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# The Smell of Oil

Sharon Sperry

A SMALL gray car pulled to the curb along a narrow street in the slum area of the north section of town. Frank, the social worker, a narrow man in a green sweater, got out and stood momentarily studying the brown shack in front of him. He took a breath and sucked in the peculiar air that reeked of oil and coal dust. It was disgusting air that scratched his throat. Almost as if he had gulped muddy water, he pushed it out, and wondered why after a career of contact with this air he never learned to breathe it easily.

While he stood thinking, the girl who had come along slipped up beside him. Carol was a small girl with a head full of bobbed curls and wide eyes that gazed at the scraggly lawn before them. She had approached him at the lunch counter at school. A paper for sociology, she had explained. Would he take her to a typical family? Typical, he had snorted. Typical was a middle class word where families were moderate in all their pleasures and failures. Nothing was at all typical of poverty. There was no typical way to go about being wretched. He had consented reluctantly. She was clean, almost too clean and proper, and he wasn't able to guess, looking at those wide eyes, how she would react to the Harrisons.

He had briefed her as they drove across the city. Four people lived in one room and shared a bathroom with the family next door. There was no man in the family, only one young boy under ten. Grandma Harrison lived with her daughter, Greta, whose husband had disintegrated from alcohol five years earlier. He had left her childless. Now she had two children, one of them a baby girl. Carol had lifted her eyebrows at that.

He tried to guess again, watching her absorb the shack whether that tiny lift of the eyebrows was his signal to turn the car around and take her back to school.

The shack door opened and Grandma Harrison's blubber arm waved them both into the room where everyone sat around a long table. Greta had the baby against her stomach which was still swollen. Carol asked if she could hold it and Frank watched Greta plop it unconcerned into her lap.

The boy, Bobby, had a cold and hacked a cough that sounded to Frank like something more serious. He made a mental note to get the boy to the clinic on the weekend. Greta had stuffed his ears with cotton. To keep them from dripping, she explained.

"Did ya see the flowers when ya come in?" she asked, leaning across her lap.

Frank shook his head and she burst into laughter.

"From the man that gave me that one," she pointed to the baby in Carol's arms. "Kin ya imagine? He sent me roses with a stork on a stem. Some joke, huh? Roses fer me. Jest on accounta the kid."

"Who was the man?" Carol asked.

"Is, ya mean, honey. He is my man. He's married to the woman two blocks down who runs the beauty shop. Gets pretty good business, I hear. Can't keep track of him, though, so I do it."

She hooted and wiped a tear across her cheek. Frank noticed that Bobby had crept to Carol's elbow and while Greta chuckled, he had reached over and kissed the baby on the mouth. Carol's face twitched and she darted a glance at Frank. He frowned slightly. Bobby kissed the baby once more. Greta saw it and slammed the table with her hand.

"Git outa there. Ya wanna give her a cold, too?"

Greta turned back to Frank, but Frank was watching Bobby who still stood gazing raptly at the baby. He rocked slowly to the balls of his feet and leaning gracefully across Carol's arm, he dropped his head slowly until his lips just touched the baby's cheek. Then, as carefully as before he rocked back. In the silence which surrounded the motion Frank could hear no crying from the streets nor the tin rattle of cans on the pavement. The rats within the walls had ceased their squealing and all the block was still as Bobby kissed the baby.

"Goddamit!" Greta screamed. "Can't ya hear? Git outa there!"

Frank sighed as the little boy scampered into a corner of the room, and catching Carol's eye he saw a lonely tear rolling down her face.

"Well, Greta," he said as he stood. "Thanks for letting us see the baby. I'm coming by this weekend to take the boy to the doctor, and I'll see you then."

The air was cold and dark. Frank stared at the row of shacks which stretched along the street, and endless line of broken buildings, all exactly alike in the night. He knew the tiny differences to be seen in the day: a broken fence beside a dirt walk, a potted plant which hung brown leaves across a porch, a three-corner tear in a screen door, a frame chair rocked back against a wall. At night the forms of difference melted into shadows, and the smell, the ever-present odor, was their common feature. Frank sighed again and climbed into the car. Carol was already in, sitting on the front seat with her knees held rigidly together. He turned the key and started the heater.

"Wasn't it tender?" she asked.

"What?"

"The way he kissed the baby."

"Probably get pneumonia next week."

She looked at him and the dashboard lights glowed in her eyes.

"What a cynical attitude."

"It's natural."

"You're just hardened, that's all. You've lost all sight of the beauty that exists even in this place."

"It's not beautiful that that baby has a slim chance of growing straight and clean—that she's damned before she begins—that all the help I'll give her is to offer medicine and food and clothes—that ten

years from now she'll start the crooked race that leads at last to more bastards."

"And didn't you notice Bobby's eyes?"

"What about them?"

"They were beautiful. Round and full of love, so very deep and warm."

"It's all he has."

"What?"

"When your body is riddled with starvation and cold and your mind never opens on the light of day, the eyes are all that's left. He can't hear anything more than the beer bottles in the trash or the squalling from the next room or the talk of his mother, and he doesn't care to talk himself because all he could say is useless. Then all that's left is to look, and once in awhile, when the clouds of oil lift in the early morning, he catches sight of the downtown buildings, the sand-blasted stone. Oh, that probably sounds cold to you. Dreaming about stone buildings, because you know they're just offices, but he doesn't. He used to ask me who lived in them. I suppose he thought they were huge castles, or something. But he'll grow up and learn that they're just offices, that some of them are police courts. He'll probably get to know them pretty well. He'll lose those big eyes, and he'll take to the bottle, a sort of suicide, I guess you'd say."

He had put a special stress in his voice and she turned her head away. He shrugged and pulled into the street to begin the drive back.

"Then why, if you feel that way, do you do this?"

"It's a job."

"That's not an answer."

"Listen. There are several things you'd better learn before you start this sort of life. First, you don't get teary eyed everytime one bastard kisses another bastard. If you do you'll go to pieces. You feel, yeah, but only within the limits of your own mental health."

Rain had begun to fall and he switched on the windshield wipers. They flapped across the window and spread the beads to fine streaks that rippled his view of the street.

"Then, I won't go into it," she announced flatly. "I can't stop feeling."

"Then don't come back again. Don't visit. Don't get close to anyone there."

She looked curiously at him and frowned slightly.

"And why do you say that?"

"Because it happens that some people get too close, get so close they can't get away," he paused. "Oh, it's just good advice. Take it."

He stopped the car in front of the castle like structure that was the dormitory and smiled.

"I'll see you."

"Yes, do. Look me up if you're in the cafeteria when I'm there. Thanks for the ride."

He waved goodbye to her, and started to pull from the curb when a numbing thought passed his mind. In the apartment building, an empty room awaited him. In his closet the clothes he owned smelled of oil. He looked back at the walk. She was inside the door, safe from the rain, shaking out her scarf. Watching her, he suddenly wanted to go home and shake out his clothes, to get rid of the stench of oil.

### UNDER THE LIME TREES

Blue unicorns bathing in the moonlight. . . .

And a wreath around the moon. . . .

I, in my time have ridden the unicorn

And revelled in the glory of my loin.

My flesh burns and I am without myself ;

Yet I am called to reason by the sweeping

Ivory curve of a gentle throat descending unto a trembling breast.

Come to me my love, and cool my brow with your caresses.

Come to me my love and I will plait your hair,

And we shall be as children in our love.

Innocence unto innocence cleaves purity ;

And we shall walk hand in hand under the lime trees.

CHRISTOPHER A. THOMAS



# Theatre of the Absurd

Christopher A. Thomas

## I. DEFINITIONS

AT LEAST two definitions must be given when one speaks of "Theatre of the Absurd," one pertaining to its nature, the other to what the movement is trying to accomplish.

Contemporary authors such as Beckett, Ionesco, Albee, and Pinter have attempted to make a break with "contrived-realism" and free their work from the bonds of rigid construction. Their plays seem to exist in an abstract void in which plot or dramatic story-telling is almost non-existent. Characterization is conceived in terms of human symbols, rather than human beings with a past and future. They seem human enough in the situation presented, but one is not aware of their existence outside of the given situation. Language is often nonsensical or even inconsequential to the play. Attempts are made at a powerful sub-conscious communication with the audience in which ideas or situations are vaguely familiar but not completely understood. Consequently the action is often incomplete and spasmodic. In short, the playwrights of this movement are attempting, through vaguely recognizable characters and ideas, to reveal truths below the surface of the common reality of what is happening on the stage.

It must be realized that "Theatre of the Absurd" is an outgrowth of the surrealist movement in all art forms. André Breton in his first *Manifesto on Surrealism* gives a definition which applies to "Theatre of the Absurd" as well as it does to Surrealism in general. Breton wrote: "Surrealism is a pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought and thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations. Surrealism rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected hitherto; in the omnipotence of the dream, and the disinterested play of thought." Surrealism then, is primarily a poetic movement dealing in the extension of accepted forms and concepts.

## II. HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

The surrealist on the theatre is not new as it would seem. Some of the men who are considered to be leaders of the current movement were writing in the early 1920's. Notable among them are Jean Cocteau and Luigi Pirandello. The influence of these playwrights extended into some of their realistic contemporaries, e.g., Eugene O'Neil in *The Great God Brown*, and Sean O'Casey in his fanciful

*Cock-A-Doodle-Andy*. However, one must go back even further to find the beginnings of symbolism's being more important than plot or the use of purely human symbols for characters. The first important use of such methods was in the 1890's by Maurice Maeterlinck in his play *The Bluebird*. Here the playwright's intent was to attenuate character for the sake of poetic suggestion or abstraction. Later August Strindberg developed the concept in more detail in such works as *The Dream Play*, *The Ghost Sonata*, and *Storm Weather*.

The causes for this style seem to arise out of upheaval, whether it is personal as with Strindberg or general as with the writers immediately following both world wars. In times of peace and prosperity unthreatened by external conflict, dramatic form leans toward realism and the depiction of actual life situations. Even as far back as the time of Shakespeare there was an insurgence of non-realistic, heavily contrived tragi-comedies which was paralleled with political and economic instability.

Interest in the newly created Surrealism declined in the late thirties when a possible threat of war was becoming apparent. But again following the war this "avante-garde" movement gained new impetus with such groups as alienation writers of Germany and central Europe and the Angry Young Men in England.

### III. SPECIFIC PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

As with every movement there is a great deal of flux in the personal interpretation of the tenets of the movement by each individual artist. So it is with the various playwrights who are classed under Surrealists or "Theatre of the Absurd." In their work they actually range from Expressionism, through Existentialism, to extreme Surrealism. Following are notes on these individual playwrights and their work:

Eugene O'Neil, "We (the theatre) need some sort of supernaturalism to take the place of old naturalism, . . . (routine realism) is a banality of surfaces." To break away from realism he used masks for split personalities in *The Great God Brown*, and the Elizabethan "aside" in *Strange Interlude* for psychological revelation and ironic effect.

Luigi Pirandello states, "Art frees things and human beings and their action from these meaningless contingencies . . . it abstracts character . . . less *real* but more *true* than life." And again, "People must think what they *feel*."

Jean Cocteau has written, "The poet must bring objects and feelings from behind their veils and mists."

Sean O'Casey wrote in the preface to *Cock-A-Doodle-Andy* in 1958 that "naturalism or even realism, isn't enough." His attempt was to capture for the stage "a dance, a laugh, a song."

Tennessee Williams in explaining *Cameo Real* calls for "freedom and mobility of form" along with symbolist imagery.

Eugene Ionesco insists, "Contemporary theatre has been spoiled by the literati. It has become a kind of second-rate literature. It should not be literature but what cannot be expressed by any other means." He attempted an *anti-play*—non-characters employing non-speech. An example of this would be the Orator in *The Chairs*.

Samuel Beckett writes in a style in which often nothing happens—and it is this *nothing* that matters. This is similar to Chekhov who lets the world of the characters completely reverse itself without the characters attempting to stop it. Most of Beckett's plays contain four characteristic features: intense bitterness, a sense of entrapment, a contempt for the present conditions, and a completely fatalistic attitude toward eventual destruction. This latter is accompanied by an elegiac mood of complete submittance. As to the often confusing patterns and symbols which he uses Beckett wrote, "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them."

Finally Bertolt Brecht who has had a great influence on the avante-garde playwrights through his "Epic style" of theatre advocated "alienating" devices and disjunctive form in order to make his audience think clearly about social and moral problems rather than feel fuzzily and lose itself in empathetic situations.

Other playwrights such as Osborne, Delany, and Albee border on the realistic, throwing in such vulgarisms and symbols as necessary to enforce their point. Anouilh and Giraudoux are fundamentally romanticists, Anouilh more so than Giraudoux. In general they deal with realistic or fantasy situations and comic plots. Each of these playwrights is attempting to achieve a sharper, clearer concept of the condition of man in his environment; although the means differ greatly, the end product—to stir up an awareness of the present state of our society—is the same.

#### IV. SUMMATION AND PERSONAL COMMENTS

For all the good "Theatre of the Absurd" may do in provoking philosophical thought on the fate of the human race, it does have one bad defect: the *dissolution of character*. It is not the obscenity or morbidity, or undue fascination with death and decay that will undermine our drama—these are concomitant characteristics—rather the disappearance of man himself constitutes the decadence in the theatre. This surrealist depersonalization is the gravest threat to our theatre since it began.

Often too, the playwright in his desire to point up all the world's evil crowds any meaning at all out of the play. He is often ambiguous in establishing a central theme, and over indulgent in his selection of symbols. Many playwrights who fall into these limits point to a quote by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who said, "Poetry gives more pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood." Although this may be true to some extent, it was T. S. Eliot who commented,

"The suggestiveness of true poetry . . . is the aura round a bright clear centre. You cannot have the aura alone."

Each age searches for truth in its own way; however, our age must be careful that in its attempt to strip man naked of the filth and corruption which surrounds him, it does not at the same time destroy all the good in man—leaving nothing but an empty void as the end result.

## The Suburbanites

Russ Durbin

IT WAS colder inside the car than outside when Jim slid out. He made no attempt to kiss her. "See you tonight," he said, and walked toward the train. Janet scooted over behind the wheel and backed the station wagon viciously out of the parking space, her mind still busy with the events of the previous evening.

It had all started when Mrs. Applegate phoned to say she didn't feel well and wouldn't be in that afternoon. That meant Janet had to do the marketing, the cleaning and the cooking alone—and with the Blakes and the Carsons coming to dinner. She'd have to cancel a three o'clock appointment at the beauty shop which she'd really needed; then the butcher had been late in sending the roast. She had dropped everything to rush to the five-fifty-seven for Jim, and he hadn't been on it. Back at the house, she managed to get everything under control, but her guests arrived before she got the curlers out of her hair. Trixie Blake just smiled and said, "Janet, how cute! Just like a girl space cadet." She had never been very fond of Trixie anyway.

When the Carsons arrived, they had a stranger with them named Marian Todd, an old friend of Janie's who had dropped by late in the afternoon. Janie said, "I called about six but you weren't in, Janet, but I knew you wouldn't mind." She laughed, "Marian eats hardly anything at all."

Janet looked at the girl and thought: Just men. Marian was a sultry brunette with languorous eyes, a gorgeous figure and a full mouth. She wore a dress that was beautifully cut an inch too low. "I hope you're not too angry," she said in her best Julie London voice. Then she sank into a deep chair and crossed long, lovely legs. Jack Blake's eyes bulged.

It was almost eight, and the roast was drying, by the time Jim arrived. She could tell by the subdued astonishment in his eyes that he had completely forgotten about the Carsons and the Blakes. He explained that he had been delayed at the office, but Janet detected the Martinis on his breath when she kissed him. He'd certainly been in a great hurry to get home.

It turned out to be one of those nights. Halfway through dinner the lights had gone out, and it had taken Jim, never one of the world's great mechanics, half an hour in the cellar to replace a faulty fuse. And when she had tried to help him, he snapped, "What the hell do you think I am, a magician?"

Of course, there hadn't been a candle in the house. And dinner had been ruined.

Marian Todd, it was soon evident, approved highly of Jim. Her eyes left him only occasionally, and she laughed throatily at every limp witticism he uttered. Janet could understand it since Blake was a bore and Carson was a bit pear-shaped. And Jim, damn him, still looked like the halfback and college class president he had once been.

There were drinks after dinner, of course, and Trixie had found the stack of new records for the stereo. Politely enough Jim asked Marian to dance, and after thirty seconds Janet bitterly admitted they were something to watch, all right.

Jim returned to her, a silly fixed smile on his face. She surrendered because she knew he wasn't the world's best dancer.

"Tired?" Jim asked her.

"Of quite a few things," Janet replied.

\* \* \*

When the evening finally ended, it developed the Blakes had to pick up their children over in Weston Village and were unable to take the Carsons, and Marian Todd, home when their car developed engine trouble. Jim volunteered to drive the Carsons, and Marian Todd, home. Marian, it turned out, lived three miles the other side of the Carsons in Boonville. They all left in high spirits while Janet attacked the mountainous stacks of dishes.

Jim finally got home an hour and a half after Janet had calculated he should have. There was a smear of lipstick on the side of his mouth. Janet was sitting up in bed, a book on her lap. "Well, have a pleasant trip?"

"Wonderful," he said, putting clothes in his closet.

"What is Marian's place like?" she asked in a tight little voice.

"Huh?" he said, turning to her. The lipstick was like a neon light. "I don't know. I just dropped her off in front of her house."

"You're getting a little old for that, aren't you? I mean, parking in front of a girl's house? Look at your face."

He glanced in the mirror, wiped away the stain with a tissue, and said, "Janie Carson was acting silly. She insisted on paying me with a kiss for the taxi ride."

"And Miss Todd's ride was quite a bit longer, so the fare, I imagine—"

"Look, Miss Suspicion of the Year," Jim said. "I took them all home and had a flat on the way back from Boonville. The lousy jack broke, and I had to walk a mile to Moran's and have them come back with me to change the tire. Let's not make one of your silly productions of this."

"Jim Johnston, if you think for one minute I believe—"

"Look, stupid. You going to keep this up forever? I've had a rugged day, and I'm sure not going to listen to you yackety-yack for the rest of the night. You want to talk, you talk to yourself." And he picked up a blanket and went into the living room.

Oh, it had been a wonderful evening, all right. She whipped the car into the driveway and was delighted at the sound of the bumper ripping the side of the garage door.

\* \* \*

On the train, Jim tried to read the morning paper, but all he saw were the events of the preceding evening. What the hell had happened, anyway?

It started in the afternoon, when old Wilson had called him into the office about the Bodacker account. Jim had worked hard on that one, and it had seemed to him that this was a particularly good advertising layout. But not to the Bodackers. They needed a new one right away. He made the change, working furiously, and was surprised to find that he had missed his usual train. He called Janet, but there was no answer. Probably she had already left to meet his train. He ran to the station, just in time to miss the six-thirty-four. Oh, boy! He walked into the station bar with bitterness in his heart. Sometimes things just piled up.

Two Martinis made him feel a little better, and he got on the seven-o-five train in a calmer mood, basking in the pleasant thought of how nice it would be to spend a quiet evening alone with Janet. She'd understand about missing the train. Besides, there was a good ballgame on television.

It stunned him a little when he opened the door and found the Carsons and the Blakes and that raven-haired man-eater there. He had completely forgotten that Janet had told him they were coming.

He had tried to be supergracious to everyone, trying to make up to Janet for his lateness. He'd even been nice to that phony *femme fatale* the Carsons had dragged along.

Certainly, it hadn't been his fault the light had gone out, but he'd been ashamed that he'd forgotten once again just where the fuse box was hidden in the cellar. Janet hadn't been much help either. She just bawled him out. Fortunately, he'd kept his temper in check, soothing her with, "Don't worry, darling. I'll have everything ship-shape in a moment."

When Trixie had started the record player, that had been the crusher. He was dead on his feet after a brutal day, and all he wanted to do was talk to Janet and tell her about the foul-up at the office. But no, that would never do. He had to dance with what's-her-name. Of course, she was a good dancer, but— He had noticed Janet blinking her eyes, and he asked her solicitously, "Tired, baby?" She gave him some short, enigmatic reply that he was too tired to attempt to figure out. And then, on top of everything else, Carsons' car broke down and he had to take them home. Janie Carson had

had one too many, that was for sure, and he was unable to defend himself from her slobbery smacker when she got out. On the contrary, Miss What's-Her-Name hadn't had enough to drink. She had invited him in, but he'd excused himself because of the hour. Then the flat tire. Oh, boy!

Janet had certainly been in a fine mood when he got home, all those biting comments of hers that were anything but subtle. Janet had dramatically pointed at the lipstick, and shouted, "Look at the lipstick on your ugly face! Where have you been for the last four hours, you wolf!"

Jim knew he had carefully explained about the kiss and the flat tire, but Janet hadn't listened. Instead, she screamed, "That's a lie, Jim! You were with that Todd woman in her apartment, drinking and drinking and—"

"Darling," he'd begun. "you know you're being a bit silly. I'd like to apologize for being late this evening, hon. It was one of those things that couldn't be helped. I—"

"You're a lout!" Janet had screamed. "A rake and a liar."

He had held up his hand placatingly and smiled, he remembered. "Darling, the neighbors."

Her voice had been shrill. "Jim Johnston, you beast, I'm going to Reno in the morning. I'm going to call Mother and—"

He had known then that there was no understanding between them. He remembered he had said, "Darling, you're upset. I'm sure you've had a hard day, and I know it was mainly my fault. Now, go to sleep, and I'll use the sofa so I won't disturb you."

And he had taken a blanket and gone to sleep on that damned sofa.

Jim shrugged and opened the paper again. Maybe she'd feel better today. Maybe some flowers—

\* \* \*

He got off the five-fifty-seven feeling fine. The car was in the customary place and Janet was in it. He opened the door and slid in. "Hi, baby."

He hesitated, wondering whether or not he should take a chance and kiss her. The result was amazing. Her arms went around his neck, and she murmured, "Jim! I'm so glad to see you! Have a good day?"

He took a deep breath, then grinned. "I wanted to tell you last night. I was late because I had to make a big change in the Bodacker account layout. Old Wilson called me in today and harumphed for a while before telling me there'd be a five-hundred-dollar-bonus in my next check. Nice?"

He was quite sure she hadn't heard him. "Yes, that's nice," she said in a dreamy voice. He looked at her. "Jim, the flowers. It was sweet. I never dreamed that you'd remember."

Oh my God, he thought. Remember remember what? He smiled modestly, and said, "Well, I—" letting his voice trail off.

"The anniversary of the day we met! It was at that party of the Powells and—" her voice trailed off too. He began to breathe again.

Her arm was linked with his now. "And I stopped at Moran's for gas today, and he told me all about the trouble you had last night. You poor lamb, why didn't you tell me?"

He knew enough to kill his smile. "About last night, I was tired and grumpy. I'm sorry."

"Jim," Janet said. "Let's forget all about last night."

"That suits me fine." He looked at his image in the rearview mirror and raised his eyebrows. Sometimes, you just didn't know what the hell was going on in a woman's mind.

## THE FINALE

Dying in a grand leap before the pain  
Of falling surged from the earth again,  
The soul rising beyond thighs tight with strain  
And the doll topples. . . .

Worn point shoes lying fallow in a drawer  
Bear rosined witness to once-spotlit wear  
While once pink ribbons whiten year by year,  
Fade as she watches.

He\* too fell, already mad, as his wife  
Pitying from the wings, on his behalf  
Prayed for his death whose dancing was his life  
Before his madness. . . .

Unfeeling, childlike, immortal thighs  
As ivories unguided, flesh could rise  
Thoughtward, without the wounded falcon's cries.  
Such is God's mercy.

Yet her heart, polished as a hussar heel,  
Beats homage to the challenge of a smile  
From her constant companion, to whose will  
She once submitted.

Her eyes dance with young Vienna couples  
And sometime swans on Sunday promenades  
With Chopin and Liszt, music and love's wiles.  
Tempus fugisset.

BILL MCPHERSON

---

\* Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1950), Russian ballet dancer.



## Misquamicut, Rhode Island

Joan O'Sullivan

**S**LAM! THE sound of the screen door calls to you as you walk softly with bare feet across the damp grass to the path leading to the beach. The heat of the day lingers in the sand, although the dark air is now cool and damp. Up, over the dunes and down through the sea grass the path takes you as you inhale the sharp, salty air voraciously; it fills your lungs and soul with a freshness, an aliveness unmatched in worlds of smells. The beach, deserted, stretches in a long, white curve punctuated at each end by the twinkling, kaleidoscopic lights of twin amusement parks miles away. The water is at low tide, and the beach drops then flattens out to a broad plateau of hard sand before it melts to the water line. Behind you sleep a hundred dark cottages, tired and faded from the long, hot, sun-baked day.

You look to the sea—it is complacent now, ruffled only at the fringes where the waves crowd in restlessly, unceasingly, plunging down on the sand then stealthily slipping away with a quiet hiss. Again and again they come, with the same sound, the same sucking and slithering as they slide back into the sea. To the right and to the left you can hear the echo of a thousand other waves, each falling, receding. You move to the water's edge—the sand is cold and wet now; your footprints trail behind you in a series of pushed-up humps. You walk along the sand, feeling the fingertips of the waves sneak up under your feet and then disappear as they slink in and out, in and out. Sometimes a shell, sculptured more skillfully than Michaelangelo's work, is carelessly carried in and forgotten by an unappreciative wave. It settles on the sand, looking luminous and ethereal in the moonlight. You start to pick it up, then decide it belongs there and walk on.

You turn and face the sea once more and discover that the moon has cleared a wide silver path across the waves. The path leads straight to you standing there at the water's edge, and the face of the moon winks and beckons you to come. The waves pull the sand from under your feet, urging you to move, telling you there is something more solid out there; you hesitate, for you are alone in the world and there is no one to advise you—only the winking moon. You remember the shell and turn to confer with it, but discover that it has already gone ahead of you. Then you look to the moon to ask once more before you start, but find a cloud has hidden it away, and your path is gone, and you are standing in the water, and the air has grown chill. You slowly turn and start back across the rumpled sand to your sleeping cottage.

## MEDITATION

All my world is dew . . . so dear, so fresh, so fleeting . . .

In its brief sweet waters

Do I cleanse a darkened soul.

A dewdrop on a swaying grass, that's all. . . . But so exquisite!

I seek in high bare trails,

One sky-reflecting rose.

Just as a leaf looks toward the fall, I live in simple faith . . .

For death is only mist

To veil eternity.

Just as the twisting cherry . . . flowers, fades, and falls . . .

Thus, too, my lovely life must end,

Another bloom must float away.

But I have known the bittersweet of life's three loveliest of things . . .

Of love, of song, of moon-lit night,

And so part silent and content.

And still the winter rain is deepening lichened letters on a grave . . .

A tear and a smile lie behind,

I rise to seek God unencumbered.

BROOKE BOYCE

## Convention

Ellen Sostman

**I**MAGINE, please, the large room with its rows of chairs neatly arranged to face toward a raised platform. The chairs are closely packed with men of all ages, interspersed with women and children. These people are from all stations in life and from all places on earth; in short, they are a heterogeneous group which represents most of the ideas extant in the world. They are facing five machines which stand on the raised platform, computers of coldly analytical and mechanically objective minds. One of the computers is slightly larger than the rest, and one can distinguish the initials N.A.M. on the front, probably standing for the company of which this machine is a representative product. People and machines together make up a forum to promote tolerance. The task of the machines will be simply to review the philosophies expressed by the people. In this way, everyone will have a chance to be heard.

From the mass of people, a small, dark man stands up. There is nothing outstanding about him; he is rather indistinguishable from others. His voice is quiet, his manner humble. "I am a Jew," he says. "Have I the right to speak?" Lights flash as the computers take in his words. The slightly larger one answers by projecting on its large screen, "Speak." The others do likewise. The man describes his beliefs with quiet emotion, but before he resumes his seat he explains that he is not trying to persuade or convert. He just wants to make others understand why he believes as he does. There are angry mutters from the dark-skinned men with the hawk-like features of the desert races. One can hear their curses against the man just finished speaking. They are silenced by the official flashes from the computers. Words are projected on the screen of the larger one and repeated by the others. They proclaim that inasmuch as this man has presented his ideas logically and in an orderly, inoffensive manner, injuring no one and being open-minded toward all, his ideas should be thought over carefully, and bigotry should cease.

The next man to stand is tall and pudgy with a smooth, bland face. He speaks in a powerful voice which fills the hall. "I am a Communist. Have I permission to speak?" The answer comes again on the larger machine; again the others follow suit: "Speak." The man is powerfully persuasive. He proclaims the glories of the proletariat in eloquent tones. His words fill the room with pictures of happy, carefree workers, all doing their part for the state. An invitation to rise and overthrow the capitalists ends his discourse. The room is in an uproar. People are calling the man vile names or praising his wisdom. Some are shouting that he should be thrown out, while others cheer him. All are silenced by the buzz from the computers which transcends the cacophony. Then the answer is presented. "This man has placed his ideas before us in an eloquent

manner. He has facts to back up what he says. Furthermore, he is entitled to his opinion as an individual. You should not be prejudiced toward him."

The next speaker is a young man with an intense, intellectual manner. His voice is sympathetic, but not overly-emotional. "I am a researcher attached to the Unemployment Bureau. It is my job to keep files on the unemployed and to institute re-education programs for those people whose jobs have been absorbed by automation. The greatest part of the unemployed fall into this category. Many of them haven't the education necessary to take advantage of re-education programs. There is nothing, or almost nothing, they can do except live out their lives on Unemployment Compensation and their wives' earnings while this nation slowly turns into an army of automatons. They call this progress, to take bread out of people's mouths. I say do away with machines and give men their jobs back. Get rid of those cold, mechanical bolt buckets and rehumanize this world! Let's not turn into a race of robots. Let's . . ."

The man is interrupted by the ominous flashings of the lights. The largest computer furiously projects obscenities on its screen. It buzzes incoherently, and one can see that all five machines are trembling. Finally, coherent sentences appear on the screen which read, "You have not been given permission to speak! Sit down! People, close your ears to this man. He obviously is simply raving. Nothing he says is logical. He is a dangerous subversive! Don't listen to him." The people fearfully repeat the epithet to one another. One can hear the undercurrent of fear as the voices grow louder and angrier, and the crowd advances on the researcher. In the background is a quiet hum like a hive of secure, contented bees.

## Man Is the Measure

Barbara Newberry

**F**IRST MAN: God is Nothingness.

Second Man: I cannot believe this.

First Man: Do you agree that if a syllogism is valid and the premises are true, then the conclusion must be accepted? If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal?

Second Man: Yes.

First Man: Do you believe that the argument is valid if the conclusion follows the premises by logical necessity?

Second Man: Of course.

First Man: And can not the premises be true by definition, even as man is defined as mortal?

Second Man: Yes, it can be so.

First Man: From whence comes the definition? Is it not based upon the perceptions and judgments of the individual—perceptions and judgments that may or may not coincide with those of others?

Second Man: I believe this to be so.

First Man: If I were to define a certain vase as beautiful and you were to define the same vase as ugly, which of us would be correct?

Second Man: We both would be correct.

First Man: With this common ground, let us explore my aforementioned conclusion. Would you agree that God is Perfection?

Second Man: That is my conception. I define God as that which is perfect.

First Man: And Perfection?

Second Man: I suppose that which is perfect is faultless.

First Man: What constitutes a fault? A crack in the vase? Dishonesty in a man?

Second Man: Those are surely faults.

First Man: What do you perceive which is faultless? Are you yourself faultless? Or anything else that you are capable of perceiving?

Second Man: Naturally, I am not faultless. Every man has faults. All that I perceive has some defect.

First Man: Would you also say that whatever is perfect must not be in disarray?

Second Man: Yes, for disorder is a fault.

First Man: And do you believe that everything which exists or which can be imagined to exist is unique?

Second Man: Such has been my experience.

First Man: With everything unique, all is disordered, for complete symmetry, which I believe to be necessary for order is lacking in uniqueness. Each man is unique; no symmetry is formed with two or several of these unique individuals. Likewise, each part of each man is unique—parts of a whole which are not symmetrical and are thus disordered. This state is chaos. Is it not true?

Second Man: It seems to be true.

First Man: What can be conceived which is not unique? What is not disordered? What is faultless?

Second Man: I do not know.

First Man: In my conception Nothingness is Perfection. Nothingness is not unique. Each bit of nothingness is identical to every bit of nothingness. This state is order. Nothingness is faultless. That which is imperfect: that which is not is perfect. Can you agree?

Second Man: I can.

First Man: If I define God as Perfection and Perfection as Nothingness, then God is Nothingness. Is it not so?

Second Man: If one does not accept the definitions?

First Man: Assuming the definitions were derived with honesty,

then God is still Nothingness.

Second Man: So I thought. If one were to define you as a fool?

First Man: Indeed, I would then be a fool. I am as defined by others.

## Freedom for Jazz

Joseph Hill

**I**N FEBRUARY, 1948 three famous Russian composers—Sergei Prokofieff, Aram Khatchaturian, and Dmitri Shostakovich—found all their compositions condemned by the Soviet government and themselves accused of having “lowered the high public role of music and narrowed its significance, limiting it by the satisfaction of distorted tastes of esthetic individualists.” Prokofieff and his comrades had their works labeled as exhibiting “a passion for muddled neuropathic combinations which transform music into a cacophonous and chaotic heaping of sounds.”

Similar attacks against progressive music took place in this country in 1956. For example in Birmingham, Alabama, several hundred citizens went to a jazz concert given by the late Nat King Cole. During his performance Cole was interrupted by several members of a White Citizens Council who attacked him. A spokesman for this group said jazz in general was an attempt “to mongrelize America. It appeals to the base in man, brings out animalism and vulgarity.” By the end of 1956, many other civic and religious groups insisted that jazz be outlawed in the United States as it was in Russia.

I must disagree with such insular views concerning jazz. I enjoy jazz because it is an original kind of emotional expression, in that it is never wholly sad or wholly happy. I enjoy jazz for its humor. Jazz plays around with notes, rhythms, and dynamics.

I find I have to defend jazz to those who say it is low-class. These people forget that all music has low class origins. Hayden and Mozart minuets are refinements of rustic German dances. Even Tchaikovsky used a simple Russian folk song and dance as the principal thematic element in the final movement of his monumental *Symphony in F Minor*.

In addition, I find I have to defend jazz to those who say it is too loud. They forget that Beethoven Symphonies, Brahms Concertos, or Liszt Tone-Poems are also loud. I believe their false notions stem from the fact that in the early days of jazz musicians had only cheap brass instruments to use and small quarters to perform in. This is not the fault of jazz.

A few days ago when I was in Block's record shop, a sales-clerk was playing a Beatle recording for two teenage girls. As I was walk-

ing around I overheard an elderly woman exclaim her dislike for "jazz." Once again I must defend jazz to those who mistake it for the base music produced in myriad quantities and passed off onto the vulnerable masses of teenagers.

Recently Great Britain, France, Holland, Switzerland, and other countries allied themselves with communist states in order to denounce "dissonant contemporary music and tendencies of extreme subjectivism." I hope this country will never join in such a union. This country must remember the artist under communist styled supervision is not free, since he is denied the irremovable right of being wrong. The need to be "right" is undoubtedly the heaviest burden such an artist can carry since an artist learns as much from his mistakes as he does from his successes. If the United States were to join this union, it would be denying many men one of their basic and most precious rights—the freedom of expression.

## The Return of the Chinaman

Melva Sissom

SITTING in my upstairs study, I watched the darting silhouette of my little Chinese servant as he saddled my guest's horse and helped him mount. His pidgin English carried up to my ears. "Good night, Missy Blake. Careful ridee horsey."

As the horse and rider began to fade from sight and sound, I returned to my desk; and lighting my pipe, I waited for Chang to enter the room. It was ironic, I mused, that around most people Chang had to use pidgin to be understood. It was expected of him, as was the queue he wore.

My thoughts wandered to my two little girls and then to their mother, who had been the strength of my soul. When she died eight years ago, I was left crippled. Had it not been for Chang, who one lucky day came rattling up to my front door in an old peddler's wagon full of pots and pans, I would still be going through the motions of a pretended living; and God only knows what the fate of my daughters would have been. Chang was a remarkable man. Of a first Chinese generation to be born in America, he had attended Stanford University. Believing the life of a servant to be the refuge of a philosopher, as well as a position of power and love, he had, thus far, been content with making my life and my daughters' as comfortable and enriched as possible.

"Missy Stephens, I bling Chinese brandy. Stlong dlink. As a matter of fact, it's brandy with a dose of wormwood in it. Taste it at the back of your tongue," advised Chang as he entered the study.

Lifting the translucent China demitasse to my lips, I tilted my head back. "I see what you mean. That is good."

As I finished the brandy, Chang stood stiffly before me. "All right, Chang, out with it!"

Somewhat taken back by my sudden remark, he began, "Faith-

fully have I served you to the best of my ability for the past six years, and now I . . ."

"When do you want to go?" I asked, interrupting his memorized speech.

Sadly Chang smiled. "Am I so obvious?"

"I heard you rehearse in the kitchen last week."

"I must leave as soon as possible. If I don't, I'm afraid I'll lose my intention."

"But why must you go back to China? You know you will break the girls' hearts and mine. Aren't you happy here?"

"To the American definition of happiness, I must say no. I am called to China just as a salmon is called to his spawning waters. Richard, you weren't born in America, were you?"

"No, I came over from Sweden when I was eighteen."

"Yet today, you have blended in with the surroundings, and no one knows or cares that you are an immigrant. I was born and educated here; yet, I still must speak pidgin and wear a queue because I have never blended into the melting pot. I must go to China to see how I mix there."

Thus ended our conversation for the night.

The next morning during breakfast, I was outraged at the apathetic way my children received Chang's notice of departure.

"Is he?" asked Ruth. "Ellen's having a birthday party tomorrow afternoon. Can we go?"

"Yes, but did you hear what I said?"

"Sure," answered Mary. "You said Chang's leaving us."

"But he's not coming back!"

"Oh?" queried Ruth. "Where is he going?"

"To China."

"Have a nice trip, Chang. Come on, Mary, we're going to be late for school. Bye."

Chuckling, Chang began to clear the breakfast table. "Don't worry about the girls, Richard. Children are remarkably free from the pretensions that mark their elders. I know they'll think of me from time to time, though. Don't forget to buy two birthday gifts. Be sure the girls do their homework. There's a chicken in the ice-box."

"I'll walk to the depot with you, Chang."

"No!" he replied sharply. "No, I don't want that. Good-bye, Mr. Stephens. Good-bye Richard."

As he hurried out the door, I shouted after him, "Be sure to write."

One, then two months went by; next, a whole year passed. I heard nothing from Chang. One evening as I was scraping at the thick black crust that marked the remains of what was supposed to be Mary's birthday cake for the next day, the back door suddenly opened. As I wheeled around, I saw Chang. Taking the pan from me, he put it in the sink and ran cold water over it while I stood



motionlessly. "Let it soak."

"Chang . . . Chang . . . what happened? Is anything wrong? Did you run out of money? Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes, calm down," replied the dignified little Chinaman. Taking two little porcelain cups from the cupboard, he said, "I'll pour us some brandy."

"Well, stop studying your cup, and tell me what has happened," I demanded.

Slowly placing the demitasse on the table, Chang began, "You see, Richard, I set out on my quest to find out where I really belonged. My trip proved successful. I found it, and it's not in China. Would you believe it? I was more foreign there than I am here. They laughed at my accent; they ridiculed my looks; they called me an Occidental."

"Then you are home to stay?"

"Yes," answered Chang. "I have given the matter much thought, and I've decided the key to acceptance of different peoples must be education. If this is true, then someday the power of America's educational system will wipe out those disagreeable elements that mark me and similars an inferior." Saying thus, Chang arose from the table and went over to his sewing box that lay dusty on top of the cupboard. Opening it, he withdrew a pair of scissors, and, with the aid of the reflected lamp light that shone from Richard's shaving mirror, he snipped off his pigtail.

## The Spirit of Religion

Evelyn Jones

**I** WAS ALONE. Gradually I became aware of my surroundings. Grass six inches high tickled the bare portions of my arms and legs. A matted bed of grass lay beneath my body. I breathed deeply. A fresh scent of clover and apple blossoms filled my nostrils and lungs. I was one with God, my Father. I rested my head in the cradle of my arms. I closed my eyes so that I could see. I envisioned a meadow, a brook, a blue sky, a cloud—a single cloud. We waited together.

Perfect health, spirit, and harmony were mine alone. My every need was fulfilled by Him, my God! My Creator! I was at peace. I was not in my body. I was the realization of the divine image of the One Soul, the One Mind, the One Spirit, the One Love, the One Life, the One Truth, the One Principle. I was a church, a temple, a monument of happiness and strength. "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." My life knew nothing of a material birth. I knew nothing of death. My life was eternal as the everlasting endowment of God's origin and being. This reality was ever present in consciousness.

The cloud and I were not alone. God waited with us.

## The Effects of Reality

Anne Fisher

THE STORY is told of a man who viewed from his shabby dwelling on a mountain another house on a more distant peak. He viewed this house with awe and curiosity, for it appeared to have windows of glistening gold. For many days and nights he traveled toward the magnificently adorned structure. Although his trip brought many hardships, he never faltered; for he knew the end of his journey would bring the fulfillment of his desire for a closer inspection of that faraway wonder. At last he reached the base of the peak on which stood the house with the gilded windows. Preparing himself for the revelation of splendor, he clawed his way toward his objective. As he elevated himself to a position promoting a clear view of what he sought, he laughed in eager anticipation. Then he stopped; the smile left his face. Before him was a hut more dilapidated than his own, and its windows were nothing more than common glass. He was confused and disheartened. He had traveled so very far only to be confronted with barren ugliness. He turned to view the vast expanse of territory he had trekked to receive so inadequate a reward, and in doing so he noticed that his own home on the mountain from which he had ventured appeared to have windows of gold. The sun shone brilliantly; now he knew. His image of grandeur was created not by the existence of a gilded cottage but by his own misinterpretation of the sun's rays falling on the glossy window panes of a crumbling shack.

As this man sought the truth about an inexplicable but highly provocative image, so seek many of us the truth about unfamiliar situations or things. We hear of an interesting book and want to read it. Pictures of a lovely resort area beckon to us to come to the area and enjoy the view. College life is portrayed in a storybook manner on a television program and in the movies, and we hunger for the opportunity to live it ourselves. Upon closer examination of the object of our desire, however it quite often brings the reaction of disillusionment or unhappiness. The book employs, for example, sensationalism and escapism, and we are disappointed. The resort area is in actuality small and cluttered. The life of the college student involves mostly hard work and study, and our image is shattered. Unhappiness did result; yet, we received what we wanted.

Is unhappiness the only result of confrontation with an unforeseen truth? To answer this question I feel it is necessary to define "happiness." If used in a superficial sense, happiness could be that which results from the fulfillment of one's desires. In this example pursuit of the unknown could certainly result in disillusionment, a type of unhappiness that I have previously illustrated. I do believe, however, that we cannot consider exclusively the superficial connotations of the word. Happiness in any context would refer to a state

of well-being or contentment, but this state itself is almost undefinable. Because this definition is so unspecified, I feel that there must be also a broader effect of the revelation of reality—an effect which goes beyond the primary state of disillusionment. An initial confusion and sorrow were felt by the man on the mountain as a result of his encounter with reality, but this was complemented by or perhaps replaced by a later recognition of the trickery of a simple phenomenon. It is reasonable to assume that relief of a sort must have been felt as a result of this revelation. A certain degree of contentment must have been experienced upon viewing a situation which was no longer baffling; indeed, we might call it happiness. This would be the deeper effect of pursuing truth.

We can safely conclude that what one desires does not always bring contentment, but coupled with the assimilation of new information an *unhappiness* can become a *happiness* of greater worth. Because the result is broadened knowledge, the initial unhappiness is justified. Did the man on the mountain experience unhappiness? Yes, he did. Did the pursuit of truth and the eventual discovery of it cause him anguish? Yes, it did. Anguish can, however, result in the evolution of a more profound pleasure. As the man scanned the territory he had traveled and began his journey back to the home he had forsaken for the purpose of pursuing a dirty hovel, *he* was the master of himself. His *gnawing ignorance* was not.

## He's a Rough Character, Ladies

Brenda Stump

**A**FTER HE'S backed you into the corner, rolled an avalanche of kisses over you and whispered cleverly contrived phrases into your ear, he suddenly breaks away, covers his face with his hands, and murmurs, "I don't want to hurt you." Until I find a better reply to this statement, I usually say, "Don't flatter yourself, Buster!" The typical American male is an excellent actor, especially when the lights are low. He's on stage alone with the leading lady of the evening. Until this point it has been a lovely evening and you've laughed and talked about numerous subjects, such as his opinion of the Chicago Bears and how to improve them, his opinion of the armed forces and how he plans to dodge them, and, of course, his opinion of his last date and how charming she was. As the lights go down, his ego comes up. He's everything you didn't think he was. He's suave, considerate, and soft-spoken. Once you've hit the corner and he's finally backed off enough for you to retrieve your senses, he's begun his speech. He proceeds to warn you against the dangers of his charm. He has many things to do before he becomes serious or gets

tied down. After college there's the draft, and of course he wants to travel. Up to this point you haven't uttered a word. You've stood there trying desperately to recall something you might have said to bring about this sermon. But don't let this rascal fool you, ladies! He's thinking, "She's the girl of my dreams." It is not that he's afraid of hurting you, he's afraid of getting burned a bit himself. Back off a little and reverse the play by saying, "You're right, Charlie! Let's call it quits." But be sure to stay near the telephone the next day.

Another thing you must realize, ladies, is that talking with a male is like talking with a parrot. He repeats what you've said, then shakes his head because he knows you're wrong before you've said anything. He never follows a path of reason. He always has definite opinions, and he's always right. He'll discuss his opinions, however, so just keep your mouth shut, and he'll talk for hours. It is really quite interesting to watch two males trying to discuss something. They do everything except step on each other's hands in order to get their views stated. Men refuse to listen. Most of them can talk fairly intelligibly, but they fail to realize that they might learn something if they remained silent for a few moments. I will agree that we ladies do tend to talk quite a bit when we are among other ladies. We do, however, know how to listen. When we females are in the company of males, we speak only when spoken to, but not always by choice. If a lady does muster enough courage to add a short statement to a gentleman's conversation, her statement is usually followed by a snicker or that sarcastic smile of his. He pats you on the arm, takes a deep breath, and changes the subject. Therefore, all you have to do, ladies, is to sit there, try to look beautiful, and remain silent.

Men also are constant complainers. They are never satisfied with your appearance, and they're not at all hesitant about their disapproval. If you have a lovely new hair-do, a man will notice that your eye make-up is too heavy. If he is not the center of attention at the party, it is a boring party. If you do talk him into taking you downtown to a movie, he'll complain about being dressed up, he'll complain about the movie and your choice of seats. He insists you choose the seats, and instead of wandering up and down the dark rows, you point in a central direction, and he immediately escorts you to the seats of your choice.

Good manners are usually very important to a man. I say usually, because sometimes he opens the car door for you, and sometimes he doesn't. The only time you can be sure that he is going to be mannerly is if he is in the public eye. You'll be treated like a queen!

Come rain, sleet, snow or hail, he appears at a first glance to be the All-American Boy. Take a close look. What do you see behind that mask? You see a walking, talking, smiling hypocrite, who, for some reason, looks upon you as a prop that he uses in his little act. It makes him feel important to have you around for several reasons:

he gains sexual satisfaction and status, and he uses you for an ego builder and a servant.

My suggestions and clues to the American male are as follows: 1. A woman does not fall instantly in love with a man because he kisses her forehead or holds her hand. 2. Keep your mouth shut and let a woman talk. Maybe you'll be pleasantly surprised at what she has to say. 3. Stop complaining about everything that isn't your idea or creation. Tell her she's lovely—she builds up your ego constantly merely by being with you. 4. Be considerate of a woman. Judge her as an individual who appreciates the fact that she is a woman, you are a man. Just don't judge her on the "Me Tarzan, you Jane" level.

Actually, I like men. Not all of them are vegetables. I have merely stated what are usually the basic faults of most men. It may seem strange that their faults pertain mainly to the treatment of ladies, but these are the faults I notice. In discussing these shortcomings with the members of my sex, I find that most women agree that men are generally a pretty good bunch of fellows. If they would just polish off the rough edges, they would be very acceptable. Grab the sandpaper, ladies. Only you can shape him into the ideal American male.

## A Gift of Christmas

Anne Szatkowski

I HAD NEVER spent a Christmas without Aunt Stella and Harold; they were always there—Aunt Stella sitting in front of the tree and Harold peering at the names on the packages as he tried to hand them to their recipients, because Harold thought of himself as Santa Claus. Aunt Stella was my grandfather's half-sister and Harold, her only child, was born quite late in her life with an incurable thyroid deficiency which made him somewhat mentally and physically retarded. Harold was nearly as old as my mother, but had grown in height and mind to the age of about a nine-year-old; however, horizontally he was as wide as he was tall, and the lines of his face revealed his age rather accurately. Harold's father had died shortly after Harold was born, and he and his mother lived alone in Chicago with no other living relatives who really cared, except my grandparents and my mother. Since she was five, my mother had never known a Christmas without them. The year I was sixteen, however, I knew for sure that I would just die if they were gathered around our Christmas tree that particular morning.

I had met Joe who was just about the most nearly perfect seventeen-year-old boy that ever existed. I just knew that Joe had absolutely no defectives in his family; he was so perfect it would simply be impossible. Joe's parents had asked me to their family's Christ-

mas Eve gathering, and since he knew that we had our family gathering on Christmas morning, I just had to invite him to ours. I knew that I must persuade my mother to exclude Aunt Stella and Harold from our regular gift opening—couldn't we have two? There must be something we could do; there just had to be something. Yet, I felt just a little pang of guilt when I asked my mother. I knew Aunt Stella and Harold had nowhere else to go; there was no one who cared enough to dampen their own Christmas with Aunt Stella and Harold's peculiarities. But I was just as certain that Joe would never speak to me again because he would think there might be something wrong with me; because I had a relative such as Harold (even though very distant), he would think that there was probably a weakness in our whole family, including me. I discussed the situation with my mother, but it was no use. Mother informed me that one of the greatest lessons in life was to learn to accept situations as they are, if they have not been caused by something that I have done, and that I must remember that kindness is a virtue of life and must be followed. Then I knew that there was no use to pursue the subject another minute.

What would I do? My life would be ruined. Joe would think I was a complete mental case, and he was sure to tell all the other boys. I was doomed if he came; but if I told him he could not come over Christmas morning, he might think worse things of me. Thus, I knew the situation must be faced; I was a victim of circumstances. It was the first Christmas Eve of my life that I lay awake thinking of anything other than what was under that beautiful Christmas tree. All I could think of was that my social career was soon to come to an abrupt end.

With a heavy heart I watched everyone, including Joe, gather around the Christmas tree that morning; however, I had noticed that Joe did not change a single expression as he was introduced to Aunt Stella and Harold. There was not even the slightest quizzical look as Joe said, "How do you do?" As we gathered around the tree, Harold took his usual standing position to play Santa Claus, and my heart sank. Harold was so short and fat that he actually looked like the little elf we had always described as Santa; all he needed was a red suit, boots, and a beard. Harold went on passing out all the packages under the tree as my mother handed them to him; he was completely unaware of my mental torture, but I did receive a reassuring glance from my mother. No doubt Mother had survived a similar situation.

Eventually all the packages were delivered, and most of them unwrapped. As I looked about the room, I began to realize that with all the rest of my wonderful family no one could possibly think there was anything amiss. No one in the world ever had a finer family. I glanced toward Aunt Stella and Harold, who had sat down beside his little ninety-year-old mother, who was dwarfed by age to his height. I saw Aunt Stella pat Harold's arm, smile kindly and say, "Isn't this wonderful? Aren't we grateful to be here with those who love us?"

I stole an ashamed glance at Joe, who was also looking at the kind little woman and the grotesque little figure by her side, smiling at them, as if he were really glad they were there also. I knew then that I had learned a part of the real meaning of Christmas, and I suddenly felt much older and wiser.

## Greatness

Don Wall

**T**HE NIGHT after former President Kennedy's assassination, newspapers around the world acclaimed him as a "truly great man." More recently, President Johnson referred to Winston Churchill as a great individual. Greatness implies an outstanding accomplishment and a marked superiority over contemporaries in the same field. Abstract and somewhat arbitrary, this quality of greatness conanates from the lives of a relative handful of history's multitudes.

The first necessary quality is an avid interest in a certain subject in which one aspires toward success. Without this most elementary ingredient, one neither thinks of nor devotes time and energy to an area of endeavor. Great men of this century furnish a primary indication of the importance of interest. When Felix Frankfurter, former United States Supreme Court Justice, landed in New York from Austria, he was fascinated by law. Overcoming a complete ignorance of the English language, he finished law school in his seventh year in this country. His interest in and knowledge of law recently caused Chief Justice Earl Warren to comment that Frankfurter has done more than any other one person in the last sixty years to interpret the law for a changing nation. Arnold Toynbee, the eminent British historian, would never have written his twenty-four volumes on the development of civilization if he had not been intrigued by the history of man's existence and the characteristics of civilization. In the same manner, Charles Hard Townes' maintaining a dedicated interest in high-energy light beams enabled him to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom last year for research in maser and laser devices. Other great men have been engrossed in several fields; Aristotle's pen recorded religious, political, biological, and economic interests. Those who lack this inquisitive concern glide over the surface of education, never diving below the easy, the apparent, to the real challenges of deeper thought. Every evening they flop into an overstuffed easy chair and digest their least soluble mental meal of the day—the nightly weather report. His most profound interest being in how much he still owes the finance company for last year's Christmas presents, Mr. Average America cannot achieve greatness.

But an active interest cannot by itself result in greatness. There must also be an aptitude, or mental capacity to succeed. Without this ability, the world's most dedicated and zealous interest cannot bring favorable results. For example, a high school friend of mine hoped to become a nurse, but blood horrified her, and in her introductory biology class she became ill while dissecting a frog. She thus lacked the aptitude for a career of helping the sick. Alvin Hansen provides an illustration of interest combined with aptitude. He would not be listed among the foremost modern economists if he had not been able to calculate and graph relationships among marginal consumptive propensity, personal income, industrial depreciation allowances, and percentage increase in housing starts. Ernest Hemingway needed both interest and the ability to write clearly and effectively to establish his literary reputation. Jean Monnet, for all his economic genius and theories of European development, could never have initiated the European Economic Community without his organizational and political ability. All of these people combined interest and aptitude to achieve greatness.

But a third component was also necessary. One must associate, either physically or mentally, through seeing or hearing, with the greats. Such an association stimulates latent interests and develops hidden talents. Plato, challenged by the Sophist doctrines of Protagoras, studied under Socrates and eventually joined his teacher as one of the three outstanding Hellenic philosophers. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of today's great religious thinkers, was to a large extent influenced by the Christian Existentialist theories of Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian of a century ago. A literary example stems from Thomas Wolfe, who studied the writings of James Joyce. English professors constantly inform their pupils that a writer must read; only by mentally mixing with the best authors can a potential writer develop the syllabic rhythm and diction required in good compositions. Churchill and Kennedy, prior to their seeking public office, had both studied various political theories and associated with previous greats. But greatness is not limited to mental exercises. Rico Carty, one of professional baseball's most promising newcomers, worked under established all-star Henry Aaron. Such association definitely inspires greatness.

This last factor is perhaps the most important. Certainly aptitude must exist, but it remains unused unless interest evokes it, and association with the great is the surest way to stimulate interest. The mental and physical challenge provided by mixing with someone superior to oneself generates interest and enables one to develop his talents. Grade school basketball coaches almost universally encourage their young charges to play against older boys and cultivate their interests and abilities. Few basketball players, however, receive All-America notices. Similarly, memory records few entries in the classification of "great." Many people do not have the aptitude, but most do not have adequate initial interest to associate with the great.



## The Still Point

Barbara Newberry

**T**O SEE HIM was to be impressed by his striking features and almost paradoxical appearance. He was a tall, gaunt, rather lean man, but his haggard look yielded to an aura of eternal might. When standing, he seemed to be precariously balanced on a pair of stilts, but his gait was sure and not ungraceful. A slender neck rose above broad, bony shoulders that supported a long head covered with a maze of shaggy, black hair. A shock of this maze was always combed neatly to one side of his high, slanting forehead. His sunken cheeks and protruding cheek bones were emphasized by a long, narrow nose. He had a firm, delicate mouth that seldom smiled and bright, gray eyes that contrasted with a cadaverous pallor. A quick glance might produce an image of grotesquery, clumsiness, weakness, but just a few moment's attention would reveal a man of comeliness, agility, strength, and above all, deep contentment.

Perhaps he lived too much. He dwelt in each moment and sucked the essence from all that he encountered. No obscure detail or subtle feeling escaped his acuity. No vast, incomprehensible problem was not unraveled to satisfaction by the power and persistence of his reason. Harmony prevailed in his soul. There was no need for him to drown a despicable identity in the cause or to fabricate a meaning for existence—a meaning that does not really alter the absurdity of existence. He found comfort in accepting the hopelessness of the human condition. He reaped happiness from a capacity to love himself and all the world with understanding and from a tendency to live for the sake of living. That which many seek but seldom find—peace of mind—he had realized.

He was sitting in the library. Here he was want to read, to think, to lose himself in a flow of spirituality. Music was playing. As its intricate complexities rose and subsided, digressed and lingered, pounded and splattered upon his ears, he rose and walked the floor incessantly. The bombastic majesty of the piece was becoming evident. A pleasant feeling crept into the pit of his stomach, and his hands grew cold. It was impossible for him to think now; he knew only feelings, inexpressible except by actions. The music swelled and gained in intensity. Even so, an intoxication began to permeate his entire being, and his elation soared to ineffable heights. As the music reached its magnificent climax, he realized the culmination of his happiness, the limits of joy. In one unique, emotional moment was the climax of his life. But utter frustration, complete dejection was the aftermath. Pure ecstasy had turned to extreme pain—the pain that results from realizing the saturation point of happiness. He turned to thoughts of death with the belief that nothing more could be gained from life and accepted calmly the most absurd of all absurdities.

## THE MAJESTY

Have you ever gazed out and over  
The acres of space, past the lesser ones,  
With your eyes traveling ever upward  
Away from the toil of a world below,  
To the summits, the heights, the greatness  
Of the mountain that stands  
Looking majestically over the valley far below?

This is it! A stately being never before  
Witnessed by mankind  
Through all the ages of kings.

This is nobility—  
Lasting from a moment when the earth pushed it up and  
Left it standing to rule its land.

It will rule!  
The mountain that stares at all its land with a quiet awe  
That leaves nothing—everything—to be desired.

What is it?  
It is the majesty,  
The queen of the hosts—  
The greatness of the heavens.  
It stands tall and straight,  
Leaving the lesser ones below.

Its crown is of pure gold  
Touched upon its head the first light of the dawn  
Born to it,  
And lasting as the day, and disappearing  
As the darkness shrouds it.

Continue! Her greatness remains through the storm,  
The hate, the love.  
She is the greatness of all things;  
She will reign for eternity.

What is it?  
It is  
The majesty—  
The mountain.

PORTIA RISSLER

# Song of My Youth

Joan O'Sullivan

In "Fern Hill" Dylan Thomas presents the tragedy of the paradox of time: while man enjoys and revels in the pleasures of youth, he is moving, at the same time, away from youth to the dreariness of old age.

**T**IME OFFERS me his paradox on a golden plate. He piles the fruits of youth in a high bountiful heap in the center: golden apples of beauty, purple grapes of power, plump figs of skill, and, intertwined among them all, green branches of freedom. And under this tantalizing mound he hides the contradiction of it—the grey, heavy mass known as age. Time tempts me with the fruit, commands me, dares me, to taste it. For the moment he hides the dark nucleus and says it does not matter and brings forth cups of passion for me to drink. I hesitate, but the dark memory of age fades and dims in the light of this shimmering, glistening cup before me, and I take one sip from the golden goblet, and then another, and then a long, deep gulp. The hot, stinging liquid sweeps through me, makes my body tingle, even to the fingertips, and my muscles feel the surge of indomitable power. I have forgotten all but this world, this now, this youth. All is mine—I am prince of my world. I race through the countryside laughing, with my head thrown back and the wind whipping my hair.

Time is my constant companion, and together we meet success at every turn. Time is always there, urging me on and on, further and further. By night he sings me to sleep with his hurrying, breezy whisper, and by day we sing the song together; in a loud, triumphant voice we carol it to the world. It is the song of my youth—it tells of my power and glory and agelessness. It tells of tomorrow and the next day and the next, and it says they will all be this same, glad, golden-green color. It sings of me and praises me and is the promise of my soul.

And all this while I pass, rushing, by the warnings, the testimonies. Others, older mortals, warn me, admonish me; they try to hold me back when my every cell strains forward, to stop me when there is no stopping. They do not know; none of them can know; how can I tell them that I am different—that I will never be like them—old and dry and wrinkled, for now is forever, now is eternal—my song has said it. But they do not understand and cannot hear my song. Their threatening arms reach for me; their craggy hands try to draw me back and keep me, but I am free of them, above them, in a world where they have never been and will never be; they have never heard my song. I fly above them, faster and faster, urged by time and propelled by the hot, fierce flame in my blood.

And thus I pass my days, singing, flying, reveling in the strength and power that is mine alone, until one day I awake from my time-lulled sleep and find my green-golden world barren and still. I look down and see my feet shackled to the dry, dusty land. I listen for my song and hear only a faint, mocking rushing above my head. Looking up I see a beautiful body, a lithe, youthful body, flying above me with its head thrown back mouthing a silent song.