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С О П У Г И Ч И О



CONVIVIO

Spring 1966

Volume IV, Number 1

FICTION, POETRY, and ESSAYS

by STUDENTS and FACULTY

from

MOORHEAD STATE COLLEGE

Moorhead, Minnesota

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with

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Richard D. Leppert

DIALOGUE: A HAPPY MAN TO A BUSY FARMER

I have been buried here for sixty years. This hill holds no snow, and in the winter I am very cold: no blanket shrouds the brown grass and keeps me warm. A fox has gnawed my tender bones after spring's thaw. A single tree has pierced my earthly innards with hairy roots.

Your father, young man, pulled down the barbed fence that kept the cattle out. But now even the cattle are gone and no one visits me. My grass is long and green. The undergrowth is matted and brown. It is last year's growth. And the years' before. Your father used to burn the grass in the fall. In spring my hill was green: my old flesh added a deeper pigment to those slender fingers that wave in an evening breeze. My wife and our children have produced good grass crops, too, in years past. They are next to me, can you see?

We like the fox. We like the hairy tree roots. The fox have carried my tender wife's bones to me. The fox have carried my tender bones to her. The hairy roots pierce my shell as they pierce hers. Between us and from within my rib cage flow fresh veins of life that both of us nourish. We make greener leaves in summer. Our tree, in gratitude, sends us back that life in the fall, when the days grow cold. Our hill has no snow to blanket us. Yet from the veins of our tree liquid warmth is turned back upon us.

Young man, you and your father have honored my name: you have covered my stone with grass and never burned it away. But still it stands. My tree grows stronger as the veins in my body grow larger. And best of all, no one uses our green grass. The pigment is no longer so very green over my bones: the tree has sucked it away. But it is there. The grass shoots are more tender over my chest than are the ones you cultivate with your machines. My soft green plants are more graceful when they wave in an evening breeze. My grass forms seed in the fall, which never grows. Yet it is beautiful seed, which teems with gentle life. But those hundred youthful roots of the early spring can never find earth to pierce, because you have never burned away their grandparents' brown and matted remains. So the children of this year die upon the hearts of their ancestors, and beauty dies on the first warm day.

Walk on, young man, ponder not at my little hill. It is spring now and the first warm day is approaching. Leave now, or you will see beauty dying in an evening breeze, and buds appearing on the only tree in miles.

FRAGMENT: NOT A SERVER. ALL SERVE.

It was the February of James Billings' twenty-second year, when he began to serve. Rather, it was one February, on the birthday of George Washington, that James Billings was called upon to serve. James Billings, true to a form which he had cultivated for seven years, refused.

Jim, as he was known to his friends, was a perfect stereotype of the idealist. That is, he was full of dreams and hopes which were nice, in themselves, and pleasant to think about, and the annual subject of the Christian sermon generally delivered at Christmas, but which were, for the most part—the part that made the difference—only dreams which remained unrealized: the hazy yearnings and baffling memories recalled from the most pleasurable moments of sleep.

Jim's friends tolerated his opinions, and enjoyed his company. They thought him suspect: not exactly in the sense that young men think of as being nicely suspect—of speaking out against the right things: Jim was suspect for his insistence on the fulfillment of dreams: for his outspoken desire for the international acceptance of the message of Christmas. Jim's friends tolerated his seemingly plausible opinions. They liked him in spite of his dreams.

His appearance was standard. He looked like most other college men. That is not to say, however, that he really worked at his image. It just turned out that way. His mother bought his clothes, usually, and she knew what everyone was wearing. It was not James Billings' appearance which bothered anyone. It was his mind.

In February, on the birthday of America's George Washington, Jim was called upon to serve. He refused. He had received a letter notifying him when and where to appear, and he had ignored it. He did not burn the letter or otherwise do violence to it. It simply lay about the house, in the continual sight of his increasingly irritated parents, but it did not collect dust. Jim's mother took the letter of notification from its envelope, daily, and read with growing alarm the date of induction, which daily, steadily, and without compromise approached closer and closer and slipped into the past. Jim was reminded, daily, by his mother of the fact that induction was approaching, and that, some days later, it had slipped by. Jim said little to these reminders. Once, however, he looked her directly in her tear-swelled eyes and remarked, carefully, almost without feeling, and certainly with no anger, perhaps almost smiling:

Thy rebuke has broken His heart
and then went about his business. He could never recall just where he had heard that little sentence, nor could he remember where the rest of it came from, which he held in reserve for the time when it would be most needed. It seemed as though he had been born with it stamped on his mind, and that his first task out of the womb was to engrave this little suggestion into his sensibility, which he would never be able to forget, even though he could not recall the source of this memory.

Ten days following the date on the letter they called on him. That is not to imply that they came directly to see him. They used the telephone. They were polite and soft spoken; they asked about his health, which was fine; and they asked some other questions, none of which explained why James Billings had failed to report to serve. The conversation, unsuccessful for them from the beginning, closed on James' favorite memory

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart.

Three days later James was having his induction physical, passively, seemingly unconcerned. His heart was good; his lungs were sound; his blood pressure was normal; and he was not ruptured. He put his clothes back on, took the mental test, filled out more papers, and was ushered to a large room where forty other men stood talking among themselves. Four men in uniform entered from a side door and arranged the inductees in neat rows. A flag was set ten feet in front of the middle of the lines. There was a speech, followed by the oath. On command forty men stepped forward and said they would serve. James Billings did not step forward. He did not say anything.

There was no commotion. A man in uniform came to him from behind, tapped him on the shoulder and motioned toward the side door from which the four men in uniform had originally come. As James Billings walked toward the door, he heard the opening lines of the usual welcome to the men who would serve:

Youse gentlemen is no longer gentlemen. Youse is now and the man in uniform closed the door.

The man in uniform was polite. He asked if James Billings, age twenty-two, male, white, no religion specified, were a C.O. Jim answered that he was not just sure what a C.O. was. Upon explanation by the man in uniform Jim still maintained that he was not sure. The man in uniform said

I see.

Then he read the standard penalty for not serving. Jim listened politely until the man in uniform was finished. Then it was his turn, and for the first time, rather the only time, he used all of the little poem, or whatever it was, which he had always known:

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart

He is full of heaviness.

He looked for some to have pity on Him,

But there was no man neither found He any to comfort Him.

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow. And in final cadence, or perhaps as a da capo ending that would make the point clearer, Jim emphasized:

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart.

The man in uniform was not impressed. He arrested Jim.

The outcome of this was never sure. It is only known that James Billings died, three years later, while serving in the same tradition as the forty other men who stepped forward when he refused, perhaps dying in the sight of one of them. A man in uniform, the attending

medic, wrote as addenda to the standard letter to the loved ones back home, that Lieutenant James D. Billings had died, after serving nobly the noble cause, whispering to the medic with gurgling, choked, faltering sound, but with perfectly articulate lip formations:

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart.

The medic, in his letter to the parents, interpreted this as Jim's insight into the fact that his body had been smashed to hell when his buddy, who had pulled the pin of a grenade and swung back his arm to throw it, was afflicted by a painful charley horse, and was forced to drop the live weapon at Jim's feet. Perhaps he was right.

FRAGMENT: FOREVER THE QUIET SMILE

Thomas Webster was a young man about to go into the world. He lived in his parents' house, which was expensive and furnished with some of the right things. He was twenty years old and he was attending college. He was a good student. He would never graduate.

Suzanne Davis was a young girl in love with a boy about to go into the world. His name was Thomas Webster. They had been friends since high school. They would never marry.

Mrs. Robert Webster was married to Mr. Robert Webster, who was the father of Thomas Webster. She was a good mother to her only child. She ironed his shirts and occasionally made his bed. She made sure he went to church. She gave him a bottle of scotch on his birthday and a sweater for Christmas. She wanted him to succeed. Thomas Webster would never succeed.

Robert Webster sold ladies corsets. He traveled a good deal. He fathered one son, who he seldom saw.

Thomas Webster made love once a week to Suzanne Davis. They had been friends since high school. They had been making love for several months. He wanted to marry her, but they would never marry.

Tom Webster joined a fraternity when he was eighteen years old. He attended three fraternity meetings and voted once for homecoming queen. He did not buy a fraternity blazer and he did not want a jacket. One would suppose that he was a desirable member, however, because he was easy to like and he was usually quiet. He was never angry. He had a friendly smile, although it was very slight. One had to know Tom Webster well to be sure that he was smiling, because his smile was always slight. The fraternity brothers never knew Tom Webster because he attended only three meetings.

Suzanne Davis was just a girl. She was always around, but she was not noticed. She was pretty, but her smile betrayed no teeth. That was her misfortune, because being pretty and nice was not enough. Her smile should have been wider. Only Tom Webster knew she was nice and pretty. Tom liked small smiles, smiles that were difficult to detect unless you knew who was smiling. In high school Tom kissed the slightly smiling face of Suzanne Davis. In college he made love once a week to the same face, which was still smiling the same smile. They made love, but they would never marry.

Tom and his mother were friends, but that was all. Mrs. Webster loved Tom because he was her only child; he was her claim to fertility. Tom thought his mother was swell. She made his bed once in a while and she was an admirable cook.

Mrs. Webster knew that she would always claim Tom as her own, but she grew farther from him as he turned toward Suzanne. Mrs. Webster knew what was going on, but she could do nothing about it. Tom had a quiet mind of his own. He spoke with finality whenever she broached the subject. As Tom grew older his mother learned to mind her own business. She concentrated on cooking and ironing shirts. She pretended Suzanne Davis did not exist. It was an

easy thing to pretend because she had never seen the girl.

Tom moved in a small world, where no one but a slightly smiling girl knew he moved at all. Yet he moved carefully and with assurance. Tom Webster would never graduate from college, even though he was a good student, and he would never marry, even though he was in love, because although he carried about himself an aura of certainty, he was mostly unhappy on the inside, and he was redeemed but once a week in the moments of love with Suzanne, so that when his unhappiness became too great for him to bear he ended his life. Tom was careful in the very planning of his final act, because he did not want to hurt Suzanne. His death was recorded as an accident.

Those who knew him at all said that his life had been used to make one girl happy for a few mostly innocent years. Those who knew him only through acquaintance with his parents said he was the joy of his mother's eyes, and the answer to his father's prayers.

To Suzanne Davis he was a boy with a beautiful mind and warm caressing arms.

Tom's world was small, and he wanted to leave his mark on everyone who inhabited it. He planned accordingly.

To Suzanne Davis he had given his smile and his love. That was all she would want.

To his mother he left one memory:

Mrs. Webster came home from grocery shopping one afternoon to find Tom leaning over the garbage disposal. Next to him, in the sink was a plastic cross. The corpus had been removed. Tom was not smiling. Mrs. Webster set a sack of canned goods on the kitchen table and walked over to the sink. She asked him what he was doing. He did not answer. She picked up the cross. She asked him where the plastic body was. He raised his eyes level with hers. He said it was in the disposal. Her question was academic: the noise of the plastic corpus in the process of being ground up by a garbage disposal was impossible to conceal. Mrs. Webster opened the machine and fished her delicate hand into the chamber. She removed the chipped remains of a phosphorescent Christ-figure. Her eyes were clouded and she was whimpering weakly. Tom took the pieces from her hand and deposited them back in the machine. He finished the job.

To his father:

He left his mother.

To his fraternity brothers:

DAILY BREAD

I

The ground was embracing the leaves; some of them were even being forced into marriage with it by the little knobs on the players' shoes. With her green eyes, and hair the color of Kraft caramels, I was thinking more about embracing Monica however. Across some groups of people, an ambulance was whining in the street; it turned toward the field and even though it was red it disappeared behind more people and shut off its siren. Monica was giving me a series of wistful glances and I tried to look as if we were manifesting implicit rapport. The voice of the loudspeaker said that a small girl named Sheila wearing a Connecticut sweatshirt had become isolated in the crowd; this announcement was counterpoint with somebody near me commenting on the head linesman showing signs of pressure. Monica, feeling at ease, clapped with the rest.

Walking entailed crushing hundreds of leaves and we relished the act, especially since the day was clear and we could see what we were doing. Later, sitting side by side, she picked up a newspaper and turned over the first page, but on the other side of the page the light coming through the window was so bright that neither of us could read anything, so we settled for the second page. I mulled over the few words that had been sandwiched between the rest of my thoughts for the past few days—partita, chevissauce, technique. A large lady in the corner of my eye pronounced; we found out that the ambulance had retrieved a man with a heart attack—a priest, or was that my idea? I put chevissauce back and decided to replace partita. I wasn't sure about technique.

The sun was trying to probe from the side, but steadily becoming transplanted. She had her shoes off and mentioned the cold sidewalk. I asked that she not throw the shoes out as planned and she agreed to save them because they were comfortable. I squinted over her head to acknowledge the fading warmth; true, I could see the source, but my shoes were thicker. Monica, you are Sheila, but who announced you, and why?

II

Water is wettest when it's iodine to a lily-white callus. Further, double trickles down the handles of the oars on the upstroke converged in the cloth of my pants. The hull plied low and slow, weaving atop the lake, drunk with passengers. Hiawatha, all greasy and worthless dragging its propellor, was clamped behind smelling like a refinery. Greeted with a grate where dirt edges are touched by water, we de-barked, purposefully strode across the little island, and didn't need a leader because somehow we all just wanted to get to the other side. We had to stop when the island quit; then a collective flounce

nudged the purlieu. One hand of each was soon clutching cold glass. Close-legged, Dr. - - - - - drank with his whole body rolling back for each chug. Taking turns, we adopted his style. Like stubby upside-down pendulums of a running down clock, we were miniature erratic vertical aqueducts.

As the other side was once again solemnly escaped, rain made up for the motor, and Charlie, sputtering, then starting a slow motion sommersault pivoting his ribcage on the oarlock; save him Doctor—thank you. My tank is full too, motor, neither of us will start, and your redolence cuts the one I garlic. Water, changed to honey now, thick and unyielding to the prow, sweet and delicious when splashed or tasted, a welcome rivulet off the oar to cool my volcanic belly; and burn my scrubbed palms—this a less ominous crisis to divert the bloated instability. Atop the hull, shoulders low and heads weaving, little lakes ply behind the drunken passengers' navels, and if we choose sides no one will go back.

Ken Warner

FROM AN EMPTY EGG SHELL

He stopped walking. His fists were jammed into his pockets and he felt ugly in his rumpled clothes. He was aware of the threadbare cloth bulging at his knees and the soiled collar of his shirt. He was studying a church standing in the damp shade of its stone. His eyes traced the dull grain of the door and the heavy ring handles, then found the plaque that read Peterskrche 1181 AD. He shuddered. Looking back into a dank recess, the black filth that had washed into it chased his eyes up the wall. The heavy gray of the speckled mortar reminded him of a cemetery wall he had seen in a village. The cemetery where the dates on the headstones bore a mute testimony to the legitimacy of the dead and the soldiers in spiked helmets, pictured on porcelain plaques, mocked the living. The gray of the church spire bleached as it climbed out of the dark into the sunlight. A complex of clocks kept inexorable time as the gold cross at the apex seemed to melt in the sun. Seeing the sun warmed him, and he crept out of the shade and headed up the darkened street toward the bright square.

He could see the people milling about the square and he felt anxious to reach them. He was eventually caught up in a group of people standing at a curb waiting for the light to change. He was directly across the street from the square facing the rathaus. The stirring of the crowd when the light turned green set him in motion. He made his way across the street, his mind barely functioning. His heel caught on the rail of a streetcar track, his cheeks flushed, and his mind focused again.

Once at the square, the cobble stones felt alien to his feet. He took up a position at a fountain and stood leaning against the low wall that shaped the basin. The sun sifted through the beads of moisture that sprayed out of the flow of water pouring from the urn of the bronze water boy. The water boy was a listless creation; his head was gracefully tilted and he appeared to be keeping a sleepy vigil. The boy looked as if his task were unending, and the burden of it were too much to bear.

He turned and faced the square, content to stand there watching the people but not wanting to be disturbed. He enjoyed watching the people and making up stories about them, passing judgments. There was a young couple walking aimlessly, arms linked, not really looking at anything. Yet their eyes seemed to be taking everything in. They were smiling and when the boy spoke, the girl nodded agreeably.

A young boy, tugging at an old woman who had him in tow, pointed his arm engagingly toward the fountain. Adjusting the woven shopping basket on her free arm, she took the cue and followed the child toward the fountain.

He looked further down the square; a man was watching him. The man was squat and had a camera slung over his shoulder. He

meant to look away but the man, having caught his eye, decided to act immediately and started toward him. Since the man's intention was obvious, he felt obliged not to look away. He watched him as the man closed the distance between them.

"Say, you look like an American."

"I am."

"Good, then you probably won't mind taking my picture." The man's voice was animated and familiar.

He didn't say anything at first. The man was a queer—it popped into his head without any reservation.

"No."

"Good, have you ever worked one of these before?"

"No, but it shouldn't be any trouble."

"Good, how bout getting me standing in front of the fountain?"

"All right," he replied. His jaw tightened.

The man stepped in front of the fountain and smiled broadly. He had difficulty at first with the shutter release but managed the picture, handing the camera back. He did not bother to look at the man, but started to walk away.

The man reached for him and just missed catching his arm.

"Hey thanks."

"Yea."

He caught a glimpse of the man's perplexed face as he strolled away. He decided to go to the bookstore at the Odeonplatz.

As the shops and delicatessens flashed by, the conversation he had had with the man with the camera kept recurring in his mind—out of sequence but eventually in its entirety. He weighed the effect of his abrupt answers and began to feel a sense of guilt welling up in him. He remembered a conversation he had had with a friend out of his past. The man was a close friend, erratic and the darling of all those who liked the unconventional. He was idolized by those who wished they were he. "I had a dream that I walked into the john and you were lying there dead with your wrists slashed." His friend had laughed hysterically. "You would," he said, and he kept on laughing.

He reached the Odeonplatz and began to examine everything around him intensely. The thick columns and the lovely symmetry of the arches of the Ferdenhalle. Weather-stained lions perched on the dias were docile. He was angry that they were not ominous. He smiled at the pigeons shuffling aimlessly, swaying from side to side on delicate legs. The souvenir stands, an extravagance of paper and color, reminded him of why he had come, so he turned toward the bookstore. A girl standing at a distance caught his eye and he began to stare at her legs. They were lovely and he was taken by their slenderness. He became involved in an attempt to associate them with a former love, but they were not representative of any emotion he might have felt for a woman before. As she passed, he looked into her face and found her to be quite plain; this annoyed him.

The bookstore was modern, very clean, and orderly. Out of habit he began reading the titles. They were in German, but by relating works of the authors whose names he knew he found he was able to translate the titles even though his knowledge of German was limited. Feeling vaguely happy about this, he decided to go inside.

All the clerks were busy, so he felt a little more secure in browsing; he did not want the discomfort of an interruption. As he began looking over the English titles, the sweep of his vision was arrested by the gaudy dust jacket of a thin volume. He grabbed it off the shelf and began to leaf through it. It was a book he knew.

The book felt good in his hands and closing it he gripped it tightly, feeling the hardness of the binding, recalling how much he had enjoyed it the first time he had read it. He decided to buy it and began to search for a price on the leaf.

His search was interrupted by a tall salesgirl who stood before him, frowning slightly.

"May I help you?"

"Huh," he cleared his throat, "Yes, could you tell me the price of this book?"

She adjusted her glasses and, taking the book from his hand, looked inside the front cover.

"Ten marks."

"I'll take it."

His browsing was over. Standing at the counter, he watched the thinness of her arms and the little bones that protruded at her elbows, her slight breasts and her long graceful fingers as she wrote up the purchase in a sales pad. He disliked the bored expression on her face. He felt somehow that he was being deprived of the faint pleasure he might have derived from the purchase of the book. Though he fought this feeling, he could not elude it. He held this against her. He offered a dull thank you and blundered out through the door.

He decided he wanted a drink so he walked across the street to the Hofgarden, passed under the yellow arches of the arcade and took a seat at the outdoor cafe at the corner of the complex. He felt at ease now under the trees with his beer on the way. The Hofgarden was a beautifully designed, ordered affair, with a baroque temple to Diane in the center and four fountains situated at equal angles in relation to it. The hedges were squared and rows of flowers traced their direction in the dirt at the roots of the hedges. The order was appealing.

The waitress arrived with his beer and he managed a smile.

Behind the garden, as he looked over it, stood the old Bavarian riding academy, now horribly damaged from the war. Although the dome was still intact, the bombing had taken a horrible toll at the base of the structure. On the upper story, the roof had been punched in like the top of a box that had been forced in by a fist. Rubble and large sections of the roof were in the hollowed framework. He began to dwell morbidly on the building. He pictured himself standing in the room while it was still intact. Then came a blinding flash,

and the room began to crumble in on him. He felt the mass of it descending, buffeting him about, the dust choking him. Objects stunned him, striking him on the head and arms, inflicting dull pain. He could feel himself resisting for a frenzied instant, then, no more. He shook his head abruptly.

Looking down at his arm, he tried to picture it lifeless, filthy and bleeding in the rubble but he could not—it was so vital lying there on the table. He began to examine it. He flexed the muscles of it to reassure himself, watching the flesh shift under his skin. He looked up and began to examine the flowers. He longed for their silence and rest, he envied their innocence. A slight nausea attacked him. He could not chase the image of his death in the building.

He shook a cigarette out of the package he took from his pocket, lit it, and closed his eyes to the irritating smoke burning them as he exhaled.

Across the way a child toddled from her mother's chair out into the pathway, a slight breeze shifting through her downy hair. Her chubby legs looked bowed and uncertain but her steps were not false; she maintained her balance. She looked over at him and her frown of concentration yielded to a bubbling smile; she knew that he was watching her and the knowledge of this pleased her. She began to caper for his benefit, then she fell. She did not cry, but instead began chattering. Then her mother came over to pick her up. The mother dusted the baby off and took her back to the table.

He wanted to have the child for his own—he wanted to protect it, to hold it tightly in his arms, but he knew she didn't need it. He felt a rage grow within him and he hated himself and his maudlin pity. The little girl was wonderfully happy and didn't need him. He felt like a fool.

Nancy Berg

OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

a short story

She stared at the telephone across the room, creating a fantasy line by line, planning the seduction of a dream. Chopin on the stereo, fantastic and intellectual, so beautiful in itself, yet harmonious with the lacing, web by web, of an unreal interlude. "Would he?" she smiled to herself, not without perversity, but wondered. Suddenly the crude modulation in the Ballade startled her to awareness and she shrugged off the daydream. With effort, she tried to listen to each note separately, but this only increased the intoxication of the moment: alone, a beautiful apartment, the music, hours of late autumn's evening lying before her naked and pale. It was tempting to indulge the dream and to look up his phone number at least, but she couldn't quite bring herself to flirt too near to action. In an effort to stall off a decision, she turned the heat on under the coffee pot and lit a cigarette; waiting for the thick brown pool to bubble, she searched through the records for the Beatle album—trying to forestall emotion for the few necessary moments it would take to change the record and destroy the mood. But this violation was too ghastly to contemplate . . . If there had to be a way, let it be another, but did there have to? Why not let it continue for an hour or so . . . why not let the music wind on and the dream wind on until at least there would be a possibility of calling him, asking him . . . why not? In a sudden vivid image she could see the yellow, red, and gold room surrounding and enveloping his brown tweed coat, his brown hat, warming him, blending in with his form, softening him. As if an oak tree, firmly standing as colored leaves whirled . . . Ha? But it wouldn't be quiet and silent, still, calling only for contemplation, and then fading away. I'd have to say something, pretend at least for the first moments, until . . . The coffee boiled over and she quickly ran to remove it from the fire. It was hot and bitter, but it softened the taste of too many cigarettes which dried her mouth.

The winter will come and all the cold frozen bundles of flesh will bound through the snow. The walls will be austere and white and there will be work to do. He'll do his work and I'll do my work and we'll commend each other, nod to each other. Spring will come and I'll wait in the cold rain looking at the small house into the yellow window and see his shadow.

It rang twice, then his daughter answered; "Is your father home? May I speak to him?"

"Hello?"

"Hello."

"Who is this please?"

How formal, how like the way every phone call had ever been.—
Autumn and Chopin never enter voices, never pervade words.

On Monday, in the office, he was surprised to see that she was not at her desk. Irritated, he made a note to remind himself to give her, once and for all, final notice. "God! Of all the inefficient, bungling, absent-minded daydreamers, she takes the cake," he was heard saying during the morning coffee break to at least three people. To her, in the afternoon, he said that he was sorry she had not felt well, and that perhaps she would like to take the afternoon off also. But she nodded silently and began typing, trying to make him beg her to stop and take care of herself; but he shrugged and walked away.

When the office closed, she asked him if he would give her a ride home, so that there would be no chance of taking another chill. "Certainly, it would be my pleasure," he smiled, and noticed that she had an annoying way of ducking her head furtively instead of thanking him.

When he pulled into her driveway she offered a quick pleading silent prayer and asked him if he would like to come in for a cup of coffee. He was going to refuse but then remembered that his wife was having Circle at their house. He said that he supposed it wouldn't hurt to come in for a minute.

While he lighted his pipe, and fondled the warm cup of instant coffee, she searched hurriedly for the Chopin and steeled herself for action as the music began.

"Oh God! That? In the afternoon?" he exclaimed.

"Take me!" she whirled around and gasped at him.

"MaryAnn . . . what in good God's name are you . . ." he began to say, but stopped in amazement as he stared at the woman who was squeezing her eyes tightly closed and stretching out her hands.

"Joe?" she whispered softly as she opened her eyes, she hoped, coyly. He shuddered and rose to the occasion. "I've been meaning to tell you for the last month, MaryAnn, you've been pleasant to work with, but . . ."

"Oh, don't talk . . . don't say anything," she fairly swooned.

A scratch in the record startled him to awareness. "I'll talk to you tomorrow," he said over his shoulder, and she watched with detachment how he struggled to put his arm into the brown tweed sleeve while hurrying down the stairs.

Winter came, the walls were austere and white, but she had no work to do.

James M. Murray, Ph.D.

RESPONSIBLE ECONOMICS AND THE JUST PRICE

(A tribute to the late Senator Kefauver, and
a Statement on Behalf of the American Consumer)

Oscar Wilde described an economist as "someone who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." This statement is most disturbing because it is so often true. It is the purpose of this discourse to demonstrate that if economists accept their self-defined responsibilities, such a statement would be false.

A noted English economist, Lionel Robbins, defines economics as, "the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses." Economists have been labeled, "The Worldly Philosophers," by Professor Robert Heilbroner in the title of his well-known book. Observing much of the current literature, however, one would never suspect that economists are concerned with human behavior nor that they are willing to accept the responsibilities of philosophers in dealing with human value systems. This discourse deals with a philosophical problem which most contemporary economists apparently prefer to avoid—the difficult problem of justice as applied to the prices of goods and services.

In a market oriented economy, prices are presumed to play a leading role in determining the choice among the uses of the means which are available to satisfy man's material wants. Prices reward and punish, induce and discourage, both people and property. A market economy is often referred to as a "price directed" system. It is not surprising, therefore, that many economists spend nearly all of their time attempting to determine how prices will influence some aspect of the economy or how some external force will influence prices. But the current concern of the profession is primarily with causal relationships. How often do economists consider the justice of a price or set of prices?

For most economists the concept of a just price is associated with the writings of the Schoolmen of the middle ages and is confronted only in a college course in the History of Economic Thought. Many contemporary economists would contend that a concern with justice is not within their bailiwick. Such a position requires a different definition of economics than the one sighted above. The ends of economic activity, as manifested by society, include a concern for justice, and if the economist is considering the means of solving the economic problem in relation to these ends, how can he approach the problem without a consideration of justice? The economist may take the usual *ceteris paribus* approach and assume the definition of justice by society as given, but that does not relieve him of the responsibility of identifying that which is assumed. Not only must he consider the ends of economic activity as defined by various societies, he must deter-

mine the influence of economic variables on society's value system. This latter point is very important when considering whether justice is the economist's concern.

If society's values are undisturbed by economic variables, assuming values constant is a legitimate approach to the study of economics. If, however, society's values are influenced by economic variables, it is inappropriate to hold these values constant when examining the effects upon the community of changes in prices, incomes, interest rates, or other economic variables.

The following propositions are offered as cases in point to support the contention that economic variables are causally connected to the value structure of any society.

As a first case, consider the influence of over-all levels of income on society's values. At one stage in the economic development of every major industrial nation, human lives—men, women, and children alike, were sacrificed at the altar of economic growth.¹ As the total product expanded at a revolutionary pace, the number of sacrifices was reduced. Which of the major industrial nations would now sacrifice the lives which they once did, to achieve a higher rate of economic growth? The United States? — England? — Even the totalitarian socialist state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics won't repeat the destruction of life which accompanied the early stages of industrial growth in that country. Human lives may again be sacrificed for economic growth, but it will occur in emerging nations, where values are different, because the income level is different. The choices among alternative solutions to the economic problem cannot be assessed without due consideration of the criteria of justice in a society. The criteria of justice are not independent of the economic well-being of the community.

As a second case, consider the influence of the economic well-being of an individual on society's criteria of justice, as applied to him. Most courts of law will recognize a different degree of guilt for the starving man who steals, than for the thief with a full stomach. The thefts of the desperate unemployed in the depression of the thirties were viewed in a much different light, by most people, than similar incidents in more prosperous times. Even theologians will typically lessen the responsibility for an act against divine law if it was motivated by frustration in the satisfaction of basic material needs. Not only will the economic status of the criminal influence the degree of guilt—so will the economic status of the person against whom the crime is perpetrated. It has always been less wicked to steal from the rich than to steal from the poor.

It seems appropriate, then, for economists to consider justice, as

1. "Soon after 1800 . . . Steam engines were imported into Massachusetts and mills were constructed to manufacture cotton textiles. Workers were recruited from nearby farms, most of them women and young children. Many of the children were between the ages of six and ten years. For many years, working conditions in industry were deplorable. No attention at all was paid to the safety, health, and welfare of the workers. Light, ventilation, and sanitation were not even considered. Each person worked from twelve to fourteen hours a day for six days a week. Deaths were frequent, and serious injuries were accepted by workers and employers alike as a necessary by-product of each establishment, a price that had to be paid for industrial progress. W. Dean Keefe, "Brief History of Industrial Safety in America," *Industrial Safety*, New York, 1953, pp. 12, 13.

a variable in the economic system. Furthermore, if they refuse to deal with philosophical value systems, there is a serious question concerning the need for economics as a discipline. By disallowing considerations of justice, an economist relegates himself to the role of a technician concerned with the allocation of resources but not with the consequences of that allocation. For this task, the tools of mathematics and accounting are more than adequate. If, on the other hand, economics is concerned with both means and ends, and if human values are influenced by economic variables, the consideration of justice in pricing is not only within the bailiwick of this discipline, it should be a major concern of the worldly philosophers.

The concept of a just price, being the result of Aquinas' interpretations and applications of Aristotle's writing, is often considered a product of its time and appropriate only in the feudal economy. Aquinas was observing a period in history when prices were usually at the discretion of local monopolists or small but sovereign political units. Commerce, as we know it, was in its infancy, and competition was restricted both geographically and technically. The small economies of the middle ages were largely planned and centrally directed. Aquinas was directing his ethical questions to those responsible for setting prices.

As trade expanded, and industrialization began, the discussions of price gradually changed to considerations of causal relationships rather than justice. This change, however, was not coincident with the reformation as some suggest. Luther wrote in 1524, "I have wished to give a bit of warning and instruction to everyone about this great, nasty, wide-spread business of merchandising. If we were to accept the principle that everyone may sell his wares as dear as he can, and were to approve the custom of borrowing and forced lending and standing surety, and yet try to advise men how they could act the part of Christians and keep their consciences good and safe, — that would be the same as trying to teach men how wrong could be right and how bad good, and how one could at the same time live and act according to the divine Scriptures and against the divine Scriptures. For these errors,—that everyone may sell what is his own as dear as he will, borrowing, and becoming surety,—these, I say, are the three sources from which the stream of abominations, injustice, treachery and guile flows far and wide: to try to stem the flood and not stop up the springs, is trouble and labor lost."² These are indeed strong words—stronger than Thomas Aquinas used in discussing unjust economic behavior.

The discussions of justice did not cease because some men changed religions. They ceased because of two other significant changes, one academic and another economic; but the two were not unrelated.

First, in the later centuries of the middle ages, slavery and servitude became less popular as the enclosure movement progressed; economic and political associations became less direct and man began exerting himself as an individual apart from society as well as in con-

2. Martin Luther, "On Trading and Usury," as reprinted in W. Kapp and L. Kapp *History of Economic Thought*, New York, 1949, p. 25.

nection with society. Scholars then began to study man in this context, as an individual. He was subdivided into psychic man, religious man, and economic man. It was as if he were living different worlds with different motivations and responsibilities in each. The vast amount of knowledge which has accumulated in each of the disciplines which study the different aspects of human behavior, has increased the degree of specialization and further subdivided the individual. The result has been that scholars are inclined to lose sight of the whole man, because not being specialists in other disciplines, they see only a part of the creature. Economists have been at least as guilty as other disciplines in this respect.

Second, the economic change, which decreased the concern about the just price, involved the development of the market system and advances in technology which facilitated widespread competition. Classical economists were less concerned with the fairness of a price because they felt that competition would result in the lowest possible price for the best possible product, and thus prevent exploitation. A concern for justice would indeed be less important if this were the case. Nevertheless, the classical economists never suggested that competitive conditions existed, they were instead suggesting policies which would allow them to exist. The conditions include a sufficient number of producers so that no one of them can influence the market price by his behavior. On the buyer's side it assumes rational well-informed purchasers. Rational is here described as a person who will buy a product only if, after considering all alternatives (and he knows all about all of them) the amount spent on this purchase will add more to his total satisfaction than any other purchase. It is doubtful that the conditions necessary for competitive prices ever existed throughout any single economy.

In fact, conditions in modern industrial nations are so very far from meeting the conditions of a competitive self-regulated economy that analyzing the economy in these terms appears to be "trouble and labor lost." One can still make the trite and somewhat tautological statement that prices are determined by supply and demand. While at the retail level, price competition remains quite significant, supply in most basic industries is determined by a small number of closely controlled, if widely held firms. In many industries, the government's control of the supply has more to do with the price than any market force. Under this system of administered prices, supply and demand may determine prices, but supply and demand are not the result of freely competing market forces.

In this circumstance, when prices are as much or more the result of people's actions, as they are a cause of their reaction, a concern for justice in price determination seems appropriate. However, the time-worn concept which Adam Smith borrowed from the French Physocrats, *laisse-faire*, *laisse-passer*, has become the guise under which privately controlled but publicly protected industries excuse the charging of prices which reflect neither competition, nor justice. The recent electrical equipment price rigging is an excellent example. Certain of the corporate elite would have administered prices go unchalleng-

ed, as the presumed result of free market forces. (Recall the reaction of the steel industry to the late President Kennedy's suggestion that its raising of prices in 1962 was not "justified.") Competition and free enterprise take on the air of sacred myths which have never existed in the manner described by those who would depend on these forces to regulate our economy.

Criticism is valuable; self criticism is even more valuable, but both are easier than constructive alternatives. The principle concern in this discourse up to this point has been to criticize economists for not concerning themselves with the just price. While this problem can obviously not be adequately dealt with in single treatise, it would seem appropriate for the critic to suggest an approach to the problem. Outside of Aquinas himself, Heinrich Pesch in Germany and Bernard Dempsey and Richard Mulcahy, all Jesuits, are about the only men who have dealt directly with the just-price concept.³

But while economists have been generally unwilling to deal with the problem of a just price, certain public representatives such as Senator Hart and the late Senator Kefauver have been. One approach to the problem, then, is to relate the findings of the Senate Committees to the questions raised by the most noted author of the just-price concept, Thomas Aquinas himself.

Consider Aquinas' first question, "Whether a man may lawfully sell a thing for more than it is worth?"⁴ If we consider worth in terms of the market value of a product as expressed by consumers, the first question would appear to be unimportant. Presumably no purchaser would pay more for something than it is worth to him. As Aquinas demonstrates, however, the question is much broader than that. There is worth to the seller as well as the buyer and the just price must consider both. As in most philosophical problems, there are norms to be established. In this case, the upper limit of the prices to be charged will be established by what the market will bear. The lower limit will involve considerations of the price necessary to attract resources into the production of the item concerned. In perfectly competitive systems, one price will satisfy both norms and marginal consumers will be paying the price which is just sufficient to bring the marginal quantity of a product on the market. In less than perfectly competitive systems, there can be a significant gap between what the market will bear and the price necessary to bring the product on the market. Under less than perfect competition, therefore, these norms become somewhat inadequate for considerations of justice. It is definitely possible for exploitation of either consumers or producers to take place within this range. For example, in the case of necessities such as medical services and life-saving drugs, the market will bear almost any price regardless of the cost of the product concerned. In the testimony be-

3. Richard Mulcahy, S.J., *The Economics of Heinrich Pesch*, New York, 1952. While I am not unaware of the contributions of *Welfare Economics*, I am inclined to agree with Mrs. Robinson that "... this sounds a grand and important subject, but in recent years it has been mainly concerned with a rather narrow problem — the definition of real income." *Exercises in Economic Analysis*, London, 1961, p. 131.

4. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, as reprinted in, *History of Economic Thought*, New York, 1949, p. 7.

fore the Kefauver Committee a drug executive was asked why an antibiotic was sold for \$15, considerably above its production cost. The answer was that this drug cures a mastoid infection which at one time required the services of a doctor and a trip to the hospital at a cost \$1,000. The presumption was, then, that at anything under \$1,000, this drug is a bargain.⁵ With this line of reasoning, one could justify the charging of any price, including the Merchant Antonio's "pound of flesh," for any product or service which could save a human life.

On the other hand, it may be demonstrated that certain products are being provided to the community in abundant quantities while many of the producers are actually realizing losses. Agriculture is a good example of this circumstance. In agriculture we have the highest rate of increase in productivity of any single industry in the United States. In agriculture we have returns to labor and capital which are among the lowest in the nation, even with the government supporting prices in this industry. If the farmers were to take a lesson from the drug industry, they should have no trouble selling the 100 per cent parity concept. They might even point out that at one time in the history of every civilization it was a full-time job to provide enough food to sustain life and on that basis, enough food to feed your family, at anything less than the total of your income, is a real bargain. Furthermore, without those first units of food, you would not survive, so food is clearly worth whatever you pay for it. This analogy is not intended to suggest that drug prices are clearly unjust or that drug manufacturers are maliciously taking advantage of the public. Conclusions about such matters require a long and careful study of the lengthy hearings on the subject. It is intended to demonstrate the fallacy of their defense.

The dilemma of value in use and value in exchange was long ago resolved by economists in terms of marginal value. That is, while the product may be very useful, its price will reflect the usefulness of the last unit rather than all units. This is an explanation, however, not a justification.

If it were possible to establish a situation in agriculture where nine firms would produce sixty per cent of the output, or thirty firms would produce ninety per cent of the output, the situation would not be unlike that in drug manufacturing. Food is a necessity, so are drugs. People don't buy much more food because prices are lower or because they have higher incomes, neither do they react to changes in price or income in the purchase of drugs. By restricting quantities and patenting new techniques, the monopolistic farm industry could charge consumers higher prices, not lose much in total quantity sold, and gain a great deal in income received.

In evaluating these two industries both of which produce products which are essential and are purchased largely for that reason, we find prices which result in low returns or losses to individual firms in agriculture and prices which result in some of the highest profits

5. Lawrence M. Hughes, "The Man Who Would Manage Your Marketing," *Sales Management*, July 15, 1960, p. 6.

in the country in drugs. The difference has little to do with total value or with justice. The variance in the returns arises from the differing degrees of control over the market by the producers involved. If drugs were produced under the competitive conditions present in agriculture, there could conceivably be a surplus of drugs and very low prices to the consumer of drugs. Would this eliminate research and development in drugs? It hasn't done so in agriculture. Quite the contrary, there is as much, or more, productive research in agriculture as there is in any major industry in our nation; and furthermore, the benefits of that research are widely distributed and widely used in that industry.

The ethical drug industry complained to Senator Kefauver that reducing prices would reduce profits and discourage the search for newer and better drugs. As the committee pointed out, research costs were included in the costs quoted for ethical drugs, and the committee was asking why prices were 1,000 per cent above these costs, in several instances, and was not yet asking the company to justify costs. Furthermore, the drug firms were spending only 6.3 per cent of their receipts on research but were spending 25 per cent of their receipts on promotion, largely urging doctors to prescribe drugs by brand name rather than by chemical contents. It was also pointed out that many of the miracle drugs have been discovered in universities and hospitals, and much profitable research has come from foreign countries where drug prices are much lower and there is little or no patent protection.⁶

In this business of research another analogy between ethical drugs and agriculture is appropriate. Consider the expenditures of the Agricultural Marketing Service and the land grant colleges in developing new hybrid grain seeds. Returning to our hypothetical assumption of an agricultural industry in which 30 farms produce 90 per cent of the output, if we were to give one or ten of these farmers the patent rights on a new hybrid corn, and let them charge a profit maximizing price, the situation would not be unlike that in the prescription drug industry.

What does this suggest—should we force competition in the drug industry? Not necessarily. But we should consider what cost and prices would be under competitive conditions when scrutinizing the pricing policies of the drug manufacturers. It should be made clear that the community will tolerate the monopolistic conditions in the drug industry only if the benefits are shared with the community. If there are technological advantages to large scale firms in the drug industry, the result should be prices which are below competitive levels, rather than above.

Before making the criteria for a just price more specific, a consideration of two more of Aquinas' questions is necessary. He asks: "Whether a sale is rendered unlawful by a defect in the thing sold?" and, "Whether a seller is bound to declare a defect in the thing sold?"⁷

6. "What Kefauver Wants From Business," *Nation's Business*, August, 1961, p. 66.

7. *Op. cit.*, Aquinas, pp. 9-12.

While state and federal laws typically restrict gross abuses in these areas, the hearings on packaging practices and on hearing aids raise some interesting questions about the adequacy of existing statutes.

The testimony before the Senate Committee by responsible users and producers of hearing aids revealed that obvious deception is being practiced in a business which is so important to the hard of hearing. The abuses are flagrant and disgusting, especially to the responsible businessmen in the industry, who were very cooperative with the committee and favored regulatory legislation to police the industry.

The greatest abuse is the selling of a hearing aid, as a simple audio device comparable to a transistor radio (the cost of the components is comparable but the finished product is priced at ten times the price of the radio). Experts note that hearing problems stem from different sources and require different audio devices. Devices sold without proper medical examination and acoustical advice and therapy are most often useless to the hard of hearing. The seller will seldom, if ever, refund the purchase price and the \$200 to \$700 typically spent on these devices is lost to the purchaser. As Senator Kefauver pointed out, of the nine million people afflicted with loss of hearing, a significant number are over sixty-five and have incomes of less than \$4,000 per year. These people can ill afford several hundred dollars for a useless trinket. Oregon is currently the only state which regulates the sale of hearing aids to prevent these abuses.

Other misrepresentations brought to the attention of the committee included illustrating a transistor and representing it as the size of the full hearing aid, and the advertising of devices which presume to shut off outside noises, which the experts say is currently impossible.⁸

In the area of packaging, the hearings conducted by Senator Hart revealed not only the clearly illegal practice of under-filling, but the more subtle problem of odd-size packages. If producers are really interested in having customers choose their product because it is the best buy, one would never guess that fact by observing package size. Testifying before Senator Hart's committee, Albert N. Halverstadt, advertising manager for Proctor and Gamble, was exhibiting various products. Among them was a package of soap containing 12-3/4 ounces. When Senator Hart pressed for the price per ounce of a box of soap selling for 34-35 cents and containing 12-3/4 ounces, it took Mr. Halverstadt and his advisers quite some time to calculate the two plus cents per ounce. Senator Hart used this to illustrate the dilemma of a housewife making comparisons in a store. Mr. Halverstadt claimed that such comparisons are irrelevant because an ounce of one product does not have the same cleaning capacity as an ounce of another product. In spite of this, no measure of the kind needed to make a comparison of this cleaning power per unit of money spent was available on the package.⁹ The fundamental question involved here is whether the pack-

8. Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly, *Hearings, Prices of Hearing Aids*, April, May, 1962, pp. 1-19.

9. Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly, *Hearings, Packaging and Labeling Practices*, Feb., Mar., Apr., 1962, pp. 593-595.

aging of products of this nature in odd sizes is the result of technology or of an attempt to prevent price comparisons. Empirical studies indicate that, whatever the intention, the result of odd sized packaging is to make the rational consumer as described in traditional economic literature, some sort of super-human. A case in point is the study conducted by the Consumer Counsel of California. Five women with college training were given \$10 apiece and told to buy the 14 items most typically purchased by consumers in supermarkets. They were directed to get the greatest quantity for the smallest price possible. In 34 out of their 70 choices, the women failed. Here were five above average consumers, who took about twice as long as the average consumer to make their selections, and yet in about half of the cases they could not get the best buy from a quantity-price standpoint. It is interesting to note that all five failed in the case of soap.¹⁰

The question of revealing defects in products sold involves considerations of deception. In the case of both hearing aids and modern packaging, deception is occurring. Is the producer guilty of deception if he represents a product as useful when it proves useless to the buyer? What responsibility does a producer have to make price comparisons by a consumer possible? If he consciously attempts to make such comparisons impossible is this not a case of malicious deception? It is interesting that many of the same people who oppose government interference because they favor a price-directed economy, defend the actions of entrepreneurs who make price comparisons impossible. A price-directed economy requires price-conscious consumers. How can consumers be price conscious when they are unable to determine readily what the price per unit of a product is?

The first step, then, toward increasing the justice of pricing techniques is to reduce the degree of deception practiced intentionally or unintentionally in our market place. This can be accomplished by considering the traditional rights of consumers which were well expressed by (Mrs.) Helen Ewing Nelson of the Consumers' Counsel to the Governor of California.¹¹ Mrs. Nelson reminds us that the consumer traditionally was allowed to examine the product by touching it, tasting it or observing it. With modern packaging techniques this is often impossible. Where it is impossible the consumer must be given detailed information as to the contents of a package, based upon known standards of quality, and of the meaningfully measured quantity contained inside the package.

The second traditional consumer's right to which Mrs. Nelson refers is the right to compare prices in terms of standard units of weight or measure. This requires that packaging not be in odd sizes, or that the price be expressed in terms of some standard unit of effectiveness. On some food items, a step in the right direction has been to express the number of servings in a container. Even here, however, there have been abuses. Few housewives would depend on getting much more than half the number of servings indicated on most products.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 624-625.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 622-623.

The third right of the consumer is to name the quantity he buys. This is clearly difficult with modern packaging, but standardization would also help this problem. Mrs. Nelson asks, "Would any consumer, given the choice, deliberately ask for a 5-1/2 ounces of potatoes, or 1 pint, 6 ounces of pancake syrup?"¹²

Mrs. Nelson sights as the final right of the consumer, the right to get what he paid for, if watchful. Selling a consumer a hearing aid by telling him that it is just like a radio and all he must do is put it into his ear and turn it on, is clearly contrary to this principle. This is especially true when the seller will not refund the purchase price if the consumer is not satisfied. Oregon's law would seem to provide a good lesson here. It requires that hearing aids be sold only by licensed people and with a money-back guarantee on the parts which are not particularly adapted to the buyer.¹³

Having suggested how to reduce deception and implement price comparisons, what about the price itself? The above discussion has suggested that the following questions need to be asked when evaluating a price:

1. What is the rate of profit on the product relative to other products?
2. Did the profits arise from competitive pricing or are they the result of a market controlled by relatively few firms?
3. What is the situation of the recipients of income from this product?
4. What is the situation of consumers of this product? Exploiting essentially high income people is both less likely and less burdensome than overcharging low income groups.
5. How is this product involved with the public interest? Exploitation of consumers of luxury goods is of less concern than overcharging for necessities.

Let us use a current example to illustrate this procedure. The Tennessee Valley Authority accepted bids for turbines in 1957. Three American firms submitted nearly identical sealed bids of 17.5 million dollars. A British firm bid 12 million. The British bid was accepted and T.V.A. asked the justice department to inquire into the reasons why United States firms consistently submit identical sealed bids, presumably separately determined, whenever T.V.A. purchases electrical equipment. The subsequent hearings and trials revealed that the electrical equipment producers were charging prices which were not only unjust but illegally established. The electrical companies screamed high labor costs at the same time as they asked labor unions to give them political support. The labor unions refused and it was soon demonstrated that while the American firms did have higher labor costs than the British firms, the difference was more than made up by the cost of insurance and freight involved in transporting the turbines to the United States.¹⁴

12. *Ibid.*, p. 623.

13. *Op. cit.*, *Hearing Aids*, p. 12.

14. John Herling, *The Great Price Conspiracy*, Washington, 1962, pp. 3-4.

The real difference was purely and simply an attempt to get an extremely high profit from a government agency.

The reaction of the corporate executives involved in this illegal activity was interesting and somewhat alarming. They were absolutely astounded that any judge would send business executives to jail for such a gentlemanly offense as price rigging.¹⁵ After all, the anti-trust act had been on the books for about seventy years and the only man to serve a jail sentence under it was Eugene V. Debs, a labor union leader.

Evaluating the turbine prices in terms of justice is hardly necessary now that the justice department has already received a conviction from the courts. Nevertheless, starting with the cost, it is clear that the cost of the turbines was about sixty per cent of the price quoted to T.V.A. The overall returns of the General Electric Corporation in 1957 at about 20 per cent on invested capital were clearly above the national median of 9 per cent for large firms, while those of Westinghouse were 8.9 per cent, and Allis Chalmers' six per cent.¹⁶ The profit on the turbines was to have been much higher than the overall profit, of course. That these profits arose out of a controlled market is now apparent. The stockholders and executives of the conspiring corporations are clearly in the upper income groups. The purchasers of T.V.A. services are now much better off than they were before T.V.A. but are generally not in the higher income groups. The turbines will serve a wide segment of the American public and the burden of the excessive prices would have been widely distributed to consumers throughout the area served by the T.V.A. The higher prices, had they been allowed, would have reallocated income in favor of the higher income groups.

The evaluation of this price-change according to welfare theorists requires knowledge of the indifference curves of electrical company stockholders and consumers of electricity. These innovations in "value" theory remain in the realm of unfilled economic boxes.

By using a simple equalitarian welfare criterion based upon the principle of diminishing marginal utility we could conclude that such a redistribution from lower income groups to higher income groups will decrease the total satisfaction in the community. Modern welfare theorists, however, are wont to deny that one can reach a conclusion concerning well-being except where one group is made better off with no others being made worse off. Some are willing to accept inter-personal comparisons of utility but few will allow us to add up individual satisfactions to determine the community's total welfare. Thus, the area of economics which offered the greatest hope in dealing with value systems, has become so cluttered with pedagogical devices from the graduate classroom that it is of little help in evaluating economic behavior.

It is not possible to evaluate all prices, even those in major in-

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; also John G. Fuller, *The Gentlemen Conspirators*, New York, 1962.

16. *Fortune*, July, 1958, pp. 133, 134.

dustries, in the course of this paper. It is possible to suggest, however, that justice would require a higher price for some products as well as lower ones for others.

The immediate reaction of some economists to these statements will be that any implementation of just prices will disrupt the price-directed allocation of resources. It is likely, however, that in those areas where such action is needed, prices are being directed, they are not directing. In those cases where prices continue to allocate resources on the basis of consumer votes, an evaluation of prices is likely to reveal that they are kept in line by competitive forces.

The proper motivation of businessmen is dealt with in Thomas Aquinas' fourth question about business ethics. It is addressed to the validity of commerce itself: "Whether in trading it is lawful to sell a thing for more than was paid for it?"¹⁷ Aquinas responds to this question positively, referring to the fact that commerce can benefit the community and, therefore, the people involved in commerce are entitled to a return sufficient to bring forth their services. He cautions such people, however, about losing sight of their basic objective, which is service to the community. He indicates that undertaking the exchange of goods for the sole purpose of the gain involved will not only cause the man to lose sight of the purpose of commerce, but of the purpose of life itself. The purpose of life is, of course, the primary concern of philosophy, and general agreement on this subject is difficult. William Fellner, Sterling Professor of Economics at Yale University expressed the resulting problem very well when he stated: "Few contemporary thinkers are unaware of its being contrary to human nature ('natural' in the time honored terminology) to regard the acquisition of exchangeable goods as the ultimate objective of life. Few would object to this statement. But formal reasoning about this vital problem is limited to specific groups, because such reasoning assumes acceptance of a formalized and authoritatively interpreted general ethical system. The modern Western world does not have the spiritual unity of medieval Europe."¹⁸

Professor Fellner's pessimism about the possibility of agreement on justice in our complex society is widely shared. Unfortunately, such pessimism usually results in inaction. We cannot agree concerning what should be said about God in our schools, so we insist that His name not be mentioned. The negative policy runs counter to our fundamental agreement but serves our superficial differences. So too in the case of prices, we cannot agree on what prices ought to be, so we assume that what they are is better than what they might be.

Is the search for agreement a futile one? To what law was Aquinas referring when he asked whether certain practices were lawful? His concept of the universe is usually called the natural law. The natural law is very much out of vogue among contemporary philosophers. This may be because it implies the existence of discoverable and immortal "truth." It also seems to some to contradict the theory of evolution. It

17. *Op. cit.*, Aquinas, pp. 13-15.

18. William Fellner, *Modern Economic Analysis*, New York, 1960, p. 7.

might be that a broader definition of the natural law would be more acceptable. Consider, for example, the definition given by John Cogley of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions:

"1) There is a nature common to all men—something uniquely human makes all of us men rather than either beast or angels; 2) because that 'something' is rationality, we are capable of learning what the general ends of human nature are; and 3) by taking thought we can relate our moral choices to these ends."¹⁹

While the use of the term "rationality" is bothersome, how different is Cogley's definition than the following statement by the well known humanist, Erich Fromm?

"Value judgments are applicable to man and his interests only. Such value judgments, however, are not mere statements of the likes and dislikes of individuals, for man's properties are intrinsic to the species and thus common to all men."²⁰

Acceptance of Aquinas' natural law is not essential to the establishment of criteria of equity in pricing. What is necessary is the admission that man is more than a beast and is capable of developing a system of justice. This is a view which most people find easy enough to embrace. Seldom, however, are we able to identify the way in which man is significantly different than other animals; the evasion is manifested by the statement that man is rational and other animals are irrational. I shall attempt a brief, but hopefully meaningful, discussion of this difference.

Whether or not one takes the book of Genesis literally, we have spent most of our efforts attempting to overcome the curse which was placed upon the first man, and upon his descendants, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." (Gen. 3,20) In dealing with man's struggle for survival, Adam Neanderthal Cro-Magnon was in the unenviable position of being first. He could learn much from his predecessors and contemporaries, the other primates, but he was very different, not being satisfied to remain a pawn in nature's game. As simply but well stated by the late Teilhard, de Chardin, "Animals merely know, but man knows he knows."

It is the possibility of progress within and between generations which sets man apart from other animals. It is also the possibility of improvement which causes man's economic problem to be something more than the logistics of survival. Most of man's struggles arise from his desire to overcome, rather than conform to nature. Man is not satisfied with a balance which only permits him an allocated role in a certain relationship with other species. Man uses nature, and when necessary he changes it, not only to provide the necessities of life, but whenever possible, the comforts of luxuries as well.

In the light of our magnificent technological progress it is inconceivable that we cannot improve on our contemporary distribution sys-

19. John Cogley, "Natural Law and Modern Society," *The Commonweal*, Jan. 11, 1963, p. 407.

20. E. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 27.

tem by establishing an effective method of scrutinizing the marketing of goods. We have often successfully modified the private enterprise system without abandoning its most useful allocative mechanism. Industrial jurisprudence which has accompanied the organization of labor; the agricultural program to soften the blow of technological progress on one segment of society; the regulation of food processing, banking, and transportation, to assure proper service without undue risk, are cases in point. Why not an agency to represent the consumers' interests in the distribution of the fruits of productivity. Consumers, as opposed to other economic interest groups, are notoriously neglected in the cabinet, at the bargaining table, and by Economists.

We don't need to reconcile all philosophical differences to have some standards for behavior. The existence of a system of laws evidences that as a fact. Neither is it necessary to have the government set all prices to achieve the goal of acceptable economic behavior. It is only necessary to have influential economists stop implying that there is magic in the market place which will serve the interests of justice, and to make decision-makers aware that the market is not a sacred cow behind which they may hide. The market mechanism is an allocative tool of society and those operating in it are accountable to the interests of the group which it was really designed to serve, namely, the consumer.

MR. KEYNES' OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL

In the deepest trough of the Great Depression, as he sat with international colleagues to see how this latest crisis of Western civilization might be surmounted, John Maynard Keynes brushed aside the technical questions which were agitating everyone else in the hall, and rose to insist that the basic problem facing the gathering was not an economic one at all, that the Depression would pass, as pass it must before the assaults of scientific industrial production, and that the thing to worry about was how the human race would behave once it got its hands on all the material wealth it was surely going to have. One-hundred years would tell the tale, he thought. His was a remarkably bold thesis, ill-suited to the times, but every day brings us renewed proof that Keynes was mining an intellectual vein of pure gold.¹

It is not that other thinkers had overlooked the problem, not at all; for we have the views of all the great religious leaders on the evils of self-indulgence, and the judgments of eminent philosophers and humanists, not to mention some towering figures in science; and of late we have been favored with several highly suggestive studies by sociologists working in the field of social mobility, of which our own Professor Chow is a leading exemplar.² Lord Keynes could speak with more assurance than his illustrious predecessors because they lived at a time when there was no possible way of assuring even a sufficiency of goods to everyone; the economic system simply did not permit it. These prophets had addressed themselves to all mankind, but it was only the lucky few—the aristocrats, the leisure classes of history—who could afford to pay attention. Everyone else was struggling just to get along from day-to-day. Keynes suggested that we take a close look at these plutocrats, these sons and daughters of Midas, and see what they had done with all that wealth. He thought that if the comfortable few of yesteryear had failed to rise to their opportunities it was hardly likely that the masses of modern times, once the industrial revolution had enriched them, would behave any better, and he asked—What are we going to do about it?

What indeed? The record, I think, is fairly clear. Granted that every leisure class of which we have knowledge managed to contribute something worthwhile to their respective civilizations, sometimes to all civilizations, remembering in particular their support of art and literature and the exemplary lives led by their best representatives and even by whole classes of aristocrats in the periods of growth, we see that the closing chapters are a dreary catalog of failure—failure to perform the important social services that had called them into being, failure to be anything but elegant drones or insensible exploiters, failure even to continue to exist, in most cases. We may pass over that aspect of the matter. Professor Toynbee has drawn together scads of evidence on the social failures of aristocracies. We may more profitably limit ourselves to one simple question. Did these people enjoy them-

selves? Was it all worthwhile? Keynes thought that most of them in his day suffered from boredom, the most subtle and demoralizing form of mental illness. He could as well have included the pampered grandees of previous ages, probably. Certainly they were threatened by boredom, constantly threatened by it. Sample biographies taken from the pack show that there were times when one more concubine, one more war, one more public office, one more of anything, was insufficient to alleviate the pain, and leisure became a curse.

Notwithstanding the appeal that a life of ease has always held for those who did not possess it, the evidence that the leisure classes of history were happier than the masses is far from conclusive. The tumultuous history of many such groups certainly indicates that sooner or later they became afflicted with a cosmic restlessness; either that, or found release only by losing themselves in sterile aesthetics, accommodating philosophies, or the cloister. Where are all these fine-feathered birds today? They are gone; the victims of themselves . . . casualties of history . . .

If there is evidence—and there is a great deal of it—that long before a workless Utopia had been reached the average American was already exhibiting some of the less healthy characteristics of the wealthy classes of bygone times, it must be asked if modern education had come to grips with the realities of life. If it is not proving possible to attain the *summum bonum* through the enjoyment of the goods we do have, what can we expect when the very word 'work' has become a lexicographical curiosity? When I went to school I was taught that juvenile delinquency was produced by poverty. Today we see well-heeled youngsters indulging in vandalism merely for the fun of it, just as in Alcibiades' day. How much leisure can be endured by a people who have never been taught how to use it? On the basis of the record, there is no good reason to suppose that 'things will work out for the best' when there is no prior agreement as to what the best is. Of one thing we may be sure: one does not find out about these things by training for a trade or profession. A very different kind of education is required.

Let me pause here to introduce some historical facts which are not, I think, in dispute. I have said some harsh things about aristocracies, and such is their notoriety that I do not feel obligated to pepper the page with examples, but I would not be understood to mean that aristocracies have not brought a great many desirable things into the world nor to deny that their record, on balance, is perhaps no worse than that of any other class of men. At the moment it is more pertinent to discuss how they maintained their good qualities (where they were able to maintain them), and here I must point out that the graceful attributes of so many aristocracies were not merely acquired, they were inculcated. When aristocracies first appear at one place or another in history they are commonly a rough bunch. The refinement and sophistication which characterizes them in the eyes of envious inferiors are a long time in making their appearance. By private instruction in the home or by formal instruction in the schools, these attributes were codified and passed along from one generation to the next. In many

instances a large part of education was given over to training for leisure.³ Without education, our young aristo might have been nothing but a thug in expensive clothes. (Such as can be seen on American streets today.)

To assume that the rising curve of leisure in modern times is one of those problems that solves itself automatically in the course of human evolution, without anyone having to do anything about it, is to be a lot more credulous than the despised aristocracies ever were. They knew better. It is true, certainly, that aristocratic education failed to achieve its objects, and leisure was badly misused in former times, but either the system was at fault or there was and is no solution whatsoever to the problems posed by idleness. Maybe there is no solution. Read the last act of Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* and judge for yourself. I will take it for granted that there is a solution, and that it is attainable by collective human ratiocination—by education, in short. Evidently most people agree with me, because nowadays the most utilitarian parent approves of his child's taking liberal arts courses in college if the result is to keep him off the streets before marriage and away from the bars after it—by leading him to a respectable hobby, perhaps. In truth, if one listens to all the speeches expended in the cause of liberal education and imagines that the speakers mean what they say, or understand what they mean, our present day educational system would seem to be dedicated almost entirely to preparing people for the dawning era of untrammelled leisure.

At the moment I see little indication that our system will overcome the shortcomings of previous ones and equip the masses for leisure more effectively than schools of ages past equipped the patricians. The principal emphasis in American education today is on vocational training, training, be it noted, for jobs that are doomed to disappear; yet it is not possible for an unbiased observer to believe that the solution lies in forcing students to concentrate on the liberal arts exclusively. The liberal arts in our day are disorganized and without an aim. Most of them are already gravely compromised by a dangerous and undignified flirtation with vocationalism. 'Training for citizenship' is usually regarded as the highest kind of training there is.

It seems to me that the future belongs to that race of people who are best educated in what is known as 'value theory.' In this field of inquiry the investigator endeavors to find out why particular ideas of 'good' and 'bad' come into existence, why they maintain themselves as the guidelines of society, and why they ultimately die out, as has been the case with almost every organized system of human values. Every civilization about which we have the requisite knowledge has been characterized by a value-system peculiar to itself. There has never been a time in history when all human beings believed that the same things were good, or true, or desirable. Historians have known for a long time that ideas do not come into favor because they are necessarily the best ideas, but because they are psychologically satisfying to particular societies at particular times. Naturally, there have been elements common to all civilized value-systems. One of the foundations underlying so many of them has been the necessity to

work for a living. Even the great religions presupposed a continuing toil on the part of most people. Qualify this requirement, and all value-systems dependent upon it begin to totter. That is where we are now.

The most celebrated thinkers in history normally confined themselves to the defining of values—hopefully the highest values. It was enough for them, and for their enthusiastic followers, that these values had at last been ‘discovered.’ It occurred to few of them that these proud discoveries were as often as not the natural and inevitable outcome of social conditions prevailing at the moment. It remained for modern philosophers, historians, and psychologists to demonstrate the subjective and relativistic coloration of all these promulgations. To many of us who are interested in the history of value-formation it appears at times that the only freedom the human race has is the freedom to have illusions about itself. Something of the sort was put down as a postulate by Spengler. I reject the notion, but I admit that the things which most people believe, they believe as it were accidentally.

The defining of values, a practice that dominated Medieval thinking and has impeded the natural evolution of the liberal arts ever since, needs to be supplemented by other methods of dealing with the quest for the good life. The Communists know it well, and this is one of their greatest advantages; the leaders of the Roman Catholic church did not know it, and this ignorance was one of their greatest disadvantages. Recently the Fathers have seen the light, and practices everywhere employed by Catholic laymen but hitherto denounced as valueless have turned out to have value after all. The published proceedings of the ecumenical council at Rome make ironical reading for historians. The American people, who, next to the Chinese, are the greatest dogmatists in the modern world, have yet to learn that no society has a corner on good values. Americans believe that their historical experience proves that many elements in their culture are of the highest value, not just for themselves but for all mankind, and this could be true; but they give equal support to values which other societies have rejected and that they themselves are in the process of rejecting, although their infatuation with fossilized definitions prevents them from seeing what is happening. Every which way we turn, we students of historical value-formation, we see ignorance on the one subject which ought to occupy man most fully in the classrooms of the world. It is a virtual certainty that most of the Great Truths which antagonistic champions are brandishing before one another today will sound like glorious nonsense to their descendants a hundred years hence. (They seem a little flat already, to some of us.)

Someday, may it be soon, we are all going to realize that the things men believe to be good are arrived at by a **process**, that this process is discernible through empirical analysis, and that once the analysis has explained the process we will, for the first time, have some idea of where we are. Once we know where we are, we can perhaps make rational choices as to where we want to go. One may hope that on that glad day we will unhesitatingly throw into the garbage can most of the supposedly eternal values which have divided the

race of men since Adam, and that what is left over will turn out to have been well worth the effort of looking for it.

The whole basis of modern value-systems is falling into decay, with the most unpleasant consequences to those who do not know why or how and who cannot, therefore, orient themselves to the change. I am thinking not only of the eventual disappearance of gainful employment, but of far-reaching changes in human physiology, voluntary or otherwise, consequent upon certain sensational discoveries of biologists in recent years. With this new laboratory data before us, I wonder how much longer we will be able to maintain a belief in unchanging 'human nature.' It is becoming somewhat risky to base one's beliefs and conduct on the assumption that Man is today what he was in Aristotle's time. I have, for example, read writers who assert that sexual practices since the advent of circumcision have greatly altered from what they were before, owing, it is urged, to reduced sensitivity in the male genitalia, and we are asked to agree that the entire neuro-psychic apparatus of man has been modified as a result, with inevitable effects upon thought and upon the values that thought invents. Whether this is quackery or profound truth, I do not know. I have little reason to doubt what Lord Keynes said about work or what my colleague, Professor Noice, said about biology.⁴ One irresistible conclusion follows from the warnings issued by trained thinkers of this sort: the values we live by will have to be reconsidered, and one good way to do it is to see how values are born in the first place. To this task all serious students of life must give increasing attention.

NOTES

1. I believe my recollection is correct that he delivered this speech to a congress of European economists, probably at Brussels, in 1931 or 1932. The only printed version I know of is in the form of an essay first published in an English periodical in 1931 and later in his book entitled *Essays in Persuasion*. A 1963 reprint of the latter is available in paper from the W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., of New York. I am discussing the last essay in the book. Incidentally, his suggestion that economics was a discipline doomed to disappear for want of purely economic questions to investigate is finding occasional but important support. See especially Karl Polanyi, et. al., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1957).

2. Yung-teh Chow, *Social Mobility in China; Status Careers Among the Gentry in a Chinese Community* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966).

3. The Greek word for leisure is the root of most Western words meaning 'school.' -Edward D. Myers, *Education in the Perspective of History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 285.

4. In the Spring (1963) issue of *Convivio*, pp. 71-5.

Nancy Leah Berg

THE FEATHERED SOUL and other poems

I HAVE HEARD

Praying to the memory of God
suddenly when the last star fell
I remembered blue eyes
filled with tears
and a star, clean and alone
which seemed amazed
as it fell.

Praying to the memory of God
silently in the black night
I remembered a pale smile
flickering over a shadow
and a clear song
from a tall willow.

Praying to the memory of God
loudly in the sunlight
I remembered with horror
the death of Christ
and how someone said
he might have been God.

With blood drenched wings
Dripping dark wet drops
Upon the smashed skull
And wounded eyes of man,

God wings through the cloud
Of death's scattered dust,

Lights on the sun, breathes
The last sigh of hope
Over the war torn earth,

Then continues his flight
Through time and flesh.

The fluttering wings of soul
then and now more like birds
wandering in the deep grass
lost to the sky and the wind
lost in their own meandering
give one last frantic shiver
for spirit's freedom,
then lie silent.

The succulent fruit of summer
and the slow sleepy dawn
of the innocent sun
wantonly seduce the lips to curve
and smile in lewd imaginings
silencing the deep down cry
and terrible singing
of the feathered soul.

• • •

Rip through my eyes,
Scarlet sunset.
The incarnate spirit,
Slaughtered, maimed,
Still bewildered,
Lingers, staring,
Still in pain.
You, sun descending,
What offers the rock,
The rain, the tree,
The silent cunning?

• • •

Great ecstasy of fear
Hover over falling,
The wings falter, fear
Of soaring, mythlike, over
The existence of a world
In which wherever
If ever, God must, then
And always, wait for us
To evolve toward Him.

Symphonic poem
Particular to holiness
And the special grace of love
Silence the universe!

The birth of hallowed harmony,
A symphony of compassion
Revealed, yet torn
And born clamorous as the sea
Wave upon wave violently
Washing upon the sand.

In a rare tranquillity
Found only among stars,
Create, O beautiful wanderer,
A song for the finite voice
Of unsolaced doves,
Innocent, but without wings.

BAREFOOT THROUGH THE WARM GRASS and other poems

To whom now sings the sparrow
his muted song of sorrow —
Long have the winter winds
abolished signs of life.
Long before silence entered
on bare black branches
staring at the moon.
A dirge for untimely death
which stalked the summer
without mercy, was sung
for lazy leaves, which hung
lifelessly, laughingly
teasing the wind;
for rippling lake water
succumbed to ice;
Will then, a dirge, suffice —
a lamenting echo,
by a lonely sparrow —
No, not a song but a cry
and wail of remorse
from one who regrets
not having once walked
barefoot through the warm grass.

Weary and calm in that late hour
Of summer when leaves
Threaten at every purple hour
To abandon the trees
My eyes close
Upon an image of neglect:
The last cared for flower
Dying without a funeral,
A futile attempt to recall
The death of every friend
In the vague grey hour
Of love's end.
Forgotten the spirit to spirit dance
Lost in the cold indifferent glance
Of ambition and ruthless intellect
The fire, the sun
And the breeze grow cool,
If I dream winter's dream
Oh God
Let it be beautiful.

• • •

Flurry of clouds
Falling apart, desegregating,
Into sections innumerable
And diverse, rain down
A moral to pervade
A kind and compassionate
Slap in the face
Rain down dew to cover
The dry sterile earth
Under my crippled toes,
Spill over the hole
Left by a jealous wound,
Fill up and pervade
The rivers of memory
Wound and winding
Lost in the forest
Of gnarled apple-thoughts,
Sky fall, sky rain,
Sky drown, and remain
Swirling without
Never within. I renounce
The search and the lie
Questing after awareness,
Futile and bitter hypocrisy,
That, spawned by hope,
Withers my reaching hands.

• • •

How a soft thing like a flower
Can grow in a soul, and blossom
With thorns, like any rose,
And color the grey world

Like stones moss covered,
Changing the aware
And the becoming
Of a universe,
Do I know? Not. Nothing. No.
And a poem crouched
And leaped into my lap
And purred and scratched
With affection, my heart,
And I killed it with
A misplaced word, a lie,
A terror undisguised
At sentiment and tangled
Wires of memory
Once blown to hell
By a machine, God, could
The shock of forty thousand
Atom bombs so kill a soul?

• • •
In solemn sighs of mystery
Moaning life's myriad themes
The wind whispered a melody
A song not of dreams
Nor illusions of beauty
More like a memory of death
A child's wonder
And sudden breath
A symphony of flowers
Growing wild under the sun
Or the soft sound of summer showers
Raining down.

• • •
In the evening after hours
When behind yellow windows
Living rooms contain love,
As the moon sullenly awaits
The first cloud's passing,
And the wind comes up,
I walk, and walking
Wonder, at the lonesome
Look dogs have, strolling
In the alleys and under
Large looming trees,
Wonder at the children
Sleeping now, or fabricating
Dreams; and tables laden
With the memory of taste,
And, too, I wonder
Where I will find a place
To read under a soft lamp
Or chew apples loudly
And disturb no one.

SING YOUR BAWDY SONGS OF SLAVERY

Condescend, if you will, satanic fiend,
To be the gentleman of matches and slipped sleeves;
Bend and twist my arms into holes
Bloody with sweat, how long told
To be tears. Formulate
And present a tale over eggs
To placate the fluttering tongue
And maniacal laughter, the wild eyes
And malicious heart; soothe
If you must, this putrid hour
Into a milk soft white wool
Comforter to cover and surround
My white body, and put
Each hand, one by one,
Around my heart.

APAISEMENT

In the persistent
Terror of the world
The pitiful bird
Weeps alone.

You hope you have
The power to love
The naked trees
Appear forlorn.

Careless old fool
Do you, like all,
Think that the earth
Is doomed to die?

The unjust rain
Ruins the land
You watch the stars
Drop from the sky.

The quiet morning
Is grey as stone
Many approach
Their death alone.

In the persistent
Terror of the world
The pitiful bird
Cannot fly.

Consider the flower:
Strive toward the very
Heights of the great mountain
Where blue flowers grow wild,
Become silent
And contemplate the power.

When you walk
Toward the cliff
On the white sand
I am your brother
Give me your hand and run
Toward the wind.

Do not ignore
The Spirit within you,
Let it be gentle
And wind like the river
Toward the sea.

As the black rain
Falls on your window
You are alone with pain
I am your tears.

The warm breast of him,
The soft hair softer
Under my chin, and
His long white body,
Were, Thank God, beautiful.
And, because it was a dream,
There was no pain;
Even should it be sensual
In the moments of reaching,
And the lulled melancholy
Later remained;
Yet when I consider
The coupling of power,
The glory involved,
What necessary shame
Might one endure,
How could I not
Lie in silence waiting?

Tender caress
You enfold my heart
Like a green leaf;
You are the center
Of my faith
The power to which
I surrender belief.

Command my soul
To become a flower
With tears and sighs
Contain the hour.
Such a mind — to weave
An intricate world
The vine of my thought
Is never unfurled.
My hand is locked
In your hand
My eyes in your look
Remember the night
On the soft grass
When you finally took
My soul to bed
Will I comprehend freedom
When I am dead?

The free spirit
Is crucified
Let it be known
That history lied.
Let the fettered child
Caged in his bed
Roam the hills wild
Before he is dead.
Let the nails be deep
Lest I plunge the knife
I do not weep
For your wicked life.
My heart is wild
With the power of hate
The heart
You wantonly violate.

In relation to the stars
In the black sky
And to the moon
What am I?
The uncertain power
Like a small bird
Shivers, sings,
Is seldom heard.
The inner world
Of fierce desire
The unknown heart
Consumed by fire.
What are these?
Cry to God,
Child of the earth,

The universe hears
With gentle mirth,
The great Being smiles
At your pain
He cannot become
Human again.

Frantically stumbling
Through the labyrinth
(corroded with impotence
the many-ceilinged
multi-walled cellar)
Which slothful figures
Of mortality built:
Gilt-edged, tin and tinsel,
Great hovering beams
And laced nets-webs, rather-
I sought the power
In its secret source;
Bellowing mutely
In baffled protest,
I tripped often over
Obscene renderings
Hieroglyphed on the membranes
Of my mind.

I shudder in humility
When I sorrowfully remember
That I once thought I was,
Well, God (I admit it.)
And shirked the responsibility
One should, as God,
Rightfully accept.
But I, in perversity,
Sought to destroy
The very realms of glory
And magnificence
Which had, in a delusion,
Been the spewing out
And mishapen formation
Of my power.

With the clean dawn
And merciful advent
Of the real world,
There were many moments
-sad and terribly calm-
When I knew, that although sunlit,
The corridors of humanity
Were also long, and yet
Carpeted with warm thought,
And here and there, a window.

I begin the slow walk
Through shadows
Alone and dreaming
Leaves fall, stars fall
Up goes the white moon
And stares down
The grass shudders
Under my feet
Lightly though I tread
Wandering to nowhere
I arrive
Take my hand, love
Come out of the darkness
Where you hide
Can you be dead
Even though the tide
Thunders on the rock
And the rain makes sounds
On the grey walk
What power prevails?

As i amble through life's pages
i see all with my great glass
there are people and people
some are truly happy
others make them so
but what of those in this magnum opus
who seem but are not
all are fooled but they
their duplicity is choking them

i was one of these
my joy was making others happy by acting happy
it was like a shadow
only with you when bright light is near
the light is now gone
eternity has it to claim

what snuffed that precious beam?
Some careless words and empty thoughts
or was it something more remote?

The light then spoke to me in a strange tongue
telling a tale of the vital tomb
it said we are all encased within its walls
to each his own, yet universal

when the spark told of this
i feigned belief, wary of its beams
then as time traveled through its rays
it burned upon my consciousness
the radiance was true

i felt the dungeon's cracks
the vault was real
but here is something strange
on one wall hung a door of glass
through it i could gaze out of this cell
not too far but far enough
i could see what i had pleaded for
i scratched my finger's bare bones
trying to escape that prison
hoping to capture what i had once seen and felt

then the pane began to blur
i cried, i needed help
to my God i turned
He spoke and said—
"Look to the key of all"
i pressed hard to see this key
there it was for all to see
was i blind before?

On this key was written LOVE
the glass blurred more as my eyes strained
i had to see the inscription on the key
at last all was clear

this key had an odd sort of shape
like a warm, bleeding heart
traced on its sides was an equation
the equivalents were oddly written in some strange script
but amazing to me, all was clear
that light was the first part
it was burned and scarred with pain
the following portions were much more simple
but that light kept reappearing
my respect it had won long before
i began to like that light of hope
at first i screamed loudly that i didn't
because it had showed the part of me i feared—
my true self
i had lied to me
false i cannot be for that is what kills the light
and causes the key to slip from my hand

the key told me to love life
this i said was easy
oh, but i was so wrong
because at first i was not quite ready
but now the formula is clear
it is easy when all is understood
it said to accept for what is

the key is turned ever so slightly
just a touch at a time
soon the door will open
and the joys will be mine
Happiness will be mine to conquer!

— ON WINTER —

Winter's the fiend, it killed all.
The hearts of trees have stopped
their cold hands dropping the leafy mail.
Life is gone, its grave is dug.
Flesh no longer preys,
the clock rusted.
The sinful spell is cast—
dark of night encloses all.
Eyes of life fade away, forever tight.
The breath no longer steams.
Of all wild is tame, shadows growing.
Released are the spirits of once life;
echoing never.

Trees cracking with pains of death,
hearts ripped from lifeless bodies.
Slowly the demon sucks away all life.
Winds carry the assassin's laugh throughout.
Victims widely scattered, whole quiet.
Vapor expended, the being ceases.

Wait, faintly a whispering brook tells,
there is life in this house of dead.
What is that current saying?
Asleep? A simple sleep?
Not everlasting dead?
Will amends be made too late

— THE SOUND —

Softly I hear it calling
the fickle tune laughing about.
Had I but Einstein's wit
or Skelton's sense,
I might understand

Now flirting with my mind,
will it never cease?
I say, stop-stop, for all the pain;
then cry, more-more, for all the joy.
Charmed by its tainting strain.
Its score scribbled on wrinkled paper.
My thirst never quenched,
I stand . . . anxiety-watching-listening

Tap the cymbals;
drums rolling-expressing.
Bang the triangles . . .
Get most of all.
Stab to the hilt, not swiftly but sensing;
taste its blood-assimilate.
Feel its hot breath upon your face,
marrow and knotted muscle warming.
Hear its tune?
To hear—encounter . . .

A NIGHT VISIT FROM WILDE, OSCAR

As I was sleeping the other night
A strange dream came to me.
I thought I saw great Oscar Wilde
Come back to visit me.

He wore a lavender velvet suit
And stood at the foot of my bed.
I blinked and then stared and remarked, "That's wild."
"Don't get smart," he flatly said.

"I knock myself out to materialize
And you lie there and pun yourself silly!"
He raved around at the foot of my bed
And brandished a wilted lily.

"There isn't much time," he muttered,
And he turned on his heel and sped
With a curious flounce across the room
And dropped down on the side of my bed.

"Well, now that you're here," I said,
"What do you want? Is there something you'd like to know?"
"Yes, yes," he said quickly with a doorward glance,
"Are they sleeping, or did they thoroughly go?"

Now I'd read of Wilde, Oscar in various books
That told how he'd travelled around
And lectured against the "Philistines,"
Whom I thought he referred to now.

"Oh, they're worse than before—they've got video sets
That blaring on every hand,
Pour forth soap commercials and blithering trash
On a wasted and withering land.

There aren't very many of the stalwarts left—
We're a strong but diminishing clan.
But we'll . . . Fella, just what do you think you're doing
With that roving and astral hand?"

"Cut the poems," he hissed, his face close to mine;
His hand moved with practiced dexterity.
"I've forgotten that stuff; this is all we have left.
Now, be a good kid 'cause there's just you and me . . ."

"Foul spirit, begone!" with a lofty wave
I said, and he faded away.
Then I fluffed up the pillow and pounded my ear
Until twenty past twelve the next day.

Getting up, I went to a reference book
And looked up Wilde, Oscar again.
There he was, looking thwarted and totally miffed
Knee to elbow and fist against chin.

Wilde, Oscar; Wilde, Oscar; I don't know about you.
Sure—you weren't all peaches and cream.
But great author or no, I can tell you this much:
You read better than you dream!

AN OCTOBER POEM FROM THE LAFAYETTE LUNCH

Bituminous out of the railyards
Black and waterous towers rise
Against the counterrevolutionary smoke of clouds—

“They tell me this rheumy old
guy came up out of Washington
conducted a brief investigation
of the Dakota Territory in the
summer of '86 but had to give
up. It seems that the . . .”

Cracking and re cracking themselves the
specters of bright season
Gather beneath the slowly turning feet
To observe the starktacular stillnesses
Of box-elder corpses
Dangling from the feet of crows—

“the road dust was too much for
him. Caused cataracts. O they'll
tell you it's from the limestone
and doesn't bring them on at all
but I've seen it and I can tell you . . .”

A snowflake
alone.
The others are coming.

“You take Johnny Big Bear.
When Johnny first came to
Dakota his eyes were perfect
I mean . . .”

Silences descending
On a withered land.

“perfect . . .”

A May Poem:
SUBURBIA NOCTURNE

A dog barks somewhere and up and down the street it looks
as if the pine-shrubs will line up perfectly again this year.
Infant oaks stand spiderly on the twilight boulevard—
The mechanism of their supporting pegs and strings.
Around them, the insane War on Crabgrass is advancing on all fronts.
And somewhere across the rows on rows of homes, a dog is barking.
Down the street, the kids shriek and run, imitating machine guns.
The Battle of Forest Lane nears an end as supertime discharges
deplete the forces and straggle them home in visions of Europe,
Korea, and the Pacific.
A dandelion in the lawnmower dusk.
In the street, my neighbor passes on his new Honda. He does not wave.
Onion news of assorted hotdishes emerges from kitchen screendoors
and mingles with the damp and the grass clippings.
Streetlights wink on and a dog barks somewhere.
A late-shift meadowlark looks about him and whistling a last few
hurried notes flies away, leaving his wire vacant—
Already the soft fluorescence of television is visible in some
windows.
Incinerator smoke. The beagle has peed on his paper again
and they're burning it now.
Inside the house, two light yellow pies bake in the oven's lunatic
heat.

**COMMUNIQUE FROM THE AMBASSADOR
OF THE UNBORN
TO THE WORLD AT LARGE**

When on the conference table's darkling plain
You clash your ideologies and vie
For leverage on our blood and brains and squint-
ing at each other's words through jaundiced eyes,

Claim the obligation to hand down
To all posterity of Man a vast
Republic's land or a Marxist-Leninist sky—
The alternative is death. But what bequest

Can will us things already ours by right?
Green hills of Earth were never Man's to give.
But if you must bequeath a token slight
That legend of your thunder ever live,

Then leave to us, the future sons, the un-
burnt powder of your silent, rusting guns.

A September Poem: FOR MIKEL

In the dream country, a little stream is flowing—
Flowing to a place where beneath a tree a maiden
Touches it with her shadow and finding it pleasant,
Pauses with her finger to trail a wedge of geese
In the ripples of reflected sky. In the yellow
Summer weather of a Mesabi afternoon,
Mikel, half-smiling, dreams the dreams
Of a young girl that shall ever remain
The secret of herself and a tiny stream
That flows in that sweet country.

On such days as this, perhaps, all journeys are begun—
Journeys so subtle that the travel is hardly noted
Until you arrive . . . so it was with us.
Drifting inexorably toward each other, our paths
Were joined in October, when from the Autumn sunlight
In your hair you wove for me a dream . . .
Tiny girl, how you have filled my heart!

The seed was sown in harvest, but the blossom
Held back too long. Perhaps that is why
Our love slumbers now and its rest at times is fitful,
For only time can awaken it.
My love is longer than time, Dear Heart,
And more brave than any black of night can quiver.
The dark is upon us now, Mikel.
But grey streaks are lining an eastern sky
And I'll wait for you in the morning.

MOONBIRD — AUGUST

Under dark leaden sheets of a sleepless night,
Observe the musty turning and turning
Of endless ceiling and unknowable shadowing walls . . .
From somewhere in August the moonbird begins its long journey
On muffled wings to this very house . . .
And deep within the humus heart of earth, I feel them stirring:
The eyeless and numberless dead.
Those terrible forces whose ranks we must join,
Vast as expanses of moonlit grass,
Legion as dust-motes in shafts of moonlight,
That stand naked within us, in all the earth . . .
A chubby, small hand clutches a picked flower
And our bodies are crushed in its folds;

A tiny horse drinks from a flowing well
And our blood rushes down his unsuspecting throat . . .
That horrible shrieking in the earth,
In that one mad hour of the night we hear it . . .
The bones of our own are calling to us—

Do not answer!

The moonbird has ended its long night's journey
And black wings are rattling amongst the eaves.
I must rise up to let them in . . .

BLACK CINEMA:

Being a short-short
odyssey that took place in
November of 1963

I

Having bent a last foot of spaghetti deftly
Around my fork, I wiped my mouth
And rode due north out of darkest Minneapolis
In search of Billy and Jack.
On a borrowed cycle I crossed the border
And found the deep, burning eyes,
The bitter hair of Canadiennes
In St. Boniface, where the beds flap at both ends.
Boldwink, hoodwink in St. Boniface
With your hips like pile-drivers and the clink of death
In your locks. But the eyes.
O the eyes.

II

"J'arrive arriver arriver a' la bonne
Heure," she had said. I don't remember why.
But late. Much too late. In the silent streets
The megaphones echo like a gargling giant.
Shutting the bike off at the hotel—
A ghostly squadcar passes in the brownstone silences.

III

The apparition of a flaming drake
Beyond the topmost towers of the city;
Far below, a sign reads, "JAZZ,"
But I hear no music. The musicians are scratching
And pulling at their drawers where they thrust and roll
With the three-way Annies of the Marlborough Hotel
From whence I walked all night and coughed
In the puddle alleys of sidestreet Winnipeg,
Looking at the sky. The murdering sun

Knows nothing of this dark movie.
While Appollo snores in the bottom of his mighty
Chariot, I have observed the stars
In their furious fancies eating each other.

IV

What with the great grey bitch of dawn
Tearing her monstrous wounds in the sky,
The grating and all-consuming garbage
Trucks have begun their end-theme now.
The black cinema draws near to a close.
Already the sun is replacing the dirt
On the buildings . . . Goodbye the little mice.
I shall miss them—the little mice
Who run in the blackside streets on their
Tiny claws, the claws that always hide
Beneath their feet and tick against the pavement.
Rippleout. Cut. Fadeout. Dissolve.
End it any way you like.
We shan't see these stars again for some time.
What with the creeping shadfly dawn
Drawing its bright curtain across
The top, hiding us from their wars.
Sunlight corrodes the delicate mysteries
Of night, leaving only the dingy tribunal
Of plateglass commerce and milktruck reality.

V

But Jack MacHeath, Billy Miller and I—
Wild alliance of sons of thunder,
Who mighty in the grass of Minnesota
Were knockers-down of the Canadian Ace
And dusters of the pants of Manitoba.

VI

Night and the final crossing of borders.
We rode from the wildnorth with the wind at our backs
While November's wintry sword was swinging so
Close you could smell the steel in the air.
We rode to the south through the roary night
And stopping in Fargo, I watched them go out
Down 81 south. Then hail and farewell:
Disappearing like snowflakes falling on the dark river . . .

John Gidmark

Come now and sit by me
On the floor against the couch
Cross-legged or as you like
And for many cups of coffee
We'll watch each other sip and swallow
And smiling from cheeze-and cracker-crumbed lips
We'll talk of how we like to sit this way
Shoulders touching

SHOULDERS TOUCHING

And when I kiss behind your eye
You'll quickly run your finger down my nose
Resting it for a moment on my lip
Smiling what you know

The sun was orange on the horizon
When they had arisen to cross the lake
And now hand in hand in the morning sun
They felt years older
Than those who would eat the berries for breakfast
A hundred a handful

PROSE POEM

SEVEN-THIRTY TASSEL GOLD

Seven-thirty tassel gold

Lay likewise glowing on everything green
Cloudlike blend

Contrast was contrast (of contrasts)

(Sorrow of departing

Joy of returning)

(Joy of departing for returning Sorrow of returning after departing)

Till catalyst headlights
Dazzled the home-bound bus window song
Up into glistening eyes

WHISPER WITH FAINTLY TREMBLING EYES

Whisper with faintly trembling eyes
Something into my fist
And my eyes will tremble faintly
As I wait to open it

Delicate crystal eyelids
Closing over softly shouldered nose
With a trust only breatheable

REVELATION

A kiss for the straying sympathetic hair
Resisting the lifting
Of frail frustrated lashes
And yet, a kiss for the eye that prevails!

An August sky laid gently
Easterglow
Upon my shoulders and eyes

EASTERGLOW

Love revealing new loves
My soul ascending lovely
Into jingle

ON A TRAIN

I

He is the night over the river
And the ocean depth in infinity.

He is where hoarse voices order
At empty cafes
Beneath charred lamposts.

While he remembers the lunging phallic of the steel mill glow,
The dawn breaks
Spent
After the coupling of night and day.

II

Then come mornings of joy
Instants of glowing brick heights and deserted streets
These are the touch of her fingertips at the quitting emptiness.
A mouth buried in long hair inhales all of this.

III

But this is nothing in the face of burnt autumn leaves
And an impotent fear of impotence is a limpness inside.
You run from your loves chasing frail leaves that rot in cold rain.
After spring's wit and summer's absurdity this sad mulch is covered
By the howl and horror of snow.

IV

But Nirvana beckons beyond love past the cosmos
The budha is obese
Stoic
Only the diamond glows.

FROM A WINDOW AT LINDAU

Walls as old as death fly into the teeth
of a mountain wind
palming the slate lake

A reader of Haiku a western bench sitter
is disturbed
his insides race
are not suspended

At night from a room above his eyes are drawn
over the
slashed
dented
path of light
from a lighthouse

Generaling the fortress it clenches its gauntleted fist
to God
and the void above turns its black
only the sardonic twinkles of seigers from a far shore
answer the challenge

Eyes suspended in glass shock back
they are lonely
in depth one cubic centimeter of lake.

ROCKS

Eyes admiration softened
She travels his Quixotic verbals
A verdure spirit greenly in love
But for the moment

Depths are all infinite
Mountains are rock
Monuments are of mountains
Of mountains are Roccoco palaces
Rock is perverse

"To know rock is of little consequence neon tantillizes it is immediate."
She sighs disdainig the modest to knight him.

"There might be a unity of two minds on a raft"
The softness is not arrested but transfixed on rock.

THE RUSSIAN

Austere, sensual; ascetic, committed.
Ascent to — asylum.
Smoke washing glass.
They had the glare of the sun on the buffalo chips
of Prufrock's Waste Land.
These two diamonds glinted from their cage in a skull.
Even the mystic's
trans-luce-cendence.
These were his eyes
Dostoyevski's
When i talked to him at Barney's he knocked over his beer glass
then she came
to chase him out with a broom.

MAN IN SEARCH

There are coves in Atlantic City
with oaken tables and glasses
where fingers print on
sticky liquer.
Abstract pantingexplode out of the black
and wan wishing washed faces
look for peace.
Overheard at a cove.
Let's leave, I want to be alone.
You can leave without me and be alone.
I can't.
What?
I will think and then I'm no longer alone.
You are confused.
I know that's why we must go.
Aren't you confusing my body with your soul?
He left to confront a similiar entity.
He seemed to be confusing his immortalities.

THE IMBROGLIO

The coffee table now sustains
An archipelago of stains.
The imbricated islands lie
Mosaically, without a sky.
There is no plying fishing boat
To fix its trade here, just remote
And flat invisible seas,
Around invented Hebrides.
The world we know cannot contrive
A world so dead it is alive,
That hazarded it still puts an
Incommunicable safeness on.
But I have made, and made, possess
A world that is preposterous,
Invented tragedy by O,
Odysseus, by what below
Is only made. And made by me
Inviolable, invisibly.

Margo Larson

**AT COFFEE OR
APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA**

I come from conversation about women.
How they cannot be friends, finally.
How they destroy each other, and are sad.
How they create biologically and verbally and, in short, are not
Composers.

It's time to spread the rot.
Of how they compose their lives, not musically,
But like a great strange garden which sits out the winter
Unharmd.
Of how they pull life together when men wrest it apart.
Trash. Nobody believes it.

Men at tables must be using this conversation.
It has been heard before. Phyllis McGinley is no proof to me.
She makes a cake and shoves it in the oven.
She writes a poem, quickly, between coffee and supper.
She takes the cake from the oven and pronounces it done.

Women in high heels discuss literature and how to teach,
Then scurry to the bank in time for check blanks
Which they forgot to get, yesterday.
The day passes—filing folders are gathered and sorted—
Large Ford headlights tear holes into the darkness going home.

WEATHERING

The ambient hold of elements seemed slight
Seemed graceful, aiding Adam. Eden lost,
Cold truth devises swords and sighs by night
And light, that hurt and show my manhood's cost.

For, now, the strangest consequence is this:
Not endless hunger of the skin and soul
For ancient unappreciated bliss,
Plain ordinary air which held them whole

And not this thin antagonist I hold,
In pain, away from my mortality—
Nor any other less surprising cold
Enhancement of my friability.

No, evidential Paradise is learned,
We live it witless of no grace we earned.

