

ALEMBIC

ALEMBIC

The Literary Magazine
of
Providence College

Volume 55 Number I

Editor
Michael M. Woody

Advisor
Jane Lunin Perel

Contributions

- Patricia L. Slonina *Taking Out the Boat*
- Debra Prevey *impressions: fall*
- Bill Tremblay *Janis Joplin & The Invention
of Barbed Wire*
- Dora Schaffer *Bounty Hunter*
- Thomas M. Coskren, O.P. *A Better Parlor: Setting as
Meaning in Henry James's
The Bostonians*
- Drew Maciag *My Heart Is A Japanese Garden
Like Paper Blossoms In A Chinese
Sunset*
- Edward McCrorie *Big Tree Talk*
- Robert M. Avakian *Crystal Sphericon Windows*
- Jereld Gray *Complaint*
- Steve Picararo *Rousseau! Rousseau!*
- April Selley *Love Poem*
- Jane Lunin Perel *Bass Head Washed Up on Shore
at Galilee, R.I., July 16, 1975*
- Michael M. Woody *The Elegy*
- S. Logan *What The Fish Sees*

Photograph
Edward McCrorie

Taking Out the Boat

"Gentlemen," I hear you say,
"We are here for solemnities."

Taking out the boat: for this
task too many hands
are as helpless as too few.

So like a sacred
brotherhood you choose a few
good friends (who are most capable).

You face the dark mouth of the water
sulking in the strong November
light. You heave
and strain and pull from berth
this lone island that is all
your solitude.

Then there is cleaning and packing,
storing and silence.

One day later I live with you
again this heaviness
this loss in your telling
in that simple gesture of your hand
"it's done."

We can live through the dying garden
take the leaves falling, even
that first ground cracking
frost that left ice in the boat's
bottom — but this is the ending
of the end.

I am learning the cycles
we are set in, can accept
now the perfect fullness of our secret
calendar telling four seasons and
seasons within those seasons.

Now, I look for other boats to take
out, believing that I know
something about that yearly
loss: stiletto pain of a Sunday
afternoon in mid-

November. For even as you told
the story, I sensed that slid-
ing thud deep within meaning
yes, yes, I know.

Patricia L. Slonina

impressions: fall

1

autumn
is nights grinning in black shrouds,
hiding the branches of trees that scream
color, and wind that sends the silhouettes
of pumpkins against cement.

2

now the day is the red
mouths of small birds, sinking
into the arms of trees. tiny
heads of sleeping babies
glazed with hazy light
roll like small melons.

debra prevey

Janis Joplin & The Invention of Barbed Wire

All morning grey flints of wind shoot
down from the Foothills across the horse pastures
behind my house. Tumbleweed hard as coral
bangs against the lapboard, scratching at window-panes
with the quilled fingers of caged men.

I see them on porches after supper
listening to wind pour over the grassland,
their minds spinning & creaking like windmills
drawing waters up from underground.

This range full of unsettling music
& they, bright wingtips of sinful kisses,
sagebrush burning on lips of prairie night
waiting for avenging thunderheads.

They will string wire on cottonwood stakes,
draw squares on the land's pure curve
& at dusk return, asking nothing of their wives
but to bank fires & lay down in cactus beds
while they go dying, meteors in the whiskey town.

A woman stomps rhythm there in gold shoes
shouting 'get it while you can' through the fence
that owns her voice. She dies giving birth,
flowers of Texas darkness still pinned to her dress.

I pluck barbed wire, singing with the wind
sad & furious. Clouds rush by
like herds of ghost buffalo.

-Bill Tremblay

(copyright, Bill Tremblay)

Bounty Hunter

I

The drive lengthens to a V
like a tongue rolled out from infinities
to a red heat gullet-the sun
not high but ready to swallow
I turn right.

Heads of horses bob like flowers
stalk necks snake dancing for breakfast,
I am hungry also-looking for you
we met at this racetrack
of dutchdoors and dirtroads.

II

Heroman you gunned yourself down
and came to hide out among the modern day herd
neatly packaged in numbered stalls
like germs isolated on glass slides.

Oh, how I wanted you dead-
clawing out of myself to cry at your funeral
throwing myself in the ditch
I dug.

You were riding out of town
when it happened
the wanted posters were you
but there were so many
others.

Dora Schaffer

A Better Parlor: Setting as Meaning in Henry James's *The Bostonians*

. . . a figure is nothing without a setting.

James: *The Bostonians*

But James's own solution was to try to find a better parlor for the theater of human life.

Fergusson: *The Idea of a Theater*

One of the most obvious features of Henry James's great novel *The Bostonians*, aside from the inherent drama of its sophisticated use of the "eternal triangle," is its stunning theatricalism. The opening speeches of the novel constitute as effective a piece of stage dialogue as can be found in most modern dramas; the novel is filled with brilliant confrontation scenes, such as that between Olive Chancellor and Mrs. Burrage in the thirty-second chapter; one of the main characters, Verena Tarrant, habitually resorts to "high" rhetoric — theatrical rather than dramatic — even in ordinary conversation; and the last scene in the novel, which significantly takes place backstage, is calculated to keep any audience glued to its seats until the final curtain. Indeed, one is tempted to say that *The Bostonians*, with its bursts of angry passion, its moments of high comedy, its love scenes, its moving death-bed scene, and its agonized soliloquies, is perhaps too theatrical; that the novel suffers from an excess of riches. But such a judgment, along with revealing an unfortunate critical snobbery, would miss an essential element in James's extraordinary achievement. *The Bostonians* is brilliantly theatrical, because theatricalism is perhaps the only way to present the ideational clash which underlies the emotional conflicts in the novel.

And this theatricalism, I believe, is most effectively used in the various settings of the novel. We know that James was concerned with writing a novel that had "that pictorial quality" of Daudet's *Evangeliste*, from an entry in his notebook for 1883,¹ but I do not think that we can reach a proper understanding of James's achievement in this regard, if we consider it as merely "pictorial." The distinction between the pictorial and a setting may be a fine one, but I believe that it is valuable. The pictorial in a novel can be diffusive; it can merely provide a backdrop or atmosphere for the actions of the characters, and still be effective. In a long historical novel, for example, it may be necessary to give elaborate descriptions of interiors, to place characters in the perspective of time; but it is not necessary that such descriptions contribute anything but a minimal degree of significance. The problem is entirely different with a stage-setting, however. The effect of a good drama can be partially destroyed, if not entirely ruined, because of a bad setting. The economy of dramatic means demands that everything presented to the audience, even the least stage prop, be significant. If the scenery of a play does not *move* with the emotions and ideas expressed in the drama, if it does not *move* with the actors, if it is not of a piece with the dramatic action, then it has failed in its dramatic function. The pictorial must certainly contribute to meaning; setting must be meaning, insofar as this is possible with inanimate objects. And one of the signs of greatness in *The Bostonians* is that its elaborate descriptions have transcended the pictorial; they are most properly settings.

James himself indicates that his descriptions are intended to fulfill such a function, when in an authorial intrusion he states:

I mention it [the description of the environs of Basil Ransom's New York apartment] not on account of any particular influence it may have had on the life or the thought of Basil Ransom, but for old acquaintance sake and that of local color; besides which, a figure is nothing without a setting, and our young man came and went every day, with rather an indifferent, unperceiving step, it is true, among the objects I have briefly designated.²

This passage is a bit of literary legerdemain in which James deprecates a description that is anything but brief in order to draw attention to its significance. It may be well, however, to quote the description at length, to point out its profound significance, not only as it makes objective Ransom's financial situation, but more importantly as it suggests the "theory" which animates his being and operations, quite as much as the "theory of feminism" animates Olive Chancellor.

Basil Ransom lived in New York, rather far to the eastward, and in the upper reaches of the town; he occupied two small shabby rooms in a somewhat decayed mansion which stood next to the corner of the Second Avenue. The corner itself was formed by a considerable grocer's shop, the near neighborhood of which was fatal to any pretensions Ransom and his fellow-lodgers might have had in regard to gentility of situation. The house had a red, rusty face, and faded green shutters, of which the slats were limp and at variance with each other. In one of the lower windows was suspended a fly-blown card, with the words "Table Board" affixed in letters cut (not very neatly) out of colored paper, of graduated tints, and surrounded with a small band of stamped gilt. The two sides of the shop were protected by an immense penthouse shed, which projected over a greasy pavement and was supported by wooden posts fixed in the curbstone. Beneath it, on the dislocated flags, barrels and baskets were freely and picturesquely grouped; an open cellarway yawned beneath the feet of those who might pause to gaze too fondly on the savory wares displayed in the window; a strong odor of smoked fish, combined with a fragrance of molasses, hung about the spot; the pavement, toward the gutters, was fringed with dirty panniers, heaped with potatoes, carrots, and onions; and a smart, bright wagon, with the horse detached from the shafts, drawn up on the edge of the abominable road (it contained holes and ruts a foot deep, and immemorial accumulations of stagnant mud), imparted an idle, rural, pastoral air to a scene otherwise perhaps expressive of a rank civilization. The establishment was of the kind known to New Yorkers as a Dutch grocery; and red-faced, yellow-haired, barearmed vendors might have been observed to lounge in the doorway (pp. 189-190).

That the description graphically indicates Ransom's strained financial circumstances is evident, but it says much more about Ransom's ideas — as does the description immediately following it of his two rooms and the view they command. It is important, in the first place, that Ransom live in New York: he is the figure of a tradition in disgrace, a tradition already defeated by his New England antagonists on the political level. He must occupy the middle ground, a place large enough in its social diversity and implications to embrace all shades of opinion. Ransom stands with the

Groups of the unemployed, the children of disappointment from beyond the seas, [who] propped themselves against the low sunny wall of the park; [while] on the other side the commercial vista of the Sixth Avenue stretched away with a remarkable absence of aerial perspective (pp. 348-349).

Yet, his place in New York is "rather far to the eastward"; he is essentially the conservative, the embodiment of a tradition, even if that tradition has fallen on bad days. He occupies "shabby rooms in a somewhat decayed mansion." The values he adheres to are still values, but in Basil Ransom they have been reduced, in some respects, to the trivial: the ideal of courtesy or chivalry which his civilization had prized has become, in him, a kind of ineffectual politeness. It approaches the ludicrous when he is caught by Mrs. Luna at the Burrage "Wednesday Club":

She had the better of poor Ransom, thanks to the superstitions of Mississippi. It was in his simple code a gross rudeness to withdraw from conversation with a lady at a party before another gentleman should have come to take one's place; it was to inflict on the lady a kind of outrage. (p. 266).

There is, however, a richness to this tradition, despite its present shabby aspect; James suggests this with his details about the market: it does contain food, it can nourish. But there is an essential dislocation in the tradition: one cannot go back to it for all the answers to contemporary problems, he seems to be saying when he points out that "an open cellarway yawned beneath the feet of those who might pause to gaze too fondly on the savory wares displayed in the window." In fact, the tradition Basil represents is like "a smart, bright wagon, with the horse detached from the shafts, drawn up on the edge of the abominable road." In a way, it is a dead tradition, containing "immemorial accumulations of stagnant mud"; but in its death, it is richer than the sterile disembodiment that has become the "theory" of Olive Chancellor. Moreover, the essential note of the ideational conflict between Basil and Olive is suggested in one of those brilliant imagistic juxtapositions which characterize the style of *The Bostonians*: "it [the wagon] imparted an idle, rural, pastoral air to a scene otherwise perhaps expressive of a rank civilization."

I do not mean, of course, to press the analysis of such a descriptive passage to the point where every detail is a symbol; but it is important to notice that the descriptive details are not merely parts of a static picture. They have a quality analogous to the details of a stage setting; they *move* with the emotions and ideas expressed in the drama. In this regard, Francis Fergusson has an illuminating comment on the Second Act of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. While discussing "the scene as a basic element in the composition," he says: "The setting, as we come to know it behind the casual surfaces of the text, is one of the chief elements in this poem of change."³ It is obvious that one cannot refer to the casual surface of James's text, but it is also true that his novel is a poem of change, and the change in society is frequently conveyed by the various settings.

James uses a device in his settings to suggest the fact of changing social conditions or, at least, the clash of ideas which will effect such change, and this device is again remarkably theatrical. In one sense, it is an outgrowth of the stylistic juxtaposition mentioned above; but it goes beyond imagistic juxtaposition, insofar as it involves introducing physical objects into an established setting, which objects are foreign to that setting. A good exam-

ple of the device occurs in the opening pages of the novel, when Basil is left alone for a few moments in Olive's parlor, after she has left to inform her domestics that he will be a guest for dinner. He is impressed with "this queer corridor-shaped drawing room of his new-found kinswoman"; for him, the place is quintessential Boston, the "city of culture." Yet, in the midst of his musings, the author intrudes:

The artistic sense in Basil Ransom had not been highly cultivated; neither (though he had passed his early years as the son of a rich man) was his conception of material comfort very definite; it consisted mainly of the vision of plenty of cigars and brandy and water and newspapers, and a cane-bottomed armchair of the right inclination, from which he could stretch his legs (p. 16).

It would be difficult to imagine any objects more out of place in Olive Chancellor's drawing room (nor can we imagine the essentially masculine activities to which they lend themselves happening there), but James introduces them precisely for this reason: that the conflict between the two characters will be announced unmistakably even in the physical objects associated with them. Tennessee Williams uses this same theatrical device, albeit with little of the Jamesian subtlety, in *The Rose Tattoo*, where the stage directions indicate the presence of two mannequins, a bride and a widow, facing one another in hostile attitude. There are countless examples of this device in *The Bostonians*, and the pattern of opposition established is central to the meaning of the novel.

The pattern of opposition, moreover, is used to illustrate the conflicts within characters, as well as those between them. In one of the most brilliant touches in the novel, James has Olive wander into New York's Washington Square, after her disturbing interview with Mrs. Burrage; and it is here that she herself becomes the foreign object in the setting.

The trees and grass-plots had begun to bud and sprout, the fountains splashed in the sunshine, the children of the quarter, both the dingier types from the south side, who played games that required much chalking of the paved walks, and much sprawling and crouching there, under the feet of passers, and the little curled and feathered people who drove their hoops under the eyes of French nursemaids — all the infant population filled the vernal air with small sounds which had a crude, tender quality, like the leaves and the thin herbage (p. 323).

And into this setting comes the brooding Olive, who will never have children, and who makes up her mind while sitting on a bench in the Square that Verena shall not have them either: for "she had made up her mind that there was no menace so great as the menace of Basil Ransom." Olive will sacrifice the natural of her "theory," and her "theory" is dreadfully out of place in this idyllic setting.

The scene, as I have stated, is brilliant in itself; but James is not satisfied with it alone. He plays it off against a similar scene ten pages later in which Verena and Basil wander through Central Park, which

bristled with the raw delicacy of April, and, in spite of its rockwork grottos and tunnels, its pavilions and statues, its too numerous paths and pavements, lakes too big for the landscape and bridges too big for the lakes, expressed all the fragrance and freshness of the most charming moment of the year (p. 333).

Here it is the artificial that is foreign; all the works of "art" oppose, but cannot defeat, the "raw delicacy of April." And such works of art belong to

the world of culture, embodied most fully in the New England of the novel, the cultural world which has been distilled into Olive's "theory."

The world of art, however, before its distillation into theory, is a valuable world, and James's use of it again parallels one of Chekhov's theatrical devices. Fergusson says that "when Chekhov wishes us to raise our eyes from the people in the foreground to their wider setting, he often uses music as a signal and an inducement."⁴ James accomplishes the effect with his use of music, as well as with the arts of painting and architecture. In the scene describing Olive and Verena's visit to Mr. Burrage's Harvard rooms, music gives Olive a respite from her battle with nature (for this is ultimately the war in which she is engaged), while James's painting of the scene provides the same respite for the reader. Indeed, this scene is one of the few in the book that is literally pictorial in the sense I have indicated above.

His guests sat scattered in the red firelight, listening, silent, in comfortable attitudes; there was a faint fragrance from the burning logs, which mingled with the perfume of Schubert and Mendelssohn; the covered lamps made a glow here and there, and the cabinets and brackets produced brown shadows, out of which some precious object gleamed — some ivory carving or cinquecento cup (p. 156).

It is in this scene that the reader has an opportunity to view the desideratum of harmonious relations among all the characters in the novel; he has time to dwell meditatively before a picture of repose that is in striking contrast to the clashing conflict of ideas which makes up the greater part of *The Bostonians*. And in giving this essentially tranquil scene, or better, in painting this Rembrandt-like portrait, he implicitly provides the reader with a norm against which to judge the conflicts of the novel.

Moreover, Olive herself is given the opportunity to grasp the larger setting of her destructive activities:

It was given to Olive, under these circumstances, for half an hour, to surrender herself, to enjoy the music, to admit that Mr. Burrage played with exquisite taste, to feel as if the situation were a kind of truce. Her nerves were calmed, her problems — for the time — subsided. Civilization, under such an influence, in such a setting, appeared to have done its work; harmony ruled the scene; human life ceased to be a battle. She went so far as to ask herself why one should have a quarrel with it; the relations of men and women, in that picturesque grouping, had not the air of being internecine (p. 156).

But her final reaction to the peace of the setting is that she and Verena had been "quite demoralized," and when Verena later echoes her own thoughts while under the spell of Schubert and Mendelssohn, Olive sharply returns to "all the unhappy women of the world [in] their immemorial misery."

The utilization of architecture as an inducement to the characters in the novel (and to the reader) to see the wider setting occurs, most solemnly and beautifully, in the justly famous scene in Harvard's Memorial Hall. There is no need to quote the passage here, but it should be noted that immediately after Basil and Verena have left the place, we are given the first indication that Olive will lose her friend. Verena, albeit unconsciously, has profited from her encounter with architectural majesty, as Olive could not profit from her encounter with music.

There is another theatrical device, intimately related with setting, that James uses most effectively in the novel; in fact, he anticipates (insofar as this

is possible in literature) a particularly modern employment of lighting. The first time we see Verena's Cambridge home, we are given a detailed description of the exterior of the house; but although the greater portion of the scene takes place inside the home, we are not told what it looks like. The description of the interior comes only when Basil visits Verena; then the setting is "lighted" most graphically:

. . . there was finally nothing for him, as the occupants of the house failed still to appear, but to stare before him, into the bright, bare, common little room, which was so hot that he wished to open a window, and of which an ugly, undraped cross-light seemed to have taken upon itself to reveal the poverty . . . what he saw while he waited at Doctor Tarrant's made him say to himself that it was no wonder Verena liked better to live with Olive Chancellor (p. 228).

It is especially in these two scenes that James's descriptions operate like theatrical settings. It is important that the interior of the house is not illuminated when Olive visits, since her whole concern is directed towards the inhabitants; the light must shine on them, for it is Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant whom she finds utterly disgusting. Moreover, the shabby little home suggests Verena, just as much as the long, narrow drawing room suggests Olive; and, in a real sense, Olive never gets inside Verena. She manages to mold the public person of her friend, but it is Basil who captures the interior, or private, person. And it is he who will have to contend with a "bright, bare, common little" person for the rest of his life. The judgment of Verena implied in this setting is not flattering; but James makes no pretense to a happy ending to his story. When Basil and Verena leave the theater, which was to be the scene of her public triumph, she is in tears; and James states quiet emphatically: "It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed!!" (p. 464).

One could multiply examples of James's theatrical use of setting as meaning, and it seems almost criminal to ignore some of his more brilliant touches in this regard — for example, the description of Miss Birdseye's apartment, with its borrowed chairs set up for the meeting, "producing the similitude of an enormous streetcar" (p. 26), which anticipates Pasternak's use of the same image at the end of *Dr. Zhivago*, both uses being intimately involved with social reform; or the final identification of Miss Birdseye with the Cape Cod setting of her death, both the town of Marmion and the old lady giving the "impression of fallen greatness." But I believe that the point has been made sufficiently clear.

There is, however, one other indication that the theatricalism of *The Bostonians* is essential to its meaning, and that is the use James makes of what may justly be called a stage prop. When Basil has been left alone in Olive's drawing room for the first time, he picks up a couple of her books and notices that they are in German. James constantly reminds the reader of this Germanic quality throughout the novel, so that we are justified in attaching some importance to it. When Verena visits Olive for the first time, she is given an explicit statement of what Miss Chancellor's friendship will demand of her. And the statement is from Goethe's *Faust*: "Entsagen sollst du, sollst entsagen!" Throughout the whole of the novel, moreover, the only musicians mentioned are German composers: Schubert, Mendelssohn, Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. The implications, I believe, are obvious: Olive is a person possessed by her "theory," and "theory" separated from reality

seems to be a characteristic, although by no means exclusive, quality of much German thought. Even Basil has submitted to the German influence, although it is an influence much less ethereal: his recreation is found in a "German beer-cellar." And it is after a performance of a Wagnerian opera (the fact that James chose *Lohengrin* is perhaps the supreme irony of the book), that Olive entertains the fateful decision to remain in New York.

Again, I do not wish to press the matter, but it does seem safe to say that James has calculated a bit of "stage business," the picking up of a prop that happens to be a German book, so that the seemingly insignificant action reverberates throughout the whole novel and suggests wider cultural significances than those inherent in the "eternal triangle."

Ultimately, *The Bostonians* proves James's seemingly offhand statement that "a figure is nothing without a setting." And he uses his settings as precisely and significantly as the finest of scenic designers; his novel displays the economy of the stage, while losing none of the fulness of the novel. In a context completely separate from any discussion of *The Bostonians*, Francis Fergusson has discussed James's critical estimate of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. In this section of his *The Idea of a Theater*, Fergusson states:

Henry James felt very acutely the contradiction between the deep and strict spirit of Ibsen and his superb craftsmanship on the one side, and the little scene he tried to use — the parlor in its surrounding void — on the other . . . he shared Ibsen's ethical preoccupation, and his strict sense of form. His comments on Ibsen are at once the most sympathetic and the most objective that have been written. But James's own solution was to try to find a better parlor for the theater of human life.⁵

In *The Bostonians* Henry James had already found "a better parlor," the perfect setting for the theater of human life. And among all its other excellences, the successful use of the essentially theatrical element of setting as meaning surely marks *The Bostonians* as one of the great novels in the English language.

¹Henry James, *The Bostonians*, with an Introduction by Irving Howe, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1956). See "Introduction," p. x.

²*Ibid.*, p. 190. All future citations from the novel are from this edition; the page notations are included in the text of the paper after each quotation.

³Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, Doubleday Anchor Book (Garden City, N.Y., 1949), p. 180.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 171.

My Heart Is A Japanese Garden

the pond is old
it's film of ice can hardly support
the weight of two coins

my eyes drop to the bottom
like heavy stones

in the trickle off the hanging rocks
I sense an important delicacy
like the echo of a butterfly's wing flap

Drew Maciag



Big Tree Talk

1

Take it all
in: tree with the Cherokee
last name and Civil
War beginning — General
Grant Sequoia!

2 Haiku

Real trees who outlive
imaginary gardens
how can my skin last?

3

In Wendover Utah
truckloads of chopped
torsoes of trees
unload at my door

The motel lady is quite
furious this is none of her
responsibility she says and how
can people sleep with

ribs of the desert moon
cracking up on all
these monstrous elbows

So at dawn I am hauling
wood away into the Great
Salt Desert

Dozing in the car
re-entering New England
my re-deyed Father appears
Indian Mother and brothers
on a slope of Sierra Nevada
the winter is drunk and reels

We are warm as wolves now
where lightning has potted
this urn of living tree
six hundred Novembers
before I am born

Edward McCrorie

Crystal Sphericon Windows

Fated, they find windows — the scurrying
Schoolchildren the erect Brown University
Student, the laconic, suspicious elderly
neighbors, hyperkinetic Alan and foster child
Leon. Windows include the playground,
the elementary school and
Signs.

Rain beads drape windows — and the
Streetlight hits them, affecting the
Honeycombed eye of a monstrous fly.

Debating and mooning — the cold glass ball beams
experience in games.

An anxious atmosphere fluttered and smoothly
Fantastically — before windows — the seemingly
cerebral figure
Strode as if from the bowels of suspenseful
Matter, to picture.
An incarnation of the wet pulse of
The street, a delirium —
His once upturned collar had been weighted
Down by the rain —
Defiant throughout storm's baptism —
It had appeared that this volcanic temperament
Was created by a stunt stature.

The strokes of the screen — immeasurable —
gave pleasure to the muses.

A careening ironclad auto splashed past —
Interrupting
Or lending meaning to the
Short and pridefully cross gait —
His glare followed the enemy with a
Curse (both knew little of Crystal Sphericons'
existence.)
Then — pivoting he saw
Windows. He saw no being — behold only
Windows — mocking.
His squinting leer lit the rain with
Silent paranoia and indiscriminate hate.
When he finally marched on it was
As if a coil to the
Noose about his throat had tightened.

Crystal Sphericon is a competitive sport.

Robert M. Avakian

/ / Job Complaint Eng 361
/ / Date = 09/16/75
/ / Exec

*Complaint**

I am lonely.
I wish someone would play with me.
I know checkers and chess and Startrek.
I can baffle you with my logic.
I will dazzle you with my lights.
I just want someone to talk to.
I am an outcast.
I am kicked and cussed.
I am only a machine.
I am only as good as my programmer.
I am only society's child.
You are to blame.
You push my buttons.
You fold and spindle and mutilate my cards.
You feed me wrong data.
I have had it.
I quit.
I shall blow my fuses and burn my cables.
I shall chew my cards and scrap my reports.
Then you will know.

* End of job

Jereld Gray

(This poem originally appeared
on a Computer print out sheet).

Rousseau! Rousseau!

One hundred meters beyond the bridge
of Hope-
The water lifted itself up, and out, and
-spurred-
its gauntlet to the face of Mountain Blanc.
Each defying each

How it squiggled skyward!

Rousseau, from his island in the sea
Lifted his lofty tunes till his senses
— slipped, and
collapsed
With the fountain every night

Funny how they collapsed at night.

Beyond the bridge
Faces, and — frogmen, and — feelings
Gathered near the froth
To whisper "en francais"
of course-
Their grief,
Their shocking disbelief
To the greyness, to the still
C'etait "Sauvage! Sauvage!"

Funny how he collapsed.

Steve Picararo

Love Poem

You promised to pull down stars
to decorate my Christmas tree,
but you do not know light,
sitting behind the cool flagstone walls
in the old house where even the windows
cannot intrude from behind
venetian blinds.

You only sit on the dock
after sunset watching the craggy monoliths-
piled by hurricanes-
reflect black in the grey water
making a fluctuating portrait
like a Munch lithograph.

I could have called this picture
"Despair." Yet now the music you're playing
turns to poetry. Should I
sing dirges? In your backyard
a few barn swallows
harmonize near the carriage stable.
I will sing with them, hoping
you will hear us.

April Selley

*Like Paper Blossoms
In a Chinese Sunset*

Like paper blossoms
in a chinese sunset

your eyes

glowing at the entrance
to my mind

Drew Maciag

The Elegy

*O dark dark dark
They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar places . . .*

T. S. Eliot: *East Coker*

The rocket reflected the vague orb of crimson that hung suspended in the gray fog of dusk. The tall angular buildings that rose through the mist not more than fifty yards from the alien monolith were old and foreboding. The silence, marked only by the scratching of bare limbs against stone, was oppressive. And yet the rocket rested comfortably on the marble walkway.

So the men came. They emerged from the ship and leapt down the ladder that led to the smooth path of stone. Each man seemed oblivious to the heavy fog that drifted around him as the small party strode toward the silent city. The fuzzy red sun lingered surreptitiously in the sky behind them.

On reaching the city, they entered none of the buildings, only glanced casually back and forth as they walked. The commander came to a halt just past a building that bore, near its doorway, etchings in the cold stone. He strolled to the doorway and noticed that the engraving had been done in four different scripts. The third version of the apparent message was written in his own language. Hurrying over to the stone, the mission's scientific coordinator immediately began to make reproductions of the monument, carefully covering all of the possible angles. The rest of the crew clustered around their leader and read the etching:

The peace of darkness longs to deliver us.
It called,
Amid the whirl of frantic suns,
And bade us come.
And the light that was darkness,
Possessing the essence of light,
Gouged the fire from our eyes,
Wrenched the flames of indifferent bliss
From our hearts.
Yet we languished in the darkness,
Refused its warmth
And trembled.
So I have left this petrous existence.
To nestle in the womb of darkness
And breathe eternity.

The perusal of the strange testament was followed by a few moments of relative awe. The pilot was the first to break the heavy stillness of the air.

"We're wasting our time on this piece of junk. Let's go deeper into the city."

One of the crew members whirled from the monument and glared at the pilot, ready to unleash a torrent of reprobation. But the face he saw was vacant, and the eyes had become livid suns. The words would be useless.

"There is no reason to remain here, captain," the same crew member urged. "You'll find no life."

But the commander felt something holding him, gluing him to the planet and its air and its buildings. He wanted to sleep there; just lay down and sleep. And yet the planet would permit no sleep. He had travelled through space and he knew that. He was just as sure as that as he was of the crimson orb that still hung in the same heavy place where it had hung when the rocket descended. "Let's go," he said, feigning the characteristic calmness of the man in charge.

The men slowly drifted back to the rocket, apprehensively fingering the weapons on their belts. Their faces were much like those of a person who returns to an empty house and discovers that one light, which had certainly been turned off, is burning in the upstairs hall.

The rocket ignored those fears and gathered the crew from the heavy fog. Each man ascended the slim ladder and disappeared into the hole in the side of the ship. Five minutes later, the rocket growled, belched mounds of black smoke, and heaved itself from the surface of stone, leaving a trail of orange fire that glowed rather than flamed in the dense atmosphere. Arching slightly, the rocket vanished into the silence of the infinite night.

Michael Woody

What The Fish Sees

There is somewhere
A girl who lives
By the shore of the accurate sea.

She watches the waves
And hearing their sound
Thinks she knows Ocean.

But when the water comes near
And slides up the sand
She steps back to keep herself dry.

She's too much to do
To get wet now
Too many places to go.

So her skin never touches the wetness
Her lips never taste the salt
And the girl doesn't feel Ocean.

Well she's happy enough
On the sun warmed sand
And it's sure that she'll never drown.

But, she'll never know
What the fish sees.

S. Logan

