) Like Telemos the seer
they care for no one--"Love," he would tell
Polyphemus, "distorts. Who can afford that?"

Although

the priest spoke freely to Polyphemus, the young
giant held no special place
in his eyes.

"What today, Polyphemus?" Spoken as if he had seen this
cyclops the day before and not several months past.
Polyphemus stood there,

grabbing his groin with a
blood-soaked arm and patting
his knee lightly to slow the flow of redness.
Doubled over in pain, tears dripping from his eye,
he looked more like a war-shattered human
than a child with a question.

And Telemos, he was unmoved. "Well, Polyphemus,
what do you want?" Obviously irritated by the interruption.
"I've met Palos the Lotus-Eater."

Telemos knew of Palos and

of Lotus,

but neither were of consequence to him. They existed
as thousands of other things existed outside his realm;
neither influencing him nor being influenced by him.

"So?" he replied.

"I was hoping you could tell me--
what he is."

"A creature like yourself, small giant. What else
is there for you to know?"

"He has two eyes, though." He hesitated. "--Like you."

Perhaps it was the comparison to Palos, or
even the interruption itself that
made Telemos so blunt. But in a greater
perspective it was more likely the very nature of
his existence.

Blessed be the wisest of all living
priests,

he paid the agonizing price of aloneness.

Celibacy from the living.

The concerns of daily existence--anyone's
existence, including his own--never distracted Telemos.

Both his heart and soul were isolated from the cares
of any particular survival.

It was through this solitude
that Telemos began to understand the nature
of a creature's movement along the line of life.

The process was dynamic and moved beyond
the control of the gods toward the realm of fate itself;
and eventually Telemos, after grasping and

understanding life's direction, began
to envision
the complete line of life. He saw the beginnings and
endings.

The priest became not merely a seer
but a true fate-knower, a vates whose grasp
of the future became bitterly entwined in his
suffering present.

For him tomorrow became history.

Yet

his very knowledge, that which he sacrificed his spirit for,
that which placed him above all creatures, that
which even the gods listened for and enlisted him to reveal,
that which encircled the essence of continued life
and allowed sleep to overcome the body and soul of living
creature with dreams of tomorrow in mind, that ability
to know the future

was impotent.

For the Fates would have their way--with or
without our consent. This too Telemos understood, so
rarely spoke of tomorrows.

"Polyphemus, it is time for you to know
that only the cyclops have one-eye; everything
else that moves and lives has two--the gods
and even men."

"What do you mean, Telemos?" said Polyphemus, rising
anxiously
above his pain.

"I mean, Polyphemus, that you
and your brothers--you are the monsters
in this world. You are the freaks
and not mankind as I know you imagined." His
body no longer ached. His eye dried bitterly.
The priest or "wise man" as his mother called him had
spared him
few words.

"So then Palos," he choked on his words--"so
then
Palos and you are like these men."
"No more than the gods are. Though Palos or myself
am hardly of the gods. Listen, Polyphemus,
Palos will not harm you, believe me; only men can do that."
"I want to know more of men, Telemos." He spoke
demandingly.

"Not today."

"Goddammit, Telemos! Everyone talks of men and now you
tell me to fear them; yet no one tells me what they
are or even why I should fear them. How
can I fear what I don't know?"

"Listen, Polyphemus, I am very busy--" (Polyphemus could
not imagine at what. He lived in this barren wasteland

where nothing existed but himself. He tended no flocks--
picked no fruit--studied no stars, for he already knew
what was to be known. Yet he says he's busy.)

"Go home,
nurse your wounds--look, your leg still bleeds." He was
patronizing now. "Come back next week. We will talk
of men and of fear, your pain will have passed by then
and your head will be clear."

The Burden of Truth

He carried his head low
and limped slowly from Telemos
taking the coastal road
rather than the treacherous mountain route.
The full understanding of his new found
knowledge was still years away--
love, murderous hate, and blindness
lay in between--
and yet somehow
the words "monster" and "freak"
weighed on him. They were true, of
that he was certain. For Telemos was
a priest capable of seeing only the god's truth.
But it seemed unfair that he had to carry
the burden of truth at still so young an age.

"But I'm really not a child anymore," he considered, "and maybe Telemos sees that too--that's why he's going to talk to me next week."

Then growing almost

arrogant

in the realization of his post-adolescence, the burden of new found monsterhood turned acidly into the egoistic defiance that comes when the age of discovery gives way to the age of knowledge. "The hell with Telemos," "goddamn the gods," "fuck the fates," and similar damnations were still buried deep in his soul. They were all part of the Age of Power which would follow when the knowledge was too much to endure, but they were part of him just the same. He was born with all this. And now it was only a matter of time--perhaps just a few years--in which the fear of his continuing existence would make him mad with the fear of his own nothingness.

The Coves

The passage along the sea was blocked by several jagged peninsular cliffs and Polyphemus' thoughts were distracted as he was forced to move inland--climbing again. "More fuckin' rocks." The soreness in his arm

and legs had eased but the pain between his legs "has no end," he thought. Reaching the top he realized that these cliffs were the first walls of the Coves.

Five separate hideaways used by the gods as love-places. Each one was set deeply in three walls of unscalable rock and would have resembled a huge well if not for the open side of the sea. During the winter months the entire floor of the cove was covered by the sea, but now in the heat of summer Poseidon pulled back the blankets of the Mediterranean, leaving a soft white bed of sand. The monster moved from cove to cove, peering into each, hoping to find the entangled legs of lovers.

Emptiness in the first three.

Vacancy.

No love today.

But the fourth brought hope. (It would bring Love and Hate as well.) She sat alone, naked and quiet facing the sea. "A goddess! A goddess!" Lying on his belly, head almost over the edge, he stared. "Alone--

How could something so beautiful be alone?"
He saw only her back and the long deep brown hair gathered over one shoulder. Her hands rested on her crossed legs. The sun poured from behind him, rushed into the cove, and then across her narrow shoulders, dripping down her bony back to her hips. "Please turn," he moaned adjusting his own hips. The pain between his legs was confused. "Please let me see your face, your front." His passion rose, but she sat motionless on her tunic. Afraid to call out for fear of offending a god, the monster waited.

The sun

slipped slowly
behind the mountains; shadows entered the cove and chillness filled the air. She rose gathering the tunic about her and as if it were a sign, another being materialized before his eyes. It was Apollo arriving on the winds.

"Are you ready, Galatea?"

"Yes, I suppose." He was impatient. ("Aren't all gods?" Telemos would say.) And she was hesitant.

"Why are you still so troubled, woman?"

"I do not know. I thought I'd be happy here."

"Will you never understand what this place

is? Is it the woman or just the human in you that makes you so confused?"

She was not a goddess. Apollo's magnificence and her own uncertainty revealed that. And she was a human. "Of men," he thought. But Polyphemus still wanted her.

"Let's go," Apollo said. She took his hand.

"What if

she doesn't return?" Already they had been together hours. Through her back he had

lived a thousand days of love. The

fear of never seeing her again seized him.

"No!" he shouted, rising to his feet, but

the wind was blowing. "No, no! Don't go!

Goddammit, Apollo, don't take her--Come back.

Please come back. Please. Please. Please."

They

were gone, and he was

alone.

His mind stopped.

With raised arms he grabbed his head and closed his eye (seeking an answer or at least consolation in the darkness. Blacking out the emptiness that the early evening light revealed in the cove).

Escape to shadows.

He didn't breathe. The air was trapped with
all reason and meaning--not in his chest--but in his
stomach.

And even as he moaned and sighed,

howled

and finally fell, he knew that he could not

bring her back. She was gone, and he did

not know for how long--or--if forever.

His whining was useless--but he continued

late into the night like a

sick puppy--

losing himself in self pity.

Shedding tears for the sake of tears.

Where's the Love

Clouds gathered over the sea

while he slept that night.

Polyphemus awoke to rains

and his mother's pains.

She was pregnant and Medita's

birthday was near.

Distortion.

Her face, her body, her voice.

The cries stung him.

"Leave me, Polyphemus. Take the sheep and leave me for awhile."

Slipping on the mud and rocks he and the sheep moved to the hillsides. Polyphemus stood staring beyond the sheep toward the cave where Thoosa lay.

He understood how and what was happening; but could not remember when another had journeyed to her center where only gods before had travelled.

"Aauugh-NNMNUUHHUH
Hhhh-ah-ahhahhh" even through the thundering skies.

He covered his ears and sat down. (Already he hated the child Medita.)

"Unending pain, screaming, suffering, all because of a moment of lust--not even love." "Aaauughh" again arose from below--penetrating his muffled ears.

"Goddammit--stop it now!" He turned toward the colorless sky and gods. "Isn't that enough? Why so much of this for her--where's the love?"

Wind blew across his face and he thought of
Galatea.

"God, do I want her. I want to lose myself in her--hug
her--

surround her so no such pain can ever reach her." He
picked up

a boulder the size of a human ship. "I'd hold her so
tight that. . . ." But reaching beyond his mighty chest--
the stone--100 times the size of Galatea--shattered
helplessly, shamelessly in his arms before he could finish.
He stood dumbfounded.

Stupidly surprised

by his own massive strength.

The thought of crushing and killing

Galatea with such monsterhood scrambled his mind.

Telemos' words "Freak" and "Monster" echoed.

The contradiction of his love-force was beyond his
own understanding. Confusion dominated.

Thoosa screamed again. "AAAugh."

"I should be with her." He wanted to be mothered.

"Aaauugh Augh-UHUUHHH." The time was near.

It had to be.

"Someone should be with her." (He did not know that
the old she-cyclops was.) "Where's that son-of-a-bitch
that screwed her now?"

He looked at the crumbled

fragments at his feet and wanted the crushed boulder
to be "that son of a bitch" and not Galatea. But
it was too late, both the idea and the act had passed.
Medita's father lived--Galatea was somehow already dead.
Lightning flashed across the skies,
the clouds thundered
and the seas heaved,
 while Polyphemus sat
imprisoned in the bars of rain
and waited.
For what he didn't know.

Mama

"To be or not to be":
those are the states--
there are no questions.

And so it seemed
to Polyphemus as Medita was born
and Thoosa died. (He cared little for the exchange.)
"You have a little brother!" It was the
fat old she-cyclops Philophisanta.
"What? How do you know?"
"Telemos--" she stuttered--"he, he told me
to go to the cave."

She was a pitiful
sweat-stinking old bitch. Her fat rolling skin
and hair-patched belly made Polyphemus nauseous.

"I, I

helped your brother be born."

"MAMA--how is MAMA?"

"Polyphemus, I've seen a lot of births and--"

"MAMA--what's happened, Philophisanta?" He started
for the cave. "Don't go!! Listen, the child was
late and and--"

"Goddammit--tell me!"

But he knew. Philophisanta
reeked of death. Blood all over her thick arms
and foul face. Birth blood or Death blood. What's
the difference.

It was all beyond his body--his sight--his vision--
his mind. He could not react.

Nothing for Nothingness.

She wasn't. That's all there was to it.

"Polyphemus, she felt little pain in dying."

"You're crazy!" he exploded. "You know that,
you old fart-smelling fucking bitch, you're crazy! She
screamed all day and all night."

"No, no. That's normal--those are birth pains--pains of
new life."

"The hell with the birth pains and new life--what's

wrong with the life there was."

"Polyphemus, please."

"Get out of here, you old pig-stinking she-bitch--get away from me and take that fucking baby with you--just get out of here and stay away."

"Now what?" He was screaming at Telemos from the rocks above the seer's cave.

"Now what? You--you priest." Telemos sat still steadily staring skyward.

"Come on, wise one. Tell me what's to happen now! Who's next? Me? How ya gonna do it? Tell me, Telemos, what's to become of me?"

He had left the sheep and walked insipidly from his dead mother to Telemos. (Telemos of course already knew.)

"You talk and talk and say nothing, but you know it all. It's not fair. You don't give me a chance--and you never even say why.

Why? Telemos? That's all I want to know. Why? Why her? Why that way? Why Death? Why didn't you at least let me know--let me try."

The

fate-knower

turned toward him

facing upwards. "It's not her, Polyphemus. That's not why you're going mad, is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's you. You're the one you're crying for. You're afraid, aren't you?"

"Huh?"

"That's it--you're afraid--afraid of dying yourself."

"That's not what we're talking about," he whimpered. The ferocity lost in his voice.

"Sure it is, Polyphemus.

You see Death for the first

time and you're frightened--frightened for yourself.

But why Death? It's no more than the

cave you live in. It has no force. It's a slave

to the Fates, to accidents of the living, to mere

chance, to the gods and kings; and of late the

product of desperate men, poison, war, and sickness.

It is no more than the Lotus that will put you

to sleep. Fear Death, Polyphemus?

How absurd!

It's men you should fear.

Man

will take you to death's door--a door you will sit at for hours, days, nights, lives; an entrance that

you yourself will eventually beg to be opened!"

"What

are you talking about, Telemos?"

"You asked me to tell you what's to become of you. I told you once already to fear men and you think that knowing the future will make a difference. Well you're wrong. You think that you can beat it. Well two things are true, Polyphemus-- a man named Agathon--yes a man--will someday tell other men that not even the gods can undo what has already been done--but I tell you more, Polyphemus--I say that no One, no force, no being, no god, can undo what is to be done--it will all come to pass.

Still you stand there in grief--for your dead mother. Why? When it's time it's time--but you're too stupid to see that--you think because I knew, I killed her.

And what if you'd have known, Polyphemus. What would you have done? Told her, 'Oh Mama, you're going to die tomorrow!' Tell me, you one-eyed monster, what would you have done. Come on!! Say something now! I'll answer for you: Nothing.

And that's just what you did--nothing.

But you're
still asking: Why? Asking for a chance. OK, Cyclops,
I'll give you your chance--
an opportunity to fight the future. A chance to see."
His eyes stopped moving
as he spoke now.

"A noble man--in fact, one of
the greatest of all men in the eyes of men--a killer
of men--will come to you--talk to you and then blind
you. Stripping you of your godhood.
Yes: shut out the light forever--leave you shadowless
in a forever shadow."

His eyes blinked.

"How does that sound? Now get out of here--show
me what you'll do. I'll wait."

* * *

MAGICIANS AND BROTHERS

(1)

She sat on the edge of the bed, shaking my shoulder and saying my name. It was still dark and as my eyes opened, the light from the street shadowed into the attic, filtering through the frost on the windows and illuminating her face. I wonder sometimes if she hadn't been sitting there for hours through the night, staring out at the snow that had been falling incessantly for days, paralysing a city. Snow that had sprinkled blessedly and piled cursedly.

Maybe she was afraid to wake me. Or not so much afraid as just uncertain. Doubtful that the predawn journey to a desolate church was deserving of the effort it would take. And yet, I think she knew that the walk itself was worth it. Knew that the cold would cleanse me as no confessional ever could. Rush through me even though I was bundled with sweaters and scarfs and hoods.

Perhaps she was trying to protect me by somehow waiting until the last minute before walking me. I know now that she didn't want me to go; but at some time-- perhaps not that morning or even the next, she would have had to send me out. Either that or wait until I discovered

it myself.

It's just too hard to try and imagine what she might have been thinking, but I know we lost something that morning. I didn't realize it then or even for a long time afterwards; but she nudged my shoulder, calling my name, and as I opened my eyes she bent slightly--kissing me on the cheek. It was the last time she kissed me and I don't know why. I never asked. I never asked why that morning and never asked why never again. It's just the way things became.

She asked me if I still wanted to go and I remember being indignant, jumping sharply with something like: -Don't you know where I'm going, mom?! She just smiled, shaking her head, telling me to hurry up and get dressed. There would be few buses running that morning and I'd have to walk to the church.

Actually I ran most of the way. My eyes watering at first from the cold that attacked my half-covered face. The sidewalks were almost all covered with high drifts, but the streets had been plowed several times in the past few days. They were packed thick with snow and ice, and I raced down them almost laughing, sliding under the street lamps that were hardly needed because the whole world seemed white with snow. Some cars were parked, actually stranded, totally covered with snow. They reminded me of the Indian earth mounds that I had read about.

I remember stopping once in awhile to spell something on their hoods or to grab snow for a snowball that I'd toss at poles or mailboxes or stop signs. But all the time I wound my way through those backstreets--cutting down shortcuts made famous in our summer bicycle chases--I never saw anyone. If I had been more imaginative perhaps that entire world of middle American houses would have taken on some bizarre appearance. But the only thing I remember was the quiet. Once I even stopped to listen because I had heard my own feet crunching in the snow behind me, seeming to chase me, terrifying and yet fascinating me.

It's just that I had never heard that quiet before. My whole world up till then had buzzed past me in a blur that not even the stillness of my attic room could rise above. I stood there in the middle of the street, watching the white smoke rise from my nose and my mouth and hearing myself breathe. No, not just hearing but actually feeling myself breathe, because all the sweaters and coats that I wore kept swelling up around my neck with each breath and then softly collapsing down around my chest.

I knew that behind those dark windows and under those white roofs people were alive, breathing too. Knew that just a few blocks away, near the larger streets and avenues, others were dragging through the snow that was still falling, but on that street, there was only me: breathing and listening for the snow itself to touch the

ground. I started running again. I must have, because I don't remember too much more until I reached the back door of the sacristy.

It was a massive door, extremely thick and heavy, made out of solid wood and without windows. No door that I've seen since has been that imposing. On that morning the door was unexpectedly ajar. It frightened me to think that perhaps someone else had arrived before me and was doing some of the preparations that I had waited years and practiced months to perform myself. I pulled back the door and discovered Sr. Rosalita pulling linens and altar clothes from a wide dresser. Her eyes were still sleepy. All the time I had known her through the fourth grade she had been the spark of energy and life itself. Alive and enthusiastic about everything. She even played kickball and dodgeball with the boys at lunchtime, outrunning and even outdodging them at times. Her long black skirt slowed her down and those stubby heeled shoes kept her from jumping, but she could stop, spin,--actually pirouette with one hand holding the top of her veil--with the best of them. Somehow it never seemed right that she was a nun.

She liked me. I knew that. And she smiled as I entered, but left me quietly to undress from my winter clothes and to put on the black cassock.

Methodically she replaced the altar clothes and with great care I lit the candles, then set up the missal on the

altar and filled the water cruet. I had to wait for the priest to arrive before pouring the wine because they kept it locked up. Besides, different priests used different wines and being Monday I had no idea who would be saying the Mass.

I had everything prepared well before 6:15 and the other server still hadn't arrived. It excited me to think that perhaps my first Mass would be alone and as I pulled the priest's vestments from the long drawers and laid them across the dressing area, I hoped that the other boy wouldn't arrive. I knew that I could do it alone.

Every fifth grader trained that year had spent weeks studying the Latin responses--even months in some cases--before he was allowed to train for the activities during the Mass itself. And then we'd spend our lunch hours and an hour after school being directed and abused by the two eighth graders who had the powerful positions of head servers as well as the responsibility to train us.

One lunch period near the end of our training Anthony Timms and I were practicing on the main altar with the eighth grader Corsi. He would say the priest's parts and go through the motions and we would respond as if in a real Mass. After the Epistle one server had to pick up the missal and its stand, walk down three steps, genuflect at the foot of the altar, and then walk back up the stairs to place the book on the proper side for the Gospel. Well,

Anthony hurried a bit through the descent and when he genuflected, he dropped the book.

-What's wrong with you? Corsi screamed in the deserted church.

-I slipped, Anthony said.

-Kiss the book, Corsi commanded.

-What?

-I said, Kiss the book. It's holy and you can't go around dropping holy things.

-It was an accident, Anthony said.

-You can't have accidents during the Mass. Besides, it's a sin to drop the missal. It's like the Bible. Kiss it.

Anthony was so afraid. He was one of the few that had taken so long to learn the Latin responses and he wanted desperately to be a server. We were both afraid that Corsi would say something to the nuns or priests and that would be the end. We never finished the Mass that day. Instead we spent the remainder of the hour taking turns carrying the missal from one side of the altar to the other.

It may sound ridiculous but we were coached on every detail from how to genuflect properly to how to hold our hands to the individual idiosyncrasies of each priest in the parish. It was painfully serious. Somehow all three priests in that church found deep satisfaction in our perfection.

The pastor was the worst. Monsignor O'Connell was a sixty-year-old red-faced, round-bellied Irishman who had been all over the world, spoke seven different languages and smiled only at the old ladies who knocked on the sacristy door just before Mass started to introduce their visiting cousins and sisters. He charmed the old women with smiles and terrified us to death without a word. He had the reputation of saying the fastest Mass in the world and of sweating more than did fat Mr. Rogish the gym teacher when he led our exercises every Thursday morning.

Even that snowy morning saw O'Connell storming into the sacristy at 6:25, feverishly unlocking the safe to remove the chalice, opening the wine cabinet loudly enough so that I would know it was time to fill the wine cruet, and dressing himself in the priestly vestments as if in a race. He was finished and ready with two minutes to spare.

The servers meanwhile were supposed to wait in a little anteroom off from where the priest dressed and at exactly 6:29--there was a large clock in the dressing room--they were expected to walk out of this anteroom and into the priest's room where they were to stand at perfect attention for the last forty-five seconds or so before leading the old man out to begin the Mass. Even as we walked out of the door onto the altar, the first server had the responsibility of ringing the bell and the second had to flick off the dressing-room light switch.

When I think about it now it seems fantastic but several times the servers for O'Connell came out of their room just ten or fifteen seconds late and he walked out onto the altar without them. He knew that they were back there and just said the hell with them and took off by himself. That never made sense, but in some vague way I knew he was right.

I had just placed the wine on the altar when the other server arrived. He was a seventh grader and had gone the route with O'Connell and the others. While he was dressing, Sr. Rosalita reminded me to go to the back door of the convent for breakfast in their kitchen. There wasn't enough time to go home before school started. She straightened the collar edge of my white surplice and left us with a smile.

It was time to enter the Monsignor's dressing room. The seventh grader just mumbled sleepily for me to lead and to take the bells. We stood quietly with our hands folded by the doorway as O'Connell sat staring past us onto the altar. His nostrils enlarged as he took long deep breaths through his nose. Even now I wonder what he looked at. What he saw out there on that altar. His lips quivered, twitched slightly. His eyes refused to blink. Was he for some reason afraid. No, he was angry. But not at us. We were there and waiting. Maybe he knew it was my first time. But I was ready: I knew the words and I knew the

actions. And someday, I thought, I would know his as well.

He stood quickly and at exactly 6:30 we led the red-faced Monsignor into the massive Church of St. Philomena with absolutely no one there.

Somehow I know that the nuns, the priests, even myself must have said that this was all for God, but I never understood why God needed all that. Even now after all these years I still don't understand, don't know why we did it. I never really understood what was happening. It was all some sort of big mystery to me, but for some inexplicable reason my part seemed carefully defined and determined. So minutely etched that I just believed. I didn't know in what or why--maybe it's because I had nothing else to do.

MAGICIANS AND BROTHERS

(2)

Philip pushed away the coffee cup and slouched forward onto the kitchen table. In the ensuing silence he could hear the February rains that rinsed the morning streets of Paris. Cold, wet, defeated Paris, thought Philip. Beauty shabbily destroyed by pride. The carnage of Ilium spread across a decade of timeless hate and confusion. The contemptible tourist asking the contemptible guard for the toilets in the Louvre.

-You should get some sleep, Heather said. She had sat with him throughout the night at the same cluttered wooden table and now in the tired early morning hours watched him push his thin fingers up across his temples into his scalp. The sleeves of his blue flannel shirt had dropped wearily past his forearms to gather at his elbows. Light falling from the small curtained lamp overhead softened the brownness of his hair and cast a faint shadow on the table into which he stared.

He was tired and Heather's words rising up in the damp gray attic apartment repeated themselves like some forgotten epigram he once knew. He smiled. His mind falling back into the past. Just how often had he heard

those words in the last few years. His professors in Detroit and Chicago stopping him bleary-eyed in the halls to counsel him to rest. His mother, whenever he returned to Cleveland to visit, explaining at length the importance of a proper diet and the proper sleeping habits. His rectors throughout the seminary and the novitiate calling him into their deep brown dark offices to ask him if the duties of religious life were tormenting his nights. To which he replied that it was only the recent strain in academics that had him slightly anxious. (Which was, of course, the converse of his answer to the lay professors.) One night, half-drunk with his friend Stephen James--not an uncommon state for Stephen--he said that he was certain the Bishop, after conferring the office of priesthood on him, was going to pull him aside and tell him to get some rest. In those years he could not sleep. Insomnia he called it.

-No, you're wrong, Stephen insisted. That's when people can't sleep. With you, Philip, the night is an addiction. You like it. A nocturnal nut is what you are.

Stephen was right, Philip had decided. But what remained was the fact that Philip hated sleeping and had hated it for all the years of his religious training as a Jesuit priest. Even when exhaustion overcame him after several successive nights of study and he slept as if dead, his reawakening was accompanied by pangs of guilt. The failure of the human flesh. Why was he always the disciple

falling asleep at Gethsemane?

Yet the night did more than test his endurance. It provided him with the solitude to read his Augustine, Aquinas, Teilhard, and Tillich. Luther, Kant, Rousseau, and Nietzsche cluttered his bed. He was in constant preparation for classes. For five years he had studied theology and philosophy at Detroit; then moving to Loyola, his course of study in philosophy had finally taken direction. The master's study was geared primarily toward the philosophical arguments of the Church toward heretical positions.

The Gnostics, Nestorians, Albigensians, and Lutherans visited him regularly in his small room near the University and the night gave him the seclusion not only to ask their heretical questions but to carry their beliefs and arguments to the fullest before venturing a protective Catholic answer. He was both the heretic and the defender; and his cubicle, the courtroom. He would nail the theses on the church door at Wittenberg. Tetzel was wrong; of that there could be no doubt. Then in a ceremony befitting a king he would assume the title, Fidei Defensor, and protect the foundation of the Church in the tradition of Ignatius himself.

Near the end of his second year, when his own thesis was in progress, he wrote Stephen in Cleveland: -The Church has fallen into a grave state. The greatest minds of time

are converging to destroy it. All of Science and Reason move toward its annihilation and the Church cannot respond. She cannot argue. She has refused to argue for so many years that she no longer knows how. She clutches precariously to the slippery rock of blind faith. The Pope cannot err, but the Pope has become mute. . . .

Stephen, as always, replied quickly to Philip: -Please give my best wishes to the Sick Lady. Hope she is feeling better. Illness of any sort can be discomfoting. Speaking of discomfort, the holy house here has been plagued with a severe case of hemorrhoids. (Communal toilets have many disadvantages--thank God we're spared of V.D.) --But one would think that the anus of a Jesuit was sacred. We have not yet located the immediate transmitter; like the Pope, he has chosen to remain silent. P.S. Meet you on the altar at St. Patrick's. In case you've forgotten we're to become priests in two months. P.P.S. O'Reilly's parents have a cabin near a lake in Alaska. Let's get a month off this summer for a "retreat." July? You'll have no trouble after your thesis is finished. If you talk to others like you write to me, then old man Midday will probably send you there. Talk more in May.

They met in May at Philip's parents' house. His mother, much to his discouragement, had arranged a dinner celebration on Sunday afternoon. Aunts, uncles, cousins

young and old, swarmed into and around the two-story house on Cleveland's east side to feast on the baked ham, fried chicken, and slices of roast beef that crowded onto plates with potato salad, vegetables, olives, pickles, and freshly baked bread. People sat throughout the house eating and drinking. The children had been fed first and then hushed out of the house into the backyard. Coolers of soda pop had been placed on the back porch to entice them further. Stephen had been corralled by Uncle Henry in the basement where Mr. Kysela had set up a makeshift bar on the Ping-Pong table. Most of the men were down there, while the women and the older cousins visited upstairs in the living and dining rooms.

Philip hid as best he could in the kitchen, talking intermittently with the guests and his mother who hurried in and out, refilling the serving dishes. It was from there that he watched his eleven-year-old sister Tricia direct the rampages of the children from the backyard into the kitchen to heist the fudge cakes and cookies on the counter. The youngest brother, Tommy, and cousin Joey were sent in as advance scouts. They would hide beneath the table and when the coast was clear they would signal for the raid to begin. On their last venture the two young ones headed for the counter themselves but were quickly routed back through the screen door when Aunt Mary appeared.

-You've had enough sweets, she scolded. Stay out of the kitchen.

Philip could hear Tricia laughing by the cooler as Tommy and Joey rushed out with chocolate chip cookies crumbling in their hands.

-They never stop, Aunt Mary said, turning to Philip. You were just as bad too.

-I guess, he said.

She was a stout woman and prided herself on the discipline she exacted from her own children. She often criticised his mother for being too lenient. Philip had seen her wrath when he was a child. She was still, in many ways, old country.

-Philip, you know how proud we all are for you. Being a master, and going to Paris, plus being a priest in a few days.

-Thanks, Aunt Mary. I guess I'm lucky.

-Lucky, nothing. Your mother tells me how hard you work. I know too. It takes a lot of mind work to get ahead these days. Your cousin Hale is studying computers and he's always late getting home. But I was wondering, Philip; your mother, she says that the Jesuits, they mostly teach. What are you going to teach?

-I don't think I'll be a teacher.

-Then what?

-Well, I'm going back to school first.

-But after that? After school? Your friend Stephen works with those Puerto Ricans on the west side. Are you going to do that too?

-No, I don't think so.

-Well, then, maybe some kind of missionary work? In Africa?

-No.

Tommy was spotted at the screen door, and half-heartedly Aunt Mary chased him a few steps. Philip jumped at the excuse.

-I'll go out back for awhile and see if I can calm them down, he said.

-Look out, here comes Philip, Tommy howled, scrambling off the porch. Philip's coming, he repeated.

The children had been gathered around Tricia by the garage when Tommy crashed into the group, feigning fear. Tricia moved forward in the confusion.

-Play catch with me? she asked. C'mon, play catch.

-OK, Philip said. Where are the gloves?

Two boys near the same age as Tricia were bouncing the rubber ball off the back of the garage and fielding it. Tricia raced up to them and stripped them of the gloves and ball before they could mount a protest. She was never to be denied.

Philip loved her dearly though he hardly knew her. The last eight years had passed with only weekend visits.

As they tossed the ball back and forth he could imagine her blond hair growing long and beautiful from that short boyish cut. Those fiery blue eyes in constant challenge would someday soften as would her constant talking. She would never lose her persuasiveness and the boys that crowded around her now waiting for her next command would someday crowd the woman, answering still.

-I'm going to play little league, she said.

-Oh really. Philip was surprised. I thought little league was for boys.

-It used to be, but now they've got to let girls play too. She threw the rubber ball extra hard, showing the strength of her arm.

-Throw me a pop-up, OK?

Philip arched the ball into the air, slightly higher than the garage. She snagged it handily--almost disgustingly.

-A pop-up, Philip. Come on, throw it high, like the big leagues.

Again the ball took flight, climbing this time higher than the garage, nearly as high as the house. But it lost its accuracy and Tricia had to scramble back and across the lawn. The ball descended with the sun and at the last moment Tricia could stare into the sun no longer. She jumped away, shielding her eyes and covering her head. The ball bounced near her and bounded into the rosebushes by

the neighbor's driveway.

-No fair, she said. I couldn't see because of the sun.

-You have to learn to play in the sun too. Especially if that's a hardball and not a rubber one. C'mon, try it again--only this time shield the sun with your glove hand--like this.

So for the next half-hour Philip threw pop-ups in the backyard, coaching Tricia on the little he knew from his own little-league and pony-league days.

Soon the other children were playing too and Philip became the spectator. That suited him. Afternoon wore into evening. Inside, the coffee cups and saucers replaced the dishes on the dining room table. His mother was finally sitting and when he reentered the house through the kitchen he could hear her talking to his aunts.

-It's a lovely chalice. The inlay on the base was done by a Spanish goldsmith. And the design. . . .

He had yet to see the ordination present. He knew that the cost was astounding. Sinful was the word he used when she told him that they had collected money from all the relatives and then matched the collection from their savings.

He avoided the dining room and headed for the basement. Stephen was still there, remarkably sober as well. He had somehow maintained the social dignity that

his deaconate collar called for. The baseball game was over and the topic had turned to politics.

-Here, here, his father interrupted. Here's Philip. See what he has to say.

-About what?

-This Watergate thing.

-Nixon's really in trouble, I think. His credibility is seriously being questioned.

-The Senate's going to have an investigation, Uncle Al said. They'll get to the bottom of this.

Philip's father grumbled.

-Last week Nixon said he was going to get to the bottom; before that, Sirica said the same thing. Now it's the Senate. You know what I think? I think it's all so tangled up no one will ever get to the bottom.

Several others began talking at the same time. Ellsberg, Ehrlichman, McCord, Mitchell. Names floating like the cigarette smoke that hung in the air. Nowhere to go. Sitting there suffocating everyone slowly. Connors, a friend of his father's, spoke.

-Well, I sure hope it clears up. Cary's home for the summer from college and all he says is: -See? See? You and Nixon. See? See?

-Cary hell, Uncle Al groaned. At least you can shut him up. What about those longhairs down at the shipping dock. Summer help, my ass. They started just last week

and already they've. . . .

Stephen grabbed Philip's arm and nodded toward the stairs.

-I've really got to be going, Stephen said. I told my parents I'd spend the night over there.

-They should've come, Philip said.

-No, they're too old for this kind of thing. Besides, they'd feel bad that they couldn't do all this for me.

Philip stopped on the landing between the basement and the kitchen.

-I need to talk to you.

-Now don't be starting with that long serious face and all that philosophy stuff. Your parents have thrown this real nice party for you and the least you can do is enjoy it. Stephen stopped himself before he went any further. Their eyes met, holding the silence for a second.

-You're right, Philip said.

-Listen, said Stephen, why don't you come over to the halfway house tomorrow afternoon. We'll pick up O'Reilly at the high school and talk to Midday about going to Alaska.

-OK, Philip answered, managing a smile.

They found Philip's mother still sitting in the living room with Aunt Mary and some other women. Stephen circled the table, saying his good-bye's and thank you's. He returned to Philip's mother.

-Thank you again, Mrs. Kysela. It was really nice.

-Well, I'm glad you could come, Stephen. I hope you told Philip here to get some rest. He certainly won't listen to me.

-I'm not sure who he listens to--but after Thursday, it'll be the Pope. He smiled widely and the women laughed nervously. In mock solemnity he shook hands with Philip. See you tomorrow, Father.

Philip frowned at the purposeful mistake.

-I'll see you to the car.

-Don't bother, he said, already moving toward the living room and the front door. They watched him disappear around the corner.

-What a nice young man, Aunt Mary said.

-He certainly is, replied someone else.

-He's helping those Puerto Ricans, you know. . . .

Philip rubbed his eyes roughly.

-You look so exhausted, Philip. You really need to get your rest. His mother's voice had dissolved into Heather's. She stood leaning over his shoulder, massaging the back of his neck. Heather with those inexplicable, patient green eyes, counseling him to the bed. Cursing the vow of celibacy not yet one year old. The slightest touch of her fingers across his forehead to push the hair from his eyes, desecrating the office of his priesthood. An act more violently against the Jesuit order than fornication

itself. An act of Love, not Law. Heather the teacher.
The French tutor. The listener.

She was right, he thought. Like all the others,
Heather was right. It's stupid to deprive myself of sleep,
of dreams. To keep myself up all night just because
they're delaying my dispensation. It's nothing. They
can't stop me from quitting. Hell, I've already quit.
It's just the formality now. See the Provincial, answer
his questions, and everything will proceed as it should.

Philip knew the major concern was money. The Jesuits
sought compensation for the education they had profusely
sponsored for the last eight years. But they're after
something else too. And that's what he couldn't
understand. That's what really bothered him and kept him
up all night.

-I have a lecture to attend, he said. I'll get some
rest tonight.

Heather shrugged her shoulders and sat down. He rose,
clearing the dishes from the table. Both knew the
discussion on sleep was closed.

-What's the lecture? she asked.

-Modern Philosophy and the Ethics of Protest. There's
a visiting professor from the States. He may even speak in
English. What about you? What do you have to do today? he
asked.

-Two French lessons this morning and a luncheon with

that woman from the American University.

-What's that all about anyway?

-Oh Philip, I already told you.

-No, you haven't.

-It's about that position with the traveling university.

-Oh yeah. Now I remember, he said. I thought that was tied up with the University in Spain.

-They're all part of the same organization, she said.

Standing near the small window in the kitchen, he watched the early morning traffic begin. He pushed his thin hair sloppily into place with his fingers. February winds curled up from the street and buffeted with the rain against the third-floor window. The chill seemed to crawl through the glass and enter the room. He pulled his long black overcoat over his narrow shoulders and bent toward Heather.

-I can meet you for dinner, she said.

-I better not, he answered. It'll probably be better if I eat at the dining hall. I'll be going to the library in the evening, though. How about coffee after that?

-What time? she asked.

-About ten--at the café across the street from the main entrance.

They kissed good-bye. Grabbing his leather case filled with books and papers, he left the attic, descending

the backstairs of the old house. Before entering the alley and the street, he pulled his coat collar up around his neck.

Outside on the street Philip walked quickly, following the signs to the Emile Zola Metro station. He nodded to the other early morning travelers, who only months before had greeted him in French with the customary and semi-reverent good-morning, Father.