

Some Secrets

GERALD STERN

Gerald Stern was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., on February 22, 1925. He did his undergraduate work at the University of Pittsburgh and earned his M.A. at Columbia University in 1949. He is the author of *Rejoicings*, *The Pineys*, *The Naming of Beasts*, *Lucky Life*, and *The Red Coal*. *Lucky Life* won the Lamont Award in 1977 and *The Red Coal* the Melville Cane Award in 1982. A recent dramatic poem, *Father Guzman*, won the Bernard F. Connors Prize, given by the *Paris Review*. He is married to Patricia Stern, and his children are Rachel and David.

I

I have always admired the relationship between younger artists and older ones, and when I read about the schools and the dear lofts and the desperate sofas where the one held the other's hand or pressed a cold washrag to his head, I have a certain envy that I was never one of them, neither the young taker nor, later, the giver. It's even a source of embarrassment to me—at interviews, for example—when I am questioned about my *origins* and find myself stammering or overelaborating, trying desperately to account for myself, longing to be a branch of some tree, a leaf somewhere with clear veins and a regular shape. It may be that I am just being taken in by the silly morphologists, who after all make a living from branches, and other poets have also walked around without masters, holding their own disembodied heads against their chests like weird creatures out of Bosch, but when I remember *The Lives* I remember, case after case, two faces bowed over a text, two hearts watching a river together, or a dirty sunset. Of course, now that I've come through it all unscathed, or with

very few scars showing, I am a little proud of my terrible isolation and even delight a little in its mystery, as if it were the result of some master plan, and certainly my poetry has resulted from it, but it would have been nice, I realize now, to have had a little help, to have had a sense of some nourishment somewhere, however tenuous or even symbolic it was.

I make it sound as if I suddenly emerged like an unknown blossom in some incredible Alp, or burst full-grown out of the head or thigh of some Eskimo god, biting my own way through the great caul. After all, I did have school and books and friends and family and place and identifiable decade. Probably my "separateness," if I can call it that, had a great deal to do with my own biology and my own history, with a certain shyness and a certain secrecy, coupled with a kind of arrogance, although that isn't exactly the right word, that made me unwilling to submit at the same time as I was too distant, too modest even, to do so. I think this is accurate, though it sounds terribly like mutterings from a couch. And I guess it's no accident that I use the word "submit" to describe my connection with the nonexistent master. Certainly it wouldn't be that word that Hart Crane would use as he thought of his dear Walt or his dearer Arthur, and if it was submission that Robert Lowell was engaged in on Allen Tate's front lawn, or Allen Ginsberg on W.C.W.'s side porch, or Pound in the Provençal room or Whitman in the Emerson room, or Rimbaud behind the smoking revolver, there were no apologies and no agonies. It may be that for me the issue is simply that I did not have one great influence, one master, but a number, even an endless number, and that's what's causing my confusion, and certainly, like everyone else, I did have a great number of influences, but I don't think that's the case. Rather I think it's the case that I'm not accountable as the result of my apparent influences, except in the most obvious ways. The Left, for example, has been an influence on me, as it's been an influence on dozens of other writers, from Williams to Auden to Rukeyser to God knows whom. Each has used it in his or her poetry, or been used by it, in a particular way. But to identify my connection with the Left, mostly tenuous, even sometimes a little sentimental and nostalgic, does not identify in any significant way my poetry. It identifies my sentiment, it shows a little the nature of my loyalty, it says something about my history—and

these are important things—but it is not a critical element in my writing. Likewise, Judaism has been an influence on me. But there, too, my connection has been a little tenuous and sometimes nostalgic. That is, the connection with my writing. Although, in that case, the historical *idea* of the Jew as an eternally stubborn, hopeful, and dreaming creature has been an influence, as have been some of the mystical texts, albeit I use those texts as a kind of midwife and secret metaphor for my own inclinations, and use the Jewish texts, as opposed to, say, Buddhist ones, as much out of loyalty as out of belief.

If I were to explore other apparent, even “obvious,” influences on me, I think I might arrive at the same conclusion. Perhaps I am saying that I want to discount ideological or formal influences and find the “true” ones in my own personal, accidental history: the city I happened to live in, or being the victim of anti-Semitic slurs and physical abuse all during my early childhood—until we moved into a Jewish neighborhood when I was ten—or living during the Great Depression but not suffering directly from it, at least financially, or being left-handed in the days of organized hatred of the *sinister*, or living for years in the same house with an Orthodox grandmother and a black maid, or wandering alone for hours through a large city woods across the street from my house. But I don’t think these fully account either. Maybe my sister’s death, when she was nine and I was eight, is the one exception. This was important for me not only insofar as it generated a direct response from me, but also because it affected my parents so strongly and thus changed their behavior toward me, causing them, among other things, to overprotect and overnourish me—the one child left—and at the same time, in a subtle way, to reject me and even “accuse” me, crazy as it sounds, because I was the survivor in that visit of death. This experience is encapsulated for me in the sad Saturday nights I spent with my mother while my father was working late. She took me to bed with her and held me while she wept, crying “*Sylvia, Sylvia, Sylvia*” over and over again while I tried to console her. It may have happened only once or twice, but I remember it as a ritual occurrence. Clearly I was being both loved and rejected. Clearly I was helpless and uncomfortable and living in two places at once, with two debts to bear, my mother’s and my own. If anything came close to being a direct influence over me it

was this, and it caused me the most pain and confusion, although I still don’t fully understand its connection with my writing.

I know little—really I know nothing—about the psychology of masterhood. I don’t know if one is more, or less, inclined to seek out a master if one has a weak, or a strong, father. Maybe it has nothing to do with the father but rather with the mother, or with an older brother—or sister. Maybe, like baldness, it has to do with the maternal grandfather. So many things conspired in my case to provide a world without authority, if I may put it that way. For one thing, neither parent ever “interfered” with my education, and I had no older brother, and no teacher in my early years, or later for that matter, ever took an interest. I think I discovered college itself by sheer accident—I mean even the buildings. I happened to be passing by the University of Pittsburgh one day in the early fall and I wandered in and found myself registering for classes. It was during the war, so I had no trouble getting in. We had no advisers in those days. And a few years later, when I began writing, I had no one to turn to, although by that time I knew it was a good idea to have someone. I gave some poems, I remember, to an English professor I was taking a course in the essay from, and after holding them for about two months, he advised me to read Kafka. I still don’t know why. The poems were unmarked, possibly unread. There were no poets coming by giving readings then, there were only a few magazines in the libraries, there were no workshops, no small presses. We lived in darkness. Moreover, I wasn’t an English major and I had no friends who wrote. I don’t think I knew what a bohemian was. I did carry a little notebook around with me in which I wrote my poems, mostly sonnets in a kind of Edwardian style. I also carried a little book of Untermeyer’s in my coat pocket. I wore white shirts, ties, wing-tip shoes, double-breasted suits. I was on the football team, then the debate team. I played nine-ball. I didn’t know one was or could be an actual poet. It wasn’t until I was in the army, in 1946, and went to New Orleans and Washington and Baltimore, and started wandering through the bookstores and libraries, that I began to realize that writing was an occupation, and it wasn’t until then that there began to stir in me that sweet idea of one day becoming a writer. But there still wasn’t anyone I looked up to or even got signals from, except, maybe a little, Thomas Wolfe, whose novels I began to read. But there were no

poets for me, not yet. The idea of going to a school and studying under a poet never occurred to me. I didn't know yet who the poets were, and later, when I did, I had no idea where they worked—or that they did work—and I didn't know you could study poetry, say at Princeton or Iowa or Columbia, or that one even visited and talked to living poets. There wasn't one other soul in the world I could talk to about the books I read or show a poem or story to. But I was very happy and was not bitter and was not in longing. I lived and studied without direction, and if anything was going to be a permanent influence on me it was that.

II

By 1948, even as early as 1947, I was moving from shelf to shelf, devouring the major poets, putting together the odd history, listening carefully to the music. I read with no real logic, Spenser one week, Swinburne another, and like a threadbare angel, a poor naïf, I was moved all by myself as I encountered the great speeches, the breathtaking lines, the vaguely familiar passages in poet after poet, one marvelous writer after another. And of course, I was reading other books to fill the gaps: novels, history, philosophy, psychology. I made lists of the important books I had to read. I would be sleepless, sometimes humiliated, sometimes desperate, at the discovery of another great book I had not read or had just heard of. My wife, whom I met in the fall of 1947, tells me the iron stacks of the Carnegie Library are permanently embedded in her mind, that she remembers me reading nine to ten hours a day, that the first books she remembers under my arm were Herrick and Yeats and Joyce. I was in the 52/20 Club, a World War II G.I. benefit, twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks, a very tidy sum for those days. My dear President, the little scholar from Missouri, gave me twenty dollars a week to read old books and transform my life.

In the winter of 1948 I was reading *Poetry* and reading the thin volumes in the new-acquisitions shelf at the Pitt library. Sometimes, I quickly discovered, they were very thin. And I was piecing together the story of modern poetry—learning the language—and collecting my own library. I think Yeats and Pound were the two modern poets I cared for most then, though I began to know all

the famous poems that were in the anthologies and all the names and dates and histories. I met Jack Gilbert and Richard Hazley that spring, or rather re-encountered them, since we all had been on the debate team together, and had indeed been the international champions, and they discovered, to their astonishment, that I was reading poetry and writing, and I discovered, to my delight, that they were too, although I recall that Gilbert's plan then was to become a novelist. We had to be the only people writing and reading poetry in Pittsburgh at the time. At least we never found any others. The peculiar thing about that period was that we didn't spend much time exchanging poems with each other but rather talked about the poets we were reading. It was as if poetry was a holy art, a religion, and we were not yet ordained. I know I was writing a great number of new poems, even if my friends weren't, but the idea was not the workshop idea—at least not then. We shared great poems, great lines, with each other, we talked about the mission of poetry, we developed our scorn. Pound was the poet we most admired, Pound of *Personae*. And after him the early Eliot, and MacLeish and Cummings, and Hart Crane. I was, as I recall, reading the late poems of Yeats and all of Auden and Marlowe. We didn't talk much about Frost and Stevens and Williams. Not then. I think our theme was "the poet in a hostile world." I don't mean to make fun of it. It's a real enough subject and as important today as ever. It has been the very *mythus* of poets, at least in Europe and America, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, in a way since Ovid, and it was the natural myth for three poets under siege in their real lives in inhospitable and merciless Pittsburgh. For us, poetry had to be serious and lyrical and personal and approach the sublime. The beautiful or moving line was the measure for us, even perhaps more than the whole poem. Thus some lines from Milton or a short speech from *Faustus* or a phrase from Yeats. Of the generation just preceding ours, we would become most interested in Thomas and then Roethke and Lowell, but not for a while. We were hardly interested in realists like the early Shapiro or the early Ciardi. Academicism was already in the air, but the cloud was slow in coming to Pittsburgh. I remember the horror with which I greeted Richard Wilbur's first book of poems. I literally tore it up on the steps of the Carnegie Library—for which crime I humbly ask mercy from the trustees, and sympathy from Dick himself. We had

all gone our separate ways by the early and mid fifties, but in our periodic reunions we never failed to curse out the new academics, with their wit and elegance and politeness and forms, for their cowardice and bad faith, most of all for their disloyalty. To the Dream. Maybe, in some strange way, we were saved by our distance and our ignorance and our innocence. We didn't learn either the new style of writing or the new style of living. We had no insurance, no cars, no jobs. No wit. Maybe Carnegie's evil angel, which kept us blind and filthy and confused, should, after all, be thanked.

I spent most of the fifties in Europe or New York City, living on next to nothing—a stretch of G.I. Bill, an odd job here and there. I was rather vaguely working on a Ph.D. at Columbia University, but had no identity with the other students and seldom went to classes. I quit forever one warm beautiful spring night. I had written a long poem in 1950 called *Ishmael's Dream*: my first epic. I remember writing ten gorgeous lines a day, on schedule. I was living on Rue Boucherie, in Paris, a few blocks from Notre Dame. I prepared for the writing by reading from *The Bridge* and *Paradise Lost* and Isaiah out of a huge rotten Bible I had stolen from the American Center on the Boulevard Raspail. The subject, which I never consciously thought about, was the regeneration and transformation of the world, and myself as religio-politico-linguistic hero, a common enough theme for a first generation American Jew only son. I showed the poem to Auden, who was living on Cornelia Street at the time, in the Village. He made a rather vague comment about the ending, and that was that. It was my only attempt to make a connection. Of course, he was the last person I should have sent such a poem to, but I was a little dumb. I eventually did come to use Auden in my poetry, years later, and in an unforeseen way, but I never did see him face to face after that, although I always loved him, poor dead soul, writer of lovely songs. By the mid-fifties I was writing some good poems and publishing them. The underlying theme was still transformation and the hero's call, but I was now more coherent. I occasionally used rhyme and the stanza, but I had nothing to do with the polite domestic verse of the day. The poet I was most involved with then was Wallace Stevens. I had reduced the number of useful "older" poets to two, Lowell and Roethke. After a while I turned more toward Roethke because of Lowell's subject matter and his turgidity, as I saw it then. It was early

Roethke—the mystery, the strangeness, the loss, the love of small animals and plants, the sense of justice. I would return to Lowell again when *Life Studies* appeared. I was interested in Williams not so much for his language but for the way he combined health and madness, domesticity and wildness.

When I began teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia in the fall of 1956, I had a definite style. I read every poet and magazine I could bear, and I was totally unknown. I was in no community of poets, either in person or by mail or by phone, so I figured things out for myself, as I always did. When everything started to blow, West Coast vs. East, beat vs. feet, I took an independent stand, finding in the poetic left an approximation of my own view, yet hating what appeared to me then to be its lack of imagination and its anti-intellectualism. I disliked the academics, yet I was working for a university. But I was slave labor, a subversive, a hater of their tide. Unfortunately, my separateness and self-absorption not only prevented me from transcending the two extremes, but made me insensitive to what other younger poets were doing—to Creeley, say, or Bly, or Levertov—or made me judge them too quickly, and I was the loser for this.

In 1958 I began working on *The Pineys*, a long poem about the presidency. It was going to be my ticket. It was humorous, extravagant, mystical, buoyant, wordy, and very long. There were elements of the *Cantos* in it, and *Paterson* and *The Prelude* and *The Bridge* and *Song of Myself*. There was reconstituted prose and lists and lyrics. It was going to do everything. I was still an eternally old student and an eternally young instructor. I had a mustache and smoked cigars. I propped up the high chair with obscure dictionaries. I lived in a lovely timelessness. But one day, while rewriting the very last section, I realized the poem was a failure, that it was indulgent, that it was tedious, that it no longer interested me. It was 1964 or '65; I was going on forty, living in Indiana, Pa., and teaching at the state college there. I was devastated. I had been a practicing poet for almost two decades and I had nothing to show. I suddenly was nowhere; I had reached the bottom. I remember walking around for months in that dull little city, teaching my classes by rote, not sleeping at night. Certainly I was going through a tremendous change—and a crisis. Certainly it was ironic that that crisis should be right on target, a real *crise de quarante*, on my own

fortieth. As far as the poetry went, it had to do with realizing that I was taking an easier way than I should, or could, or must, that I was not wrestling my own angel, that I had not arrived where I had to go. It also had to do with a realization that my protracted youth was over, that I wouldn't live forever, that death was not just a literary event but very real and very personal. It was a liberation though I looked upon it at the time as a horror. I was able to let go and finally become myself and lose my shame and my pride. It meant literally starting over, but I didn't care because I was altogether interested only in the work and not in the rewards the work might bring. Not then. And suddenly I had very little envy of other poets and almost no sense that I was competing with them—even if they were ten years younger than I and were winning all the prizes.

Maybe I'm not accounting for it enough. Was it because *The Pineys* was a failure that I fell apart? Why did I think it was a failure just then? A few years later, 1967, I had a chance to publish it, so in a few days I got rid of a lot of dead wood, did some rewriting, and sent it off. And it didn't look that bad. Wasn't it just the last stage of an endless series of rejections and abandonments that had plagued me since my early twenties? Why did I "come to" just then and start writing with authority and precision? Isn't that anyhow just what many other poets do, only they do it much earlier? Maybe if I had not got bogged down in such a long poem I could have made my move earlier—say when I was thirty-five. But then, the very occupation with that poem was a way of delaying or deferring the change I was going to make. I'm suddenly remembering now a visit to a doctor and his concern with my health—overweight and such. Did an ordinary event like that, producing a slight shift in my view, allow me to tap into material that was formerly warded off or ignored? Was it my lot to speak for the second half of life and not the first?

I think, when I look back now, that it was my own loss and my own failure that were my subject matter, as if I could only start building in the ruins. Or that loss and failure were a critical first issue in my finding a new subject matter, that they showed me the way. Or that my subject was the victory over loss and failure, or coming to grips with them. But I certainly started with loss and failure. Moreover, in a certain sense I always did start with these

two and I was merely finally coming fully into my own, doing the thing more purely now that I had always done, more perfectly. It was as if I had been preparing for this all my life—certainly since my sister's death and my mother's sadness—and now I was ready. At any rate, after a little agony, the poems started to come easily and simply. The first group were written in the winter and spring of 1966, at the time of my forty-first birthday. Those poems are collected in *Rejoicings* (the name of the tractate on mourning in the Talmud), and there has been no letup in the writing from that day to this.

A couple of commentators have talked about the issue technically. Bly, for example, referred to my long lines. But I know that the issue is emotional and not technical and that it always is when a vital change is involved in art, although I recognize that the technical can stimulate, even make available, the emotional, that it can be a facilitator, that the challenge and demand of free verse in the sixties, for example, helped James Wright make the changes he did in *The Branch Will Not Break*, that Whitman's change was aided by form and Keats's also, in the Odes. When I look at the statement I made for *Contemporary Authors* a few years ago, I see I emphasized my attraction to weeds and waste places and lovely pockets and staking out a place that no one else wanted because it was abandoned or overlooked. Aside from my attraction to these places because they are a relief from civilization, I think I found in them a perfect location for my own emotions, although after a while I realized I had to be careful I didn't suffocate from too many weeds. At any rate, I could sink there as low as I wanted, I could be utterly alone, I could even be without hope, and I found a kind of support. Such abandoned and neglected places have been used by many other modern writers, and by all the Romantics, and they have become a familiar metaphor for our lost world and a familiar arena for our holocausts and our ruined dreams, but they were for me very personal. I think I valued as much as anything else the secret aspect of such places and I have always loved the secret places that were just beyond the reach of our penetrating minds, the tiny black locust woods of my childhood, the obscure reading rooms of my young manhood, the hidden studies I go to now.

The longer I live, the happier I get, and the more I write, the more I arrive at my own place—I almost said my own assigned

place—and I am ready to let Sylvia's hand go and I am finally ready to accept my abandonment, although I doubt if that's what it is, and simply call it a blessing. What I don't understand is why I waited till my fortieth year, although I'm sure I waited so long because I had no critical guide and I'm sure I had no guide not only for the accidental reasons I have mentioned, living apart from the mainstream and such, but because I couldn't find a way to incorporate someone in an acceptable manner, given my own impulses and obsessions, including my obsession against the very idea of having someone as a teacher or guide. I could have sought Kunitz out, or Roethke, or Lowell, poets who were teaching and whom I admired, but already the pride and the secrecy had set in. It was truly as if I couldn't afford, and couldn't bear, any kind of accounting at the time, as if that would interfere with my destiny. I can't imagine myself, say, at thirty, sending a sheaf of poems off to one of the middle-aged masters. Part of it was just habit, and part of it was just insecurity, but some of it, most of it probably, was a lack of connectedness. As smart and verbal as I was, I was totally impractical and artistically crazy. I was living in a stubborn perverse proud dream place. I went where I did go because I didn't have a guide and I became what I am for that reason, although I am not recommending it to anyone. If I did have someone, if I had belonged somewhere, the poetry would have been different—and would have come sooner—but it's the life mainly that makes the poetry and I don't think I really had a choice. In the meantime, I've recently discovered that I must be on guard lest I am too impatient or too indifferent to the new poets looking for help, so I don't start mumbling in Hittite or arrogantly lecturing them on the self-made man, and so I don't lose the opportunity of making someone a little happier or a little less bewildered in the lovely and terrible struggle for beauty and understanding we call poetry.

Beginnings

C. K. WILLIAMS

C. K. Williams lives in Brooklyn and Paris. His books include *Lies, I Am the Bitter Name*, and *With Ignorance*. He has held a Guggenheim Fellowship. At present he is completing a new book of poems and finishing a translation, with William Arrowsmith, of *The Bacchae* for the New Greek Tragedy Series, Oxford University Press. He is a professor of English at George Mason University.

I

When I got out of college, I did what I imagine every would-be writer does: I sat down and tried to read everything I'd ever heard of. I read all of Homer, Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Aeschylus. Dante and Virgil, and of course *Paradise Lost*, which for one long week almost made a Christian of me. As much Blake as I could struggle through; some Chaucer; Whitman, who'd been the first poet I'd ever read voluntarily; Yeats, the poet I'd gone at most passionately while I was in school; Eliot, who was the poet then, especially in the academy, especially "The Waste Land," or its footnotes. A lot of Stevens, some William Carlos Williams, although I didn't quite understand him yet—mostly I read *Paterson*; some Auden, Keats, Coleridge, not much Wordsworth, whose clarities deceived me, not enough Shelley, who seemed so long-winded; Donne, Herbert, even Traherne; Wyatt and Sidney, Marlowe, Webster, no Spenser, who was a perfect soporific, not much eighteenth century, which was the moon. There were many others—Crabbe and Meredith for starters—and probably many I've forgotten. I was also going at the novelists—almost all of Dostoevski and Tolstoy, Melville, Hawthorne, Conrad; most of Laurence

Sterne, a lot of Faulkner, Hemingway; Joyce, except *Finnegan*, a little Dickens, who was so entertaining I found him suspect; less James, too stuffy; not many contemporaries, Bellow and Gaddis, and a little later and more thoroughly and gleefully Henry Miller. I struggled through what I could of the philosophers and social thinkers. Of the philosophers the Greeks mostly, mostly Plato; of the others a lot of Frazer and Jung, who were still having their vogue then. I once outlined, out of Lord knows what forgotten good intention, the entire Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, and copied out in its entirety the *Mystic Gloom* of the Pseudo-Dionysus. It was all more or less nonstop: I'd fall asleep every night over a book, dreaming in other people's voices. In the morning I'd wake up and try, mostly fruitlessly, to write acceptable poems.

In memory, those years seem so distended, so grotesquely swollen with frustration, uncertainty, and loneliness. It wasn't until I actually stopped to count that I realized there were only four or five years, and not the greater part of my adult life, of what could most benignly be called my apprenticeship. Just learning to be alone was such a Heraklean task. The world always offered so many enticements. And, at my desk, how my mind would drift, how I'd tear at myself with doubts, with self-accusations—I was surely indolent, probably spiritually inept, trivial, inconsequential, not cut out at all for this; no gift, no discipline. That fractured image of myself became myself. I was just as unhappy as you were supposed to be, as all the stories had you be, which may have been all that kept me going, because I was so lost by then; I had no idea anymore of what I was doing, I had no notion of what a poem even was.

I knew that I was deeply committed to poetry, but I wasn't quite sure why and was very uneasy about it. I hardly read any contemporary poets at first, I didn't know any other poets, had no idea of how to find any, and the poems I did come across I usually dismissed as either incomprehensible or trivial. It's remarkable how young artists always seem to make and feel perfectly comfortable with such outrageous exaggerations. Right along with a wracking lack of confidence, you can proclaim to yourself that there's nothing around of any real value, nothing in sight, and nobody but you who has any notion of what's really going on or needed. All you're really trying to do is clear the slate enough to get your own

scrawl on it, but all this struggling can be very aggressive, maybe because you often have then so much the sense of being put upon, oppressed, by just about everything. Because I was so alone in it, I think I may have been even more impressionable than the young poets I've met since then. I was always coming to odd conclusions. Once I decided that the whole tradition of English poetry was useless to me, and for a few years I didn't read anything but translations. That was before the great age of translating that began in the middle sixties, and I must have inflicted an awful lot of wretched translationese on myself. I did, though, find Rilke and Baudelaire, who were terribly important to me, and Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Char; Montale and Seferis, the Haiku poets, and Rex-roth's Chinese and Japanese, mostly Tu Fu and Li Po. Really, what I read seemed to have been determined mostly just by what had been done, what I could get my hands on.

Ransacking other traditions that way, though, still didn't help me much in my own work. I was still frustrated, still mostly at loose ends and without direction. Then somewhere around that time I came to another odd conclusion, and made what seems to me now, considering how confused I was about most things, a surprisingly concrete and purposeful decision. It mostly had to do with all the work in longer forms I was reading, with how comfortable I felt with Homer or Dostoevski, and how ill at ease with contemporary poetry. I began to feel that a great deal of human interaction, a large portion of real moral sensibility and concern, had somehow been usurped from the poets by the novel and drama, and that in the face of it there had even been a further kind of protective withdrawal and a tunneling of vision on the poets' part. It felt to me as though anything that was on a large emotional scale, anything truly passionate, absorbing, or crucial, had been forsaken by poetry. What the poets of our time seemed to be left with were subtleties, hair-splittings, minute recordings of a delicate atmosphere. Even in the poetry I could find to admire for one technical reason or another, there seemed to be a meagerness of theme and attempt compared to the works in longer forms. I think my ideal as a poet then was Homer: I was fascinated by the sheer weight of the data, in the *Iliad* particularly, the utter factness of its human experiences, its absolute commitment to the given.

Oddly enough, the conclusion I drew from these reflections

didn't send me to write novels or plays myself, certainly not epics. I was still, although I might have had a hard time saying why, absorbed in the lyric. I had, though, been writing some stories, I'd composed a play in college and assumed I would again, and had done some criticism—book reviews and reviews of art shows—for a local paper. Now I decided I wouldn't do any of that anymore. I resolved—the word applies; there was that much unexpected will to it—that anytime I had an idea for a story (I had notebooks of them) or for a dramatic sketch, or for anything resembling more purely intellectual activity—criticism, any sort of philosophizing—I'd try to find a way to get its matter into a poem.

It's hard to remember how long exactly it took me to come to what seemed like such an extreme notion; it's harder to remember what it felt like at the time. Surely all young poets flounder through similar crises, and make as unlikely fusses; fortunately, we don't have to know that everyone else is doing it too. However little my decision may have actually affected the evolution of my work (that kind of thing would be hard to know really), it was certainly very important, primarily because beyond the vague sense it gave me of having a purpose now, a sort of goal, I was paradoxically able for the first time to begin to study other people's poems in a genuinely useful way: I needed them now, I wanted to see how aspects of my project might be being handled.

This all happened sometime between 1960 and 1965, and it's impressive to consider the books that appeared during those years which were important in any regard, and were astonishingly what I had been looking for. (That they incidentally made a joke out of my idea of the limitations of poetry went by me with hardly a flicker.) William Carlos Williams's *Pictures from Brueghel* came out in '62 and was the key for me to the rest of his gigantic achievement. Then there were Lowell's *Life Studies*, Roethke's *Far Field*, Berryman's *77 Dream Songs*, Plath's *Ariel*, Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, Merwin's *Moving Target*, James Wright's *The Branch Will Not Break*, Kinnell's *Flower Herding* . . . , Bly's *Silence in the Snowy Fields* and the remarkable series of translations that he did himself, or edited: Vallejo, Neruda, Hernández, Jiménez, Lorca, Trakl. . . . They were all books that became crucial to me as soon as I stumbled across them, or as soon as one of the poets I'd begun by now to meet would direct me to them.

Now that I did know some other poets, it probably goes without saying that my project, my resolve, became even more of a secret than it had been before. I wasn't about to call that much attention to myself. Although I'd begun to write some poems that I wasn't completely ashamed of, I was still terribly shy and excruciatingly diffident about my situation as a poet. I still felt sheepish, for one thing, even guilty, about how I'd arrived at poetry. I'd never had that blazing calling our teachers had always indicated was the primary credential for it. Poets, we were given to understand, know who they are in the cradle: the rest is just a dechrysalization.

Poetry didn't find me, in the cradle or anywhere near it: I found it. I realized at some point—very late, it's always seemed—that I needed it, that it served a function for me—or someday would—however unclear that function may have been at first. I seemed to have started writing poetry before I'd read any. Although why this should have seemed to have been so much of a sin eludes me now, it reinforced the uneasy feeling that I'd had to create the interest in myself rather than having it dawn on me in some splendid conflagration. I'd always read a lot, but I wasn't particularly compelled by words for their own sake, or by "literature," which had always repelled me with its auras of mustiness and reverence. I detested almost any book I had to read, hated English in school, and I must have been surprised, maybe even a little put off, to find myself, just as the dreary poetry survey courses ended, turning the stuff out myself. I started writing one day, for no real reason (I had a girl who liked poetry, or liked the idea of me writing it anyway: not much of a clue), but once I did, I knew, I can't remember exactly how, that the realities poetry offered me differed in essential and splendid ways from those of every day. My every days were all either tormented with confusions of one sort or another, or were intolerably humdrum. There was something about the way poetry isolated experience, its powers of demarcation, that promised a way to endow experience with forms that if nothing else would be at least more dramatically satisfying.

My first model as a poet wasn't even a poet, but an architect, Louis Kahn. I met Kahn just as he was becoming famous. My closest friend was a student of his and he brought me to Kahn's office, a marvelously strewn muddle of rooms over a luncheonette.

I liked Kahn and spent a few years at the edges of his circle. I think he enjoyed having a young poet in his entourage; he may also have liked having someone around who occasionally disagreed with him—his disciples never did—but I can't say that I studied with Kahn so much as that I studied *him*. I was fascinated to begin with by his notoriety: architects and critics were making pilgrimages to Philadelphia to see his buildings and to meet him. More to my real advantage, though, he thought aloud. He was a compulsive theorizer and lecturer, and it was an unusual opportunity to see how a mature artist approached his work. I'd had some inspiring teachers at Penn—Schuyler Cammann, the Orientalist, Maurice Johnson, my wry, wise adviser, and Morse Peckham, who to my great good fortune was developing then his system of close reading—but it was Kahn who without my quite remarking it formed most of my attitudes about art and the artist's task. He worked constantly, day and night. I was awed by that. Even more than his industry, though, it was what informed it that impressed me: the astonishing patience he confronted his work with, the numbers of attempts he demanded of himself before he found a solution he would trust. He demanded a complexity in defining a problem, so that its necessities would always be as demanding as possible; the solution then was a purification, a refining to essentials, and his work always achieved a simplicity which belied what had gone into it.

It occurs to me that I've never really considered why, given all my admiration for Kahn, I didn't simply try to become an architect myself. It may have had to do with the fact that there were architects in my life at all. In some ways, for whatever obscure reasons of rebellion or reaction, I seem to have been looking for a sort of negative identity. I'd never, as I've said, met a poet, had no idea what one would be like, and I didn't particularly care. Not only was there no glamorous or heroic imagery to being one, there wasn't any imagery at all, and there must have been something about that lack of detail I found compelling. I'm still not sure why, but it feels as though I wanted to be something which *wasn't*. I wanted a way of being in the world without having to admit it. I was after marginality: I wanted to be at the edges of things, not quite really visible.

Such oblique needs. For a long time I fretted about it. Ma-

chado says somewhere that in order to write a poem you have to invent a poet to write it. You also, I think, have to invent a whole literature to receive it, and a whole community of poets who will have produced that literature. They'll all have biographies you've worked out for them, and I found after a while that my own biography had become as fluid as any of theirs. One's retrospective sensitivities and dramas can be absorbing—young poet being battered to splendid consciousness—but sooner or later reality recurs.

I think I had a normal enough childhood. Aside from the Depression miseries of never enough money, money battles at dinner, late at night when they thought you were asleep, it was mostly all right. My mother may have worried about us a bit more than most—her father and a sister had been killed in accidents—but she had, and still has, too much sheer joy in life to have let her cautiousness affect her much.

What I remember most from my childhood is how restless I always was, how hard it was to sit still. I always seemed to be trying to get away, out, from home, from school, from anywhere. I imagine I was just sharing in the general atmosphere of that war and postwar time. Things were moving fast then: it was the Boom, the "Rebirth of America." Coming out of those sad gray years of the war, there must have been so much promise in the air, so much hope.

It's odd. I realize I never heard during those years the word *hope* used in the sense I mean to give it here, not in our household anyway. Maybe because our hope, our ambition, our passion to advance, to move up, was so pervasive, so all-involving, that it never had to be mentioned, perhaps more urgently *couldn't* be mentioned, because expressing it might imply its opposites, doubt-in-hope and, unthinkable, loss of hope.

I didn't know at that age, naturally, how great a part of the population was rushing through those expansionist years with the same ambition, toward the same promise, and what an outlandish number of them were making it. Our fathers toiled their unbelievably long hours, drove themselves, worked like madmen. Our mothers abetted them, laboring themselves when they had to, at the store, on the kitchen table with the books. There was even something demanded of the children, something that, even if we didn't

quite understand it, we knew was our duty. We were to have an *awareness* of it all, of our complicity in it. We were to be flexed, somehow, before it. Concentration, what's what it was. We were meant to *concentrate*. It was my father's favorite word in the little pep talks he'd offer me. *Concentrate!* Sometimes I felt terribly inadequate because I had no idea of how to go about it. That didn't matter, though. My father's lectures were very dear to me. What I took from them had to do more than anything else with his attentiveness, with how important he considered my outcomes to be. The seriousness with which he regarded how I was to project myself into my life probably was central to that general sense of tension and responsibility that came so early, but if at times it was inconvenient, I was mostly honored by it.

There were some kids, though, who amazingly didn't have it. We weren't all on the same flight after all, apparently. My friend Tommy's father was a fireman: Tommy was going to be one too. How relaxed he looks. I can see him strolling home from school, ambling, dawdling along. I never ambled: I ran, trotted, paced, counted steps, got there fast, faster, first, even when I was by myself.

Tommy was different in other ways too, it not so gradually dawned on me. His mother, for one thing, never let me in their house. A gang of us would be playing in back, the other kids would trail in for lemonade or whatever, and I'd somehow be deftly amputated from the group to wander off by myself. Richard's mother did the same thing, and Michael, one of my best school buddies, got me down one day and slapped my face until I'd admit that I'd killed God.

Small stories. It doesn't at this late date bear constructing any edifices on the relatively offhanded ethnic indignities of a Newark boyhood. The Holocaust was happening somewhere, we'd know about it soon enough (though much later than one would think: it was for a long time a parents' secret), and we'd finally know, too, something about what the Black experience in America really was. Still, this business of being Jewish was complicated. The prejudice, overt or otherwise, was easy enough to incorporate into a part of one's personality where it wouldn't obtrude onto active reflection. ("Spit in my face, you Jewes," says Donne, me hardly blinking.) What I did notice with something that must have approached

intellectual interest was that I seemed to have several histories. Everyone else did too, of course—Tommy was Irish, Michael Italian; they were both pugnacious enough about it—but they participated in a way I never quite did in the official history, the one we were taught at school, all those dates and names leading triumphantly to Christian Capitalist America. I don't know when I'd have noticed that that history and the one I was getting at *shul* had essentially nothing to do with each other. Very early, I know I'd squirm when we'd be exhorted by the principal—you still were then—to be "good Christians," but I already knew the advantages of expressionlessness, mild interest, mild boredom. There was such a discrepancy, though, between the two histories that I find it striking I never had any inclination to put them together, to collate them. They were perfectly distinct, and I left them that way: having two histories was as unremarkable as having two parents. I may even, on the imaginative level, have enjoyed it. Their narratives ran in opposite directions: the American one started in the present and reeled out backward, ending with the cavemen, whom I liked a lot, and the other one started at the beginning, which was a garden this time, and came this way.

That there were several Gods, too, was beyond doubt. Michael, finally, after how many years of coyness, let me see his catechism. (It was exactly the same handy pocket size as the even more intriguing pornography he'd produce for me a few years later. Speak of influence! Whenever did language offer so much sheer glittering revelation as it did in that grubby, hand-typed *samizdat* of erotica which resolved so many burning questions of anatomy and mechanics?) The catechism, anyway, said, in cold print—yes, there it was—that the Jews *had* killed Christ, God, *that* God, a God I had to admit I found, despite the contentiousness of his adherents, not all that unsympathetic. Later, when I came back to it all, through Buber and Kierkegaard, and had my theodicy arguments with the God I created out of I-Thou and my Sickness Unto Death, probably much of the energy for it arose from the possibility of there being a kind of Manichaean double to go along with that self-absorbed Lord of rapture and good intention. It may also have had to do with why in the poems I wrote for that theodicy, I mustered all the insistent Baalshem childishness I could to inform my queries and consternations. God as the path of accusation

is famously self-limiting: that I kept it up as long as I did certainly had to do, too, with Michael's little book, the first one, that is.

II

Halfway exactly from when I began writing to here (again, another distortion: I'd never have believed it was that long ago), I stopped writing poetry, then started again. This time, though, there was no resolution or decision, however naive. All I knew at first was that something was wrong, that the poems I'd been writing no longer had any urgency or even interest at all for me, and that I had no idea of what kind of work I wanted to do next.

In the poems I had been working on, I'd been engrossed by varieties of disjunctive consciousness. I was trying to find ways to embody political and social realities by structuring and figuring poems in ways that went beyond apparent limits of logical connectiveness. Although I wouldn't use that nomenclature now, I was trying to bring the unconscious to bear on those issues. Among the poets who'd marked a direction that way, I was taken less by the Surrealists, who'd possibly gone farthest with it but who I felt were too playfully sure of themselves, than by those like Vallejo, Hernández, Mandelstam, and the anguished Rimbaud and Artaud, who were driven to the limits by their ethical sympathies. I'd also been quite involved with Freudian and the more eclectic psychoanalytic theories. I was particularly taken with what is called "primary process" language, the language of schizophrenia, a very concrete way of speaking which manifests an overriding absorption in the gross emotional charge of symbols, and little concern with logical coherence, or "meaning." (Vallejo's *Trilce* is probably what would come closest to it in poetry.)

Morally, this way of speaking, or of assembling reality, seemed to me to relate very closely to what I felt was the cardinal intellectual sin, that of coming to moral conclusions. The consciousness we call "logical" works with systems of grammar and symbolic structure which presuppose conceptual conclusiveness, but obviously our motivational apparatuses have little to do with the clarity those kinds of conclusiveness seemed to me to imply. The historical plague of conceptual fanaticism which drives humans to oppress or slaughter one another I believed had its roots in that kind

of incomplete realization, and I had wanted to write poems and imply existences which subverted, or at least circumvented, it.

Why the poetry I'd evolved out of these issues should have suddenly become of such little interest to me is probably beyond recapturing; my life in general then was in disarray, but whatever the reasons, unlike ten years before, when I'd analyzed my situation and thought I'd found a way to act on it, this time I groped. When I began to compose the poems I'd been looking for, I didn't even realize it. I wrote drafts of several of them, put them in a notebook, and forgot them until I came on them later during a reading, read one, and knew I had what I'd been looking for.

Trying to speak now of how I arrived at those poems is of course reconstruction, but I went through a similar procedure at the time as well, because when I did realize that I was under way in a poetry that interested me, I had to examine it to find a way to ground more surely my so far intuitive notion of it. I had to describe to myself what I'd done, in order to be sure it was valid, and that I wanted to go on with it.

I'd been studying a lot of longer lyrics: Williams's "Asphodel," Whitman, Akhmatova's "Requiem," Apollinaire's "Zone," Rimbaud's "Season in Hell," and Artaud's "Van Gogh," and I realized that I needed before anything else more space to operate in. Secondly, and more importantly, I decided that the poems I'd been writing, and many of those I'd been reading, operated by using a sort of code, what I called a "rhetoric." Poets and sophisticated readers of poetry share a fluency in this rather arcane system. That lyric poetry is all but a cipher to those who aren't regular readers is a sometimes distressing given, but it bothered me that even those who could and did read poems, seemed to do so with a consciousness which was so aware of itself as being in a unique, literary mode that what could really happen to them was severely limited. The reader came to the poem, moved into that special space off in a corner of consciousness for a time, and then resumed real life. Although I had no interest in making any sort of democratically motivated "simplification" of the poem, in making it more "accessible"—poetry is, and should be, a passionately complex experience—I felt that the elements of that complexity could become less specialized, less "poetic," than we were accustomed to.

Williams writes:

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

I thought it might be possible to make the news Williams was speaking of somehow less difficult to get. (Williams had obviously thought the same thing.) Much poetry takes as its lyric stance a rather passive position in the world. The poet in the poem is primarily a perceiver, meditator, reflector, usually of sensations, states of being, conventionalized slices of reality. Most of life, though, happens to us in terms of events, or at least in anticipation of events, or reflections on them. Couldn't there be a way to deal more directly and intensely with genuine life stuff, with the crude, turbulent emotional storms in which even the most trivial of our experiences seem actually to be embedded? Not "narrative," which implies process, progress, denouement, possible release from tensions of expectation: the universe I found more interesting would reflect more clearly in tragedy, which is always reaching beyond its primary anecdotes toward the deterministic, even mythic, consciousness that presumably precedes occurrence.

I wanted to continue to construct tight lyric poems, using the complex structures and systems of logic I'd been interested in before, but there was another problem here. That is, those "tight" lyrics generally work by what we call compression. Compression implies a rigorous and admirable elision of anything not essential to the movement and resolution of the poem, but I felt that compression had in fact often become a convention which worked primarily by hints, and by omission. Much of the material of normal emotional activity tended simply to be left out, or at best implied. I felt that in order to begin to get some of that material back into the poem, I'd have to make the surface of the poem more flexible, and more immediately germane to our more pressing life issues. What I came to feel was that I wanted the poem to happen to the reader without the reader's at first quite realizing it; I wanted it to become a part of the reader's felt life in a less willed way, and in order to do that, I came to think that the workings of the poem, its interior, all that offers us the purely aesthetic delights of poetry,

its music, its language tensions, the patterns of figurative association we might call the subconscious of the poem, would have to happen in terms of that surface. A poem might be able to sacrifice a possibly crippling terseness without having to lose any of the nondecorative tensions and intensities which are primary definitions of the lyric.

It seemed clear to me that the odd sort of motions my new poems had were just what I needed to begin to handle all these diverse necessities. I'd been experimenting with prose poetry, as most of the poets I knew had, but I didn't feel much interest in a non-verse poetry. The opacity of verse, what we call its musicality, its tendency to call attention to language's potential as abstract sound, as a music which indicates a matrix beyond, or previous to, itself, was too compelling to me. At the same time, though, while I wanted my verse to continue to be grounded in the language of ordinary usage, or more precisely, ordinary usages, the rhythmical units I was using were more and more extended. I pushed them farther and after a while found that I was working in a much longer line than I would have expected to. It was a line, though, that while still asserting itself as a generative verse element, seemed to be able to handle more comprehensively the sort of subjects I was interested in getting into the poems.

What those subjects are to be once the space is cleared for them is, needless to say, the most important question. Rather than influences, it might be more useful here to speak of assumptions, of what the historical, cultural, and spiritual axioms are that determine and define the poetic identity. Since the French and American revolutions, since Blake, Shelley, Goethe, Wordsworth, on through Whitman, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Yeats, Mandelstam, Eliot, Williams, to mention those who have meant most to me, the artist moves to the center of history, not as commentator or moralist, but as lyric participant, as the most exactly self-conscious enactor of secular and usually democratic aspiration. Art becomes not merely an instrument of ethical suasion or of delight, but is a redemptive resource in and of itself. Whitman defines it most self-consciously and perhaps with the greatest degree of premeditation: through the poem, he says, the very substance of our spiritual consciousness is to be redeemed; we are, finally, to become utterers ourselves, intimate and active participants in the

universe of ecstatic awareness of "Leaves of Grass."

Whether, at the end of our wretched, murderous century, and stumbling moreover into the mean, vindictive future of Reaganism, there is still enough hope on the planet to sustain such apparently exalted ambition is a difficult, possibly depressing question. If, though, the artist has had to assume a more humble, or at least a more canny, stance, the absolute minimum demand we would still seem to have to make of ourselves is that we be what Eliot calls the "socially engaged personality." There are risks in this, the risks of hopelessness, of fanaticism, of despair, but beyond that, for the poet there is a special anxiety, that which has to do with what we could call the lyric gamble. Choosing to enact one's self in the first person implies a belief that the person so evoked will have a connection to reality in ways that are spiritually essential and productive, but in fact there is no way of knowing, no matter how scrupulously one tries to oversee one's solipsisms, that the matters one is struggling with aren't ultimately idiosyncratic, having little to do with issues of any moment. We have to presume that all poetry is written with great seriousness: there doesn't seem to be any way to *decide* to inform one's work with cultural or historical significance, and it doesn't take much in the face of all this to have the sense of one's own case, and sometimes even the case of poetry itself, being trivialized or deconsecrated by events.

More and more lately, although I still come across poets I didn't know, or didn't know well enough—Milosz, for example, or Ashbery or Seidel—and even some who for one reason or another I knew about but wasn't ready to hear—Elizabeth Bishop, most notably, who dawned late for me, but explosively—I find that influence mostly consists now of going back to those who have endured for me—Williams, Whitman, Donne, Yeats, Eliot, Rilke, Lowell, Homer, Shakespeare—and studying them again. What I want from them, and what I find, beyond the ever engrossing mysteries of technique, is a reinforcement of the faith that poetry continues to be essential to what is most precious in the human, and that the sometimes painful responsibilities the life of poetry demands are not only not specious, not a burden, but an opportunity.

A Voice Speaking to No One

PAUL ZWEIG

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Poetry was part of my father's self-respect. In the series of dim apartments we lived in when I was a boy, or walking on Brighton Thirteenth Street, with its sagging three-family houses, or along the wet sand at the edge of the beach, he would recite to me from memory: Wordsworth, Milton, Shakespeare. He would be wistful and remote, his voice pinched, a little thin. Sometimes he would get me to recite some favorite passage of his. I remember standing in one of our living rooms holding a table knife: "Is this a dagger that I see before me, handle toward my hand?"

In those days, nobody spoke properly except my father. My grandparents hardly knew any English at all. They spoke Yiddish, but mostly they spoke with their hands and shoulders, a shrugging dance accompanied by mouthfuls and throatfuls that said everything, but weren't quite words. Voices, yes, caresses; but all wrong. The streets, too, were wrong, and that got my father mad. Language got all twisted out there, like the cracked sidewalks, and the boys who mumbled instead of talking.

When my father recited, his voice became strangely incommunicative. Pronunciation was important; you had to let your breath out in miserly pinches. It was a voice speaking to no one.

Poems by
Linda Pastan

Arcadia

There is always a bare house,
one cumulous tree balanced
at the rim of the second story,
emblematic fields the color of change.
We almost find it beyond
the drawn shade of the bus,
beyond the drawn eyelid where light flickers westward,
at the far end of the train whistle
as we travel with George Willard,
with Nick Carroway, travel
towards Christmas and a house
wrapped as safely in scenery
as the corn in its layers of husk.
Birds fly past the chimney,
grow smaller,
disappear as the house disappears around
the flung arm of the road—
solid as a dream at the moment of waking.

Writing While My Father Dies

There is not a poem in sight,
only my father running out
upstairs, and me without a nickel
for the meter. The children hide
before the television
shivering in its glacial light,
and shivering I rub these words
together, hoping for a spark.

After X-ray

The bones are all there waiting their hour,
patient as hangers, pushed to the back of a closet
on which this flesh is hung just for a while.
I feel them come to the surface slowly,
rise like their image in the developer's tank,
waiting to break through skin. And what can death
do with these bones? Planted like dry pods
in the earth they bloom later, washed clear of blood
to shine somewhere like strung beads of coral.

At the Gynecologist's

The body so carefully
contrived for pain,
wakens from the dream of health
again and again
to hands impersonal as wax
and instruments that pry
into the closed chapters of flesh.
See me here, my naked legs
caught in these metal stirrups,
galloping towards death
with flowers of ether in my hair.

Notes from the Delivery Room

Strapped down,
victim in an old comic book,
I have been here before,
this place where pain winces
off the walls
like too bright light.

Bear down a doctor says,
foreman to sweating laborer,
but this work, this forcing
of one life from another
is something that I signed for
at a moment when I would have signed anything.
Babies should grow in fields;
common as beets or turnips
they should be picked and held
root end up, soil spilling
from between their toes—
and how much easier it would be later,
returning them to earth.
Bear up . . . bear down . . . the audience
grows restive, and I'm a new magician
who can't produce the rabbit
from my swollen hat.
She's crowning, someone says,
but there is no one royal here,
just me, quite barefoot,
greeting my barefoot child.

Skylight

I sit in a perfect circle of sun
in a room without windows
where pale walls grow stenciled flowers
and see the tops of real trees,
see real leaves flickering in the light
as the tongues of garter snakes flicker
or flattening under an east wind
as if they grew in rushing water.
I think of a ruined church in Rome
where a boy in a blue shirt threw sticks
at a wall that had disappeared
who knows when,

or of something I only read of,
 a man whose stomach was a window
 doctors gazed through at organs
 opening for food like tropic plants
 beneath the floor of a glass bottomed boat.
 And here in the center of this house
 deep under shingles, under tar paper,
 under plaster pale as unsunned flesh
 I see through one round skylight the real world
 held up to the sun by its heels and moving—
 it is like candling eggs.

At the Jewish Museum

"The Lower East Side: Portal To American Life,
 1887-1924"

We can endure the eyes
 of these children lightly,
 because they stare
 from the faces of our fathers
 who have grown old before us.
 Their hungers have always been
 our surfeit. We turn again
 from the rank streets, from
 marred expectancies and laundry
 that hangs like a portent
 over everything.
 Here in a new museum
 we walk past all the faces
 the cameras have stolen from time.
 We carry them like piecework
 to finish at home,
 knowing how our childrens' sins
 still fall upon the old Jew
 in a coal cellar, on Ludlow street,
 in nineteen hundred.

Emily Dickinson

We think of her hidden in a white dress
 among the folded linens and sachets
 of well-kept cupboards, or just out of sight
 sending jellies and notes with no address
 to all the wondering Amherst neighbors.
 Eccentric as New England weather
 the stiff wind of her mind, stinging or gentle,
 blew two half-imagined lovers off.
 Yet legend won't explain the sheer sanity
 of vision, the serious mischief
 of language, the economy of pain.

Passover

1.

I set my table with metaphor:
 the curling parsley—green sign nailed to the doors
 of God's underground; salt of desert and eyes;
 the roasted shank bone of a Pascal lamb,
 relic of sacrifice and bleating spring.
 Down the long table, past fresh shoots of a root
 they have been hacking at for centuries,
 you hold up the unleavened bread—a baked scroll
 whose wavy lines are indecipherable.

2.

The wise son and the wicked, the simple son
 and the son who doesn't ask, are all my son
 leaning tonight as it is written,
 slouching his father calls it. His hair is long:
 hippie hair, hassid hair, how strangely alike
 they seem tonight.

First Born, a live child cried

among the bulrushes, but the only root
you know stirs between your legs, ready
to spill its seed in gentile gardens.
And if the flowers be delicate and fair
I only mind this one night of the year
when far beyond the lights of Jersey
Jerusalem still beckons us, in tongues.

3.

What black-throated bird
in a warm country
sings spirituals,
sings spirituals
to Moses now?

4.

One exodus prefigures the next.
The glaciers fled before hot whips of air.
Waves bowed at God's gesture
for fugitive Israel to pass;
while fish, caught then behind windows
of water, remembered how their brothers once
pulled themselves painfully from the sea,
willing legs to grow
from slanted fins.
Now the blossoms pass from April's tree,
refugee raindrops mar the glass,
borders are transitory.
And the changling gene, still seeking
stone sanctuary, moves on.

5.

Far from Egypt, I have sighted blood,
have heard the throaty mating of frogs.
My city knows vermin, animals loose in hallways,

boils, sickness, hail.

In the suburban gardens
seventeen-year locusts rise
from their heavy beds
in small explosions of sod.
Darkness of newsprint.
My son, my son.

To a Second Son

Now you embrace chameleons
changing color yourself with the scenery,
white with me and my white questions,
muted under a sky bruised
black and blue.

You feed your lizards
moths, plundered each evening
from the porch light
while my shudder records
as accurately as a seismograph
the distance between us.

Peter, we have given you
these hand me downs:
your brother's half used sweater,
your father's reel,
and all my old faults
drowned once like a bagful of cats.

They have washed up twenty years downstream
bloated and mewling, to plague
the perfect body you will grow into,
shaking all of us delicately off.

There Is a Figure in Every Landscape

There is a figure in every landscape—
a boy at the other end of the pier,
a woman picking dandelions for salad
who leaves a kneeprint hidden in the grass
like the watermark on whitest paper.
That crooked branch is really a girl's arm
sunned to the very color of the bark,
an oval leaf conceals an oval eye:
children are climbing here, or have been.
Even in Adam's garden in the green
newness of unused shade, distrusting
privacy, God placed a sleeping woman.

Libation, 1966

We used to sacrifice young girls,
killing them like does
on rocky altars
they themselves had kept
tidy as kitchens.

Moloch took babies,
picked them early
from their mother's limbs
like green fruit,
spat out the pits.

It always was for some necessity,
fat harvest,
rain,
wind for a flaccid ocean, sails
flapping like gull's wings towards Troy.

Now we give young men.
They dance as delicately
as any bull boy,
with bayonette,
in a green maze,
under a sky as hot as Crete.

After Reading Nelly Sachs

Poetry has opened all my pores,
and pain as colorless as gas
moves in. I notice now the bones
that weld my child together
under her fragile skin; the crowds
of unassuming leaves that wait
on every corner for burning;
even your careless smile—bright teeth
that surely time will cut through
like a rough knife kerneling corn.

Between Generations

I left my father in a wicker basket
on other people's doorsteps.
Now I wait to be adopted by children,
wait in a house far between generations
with night rising faster
than the moon.

I dream of Regan laughing on her father's lap
behind the castle.
I laughed once in my father's face,
and he laughed and the two laughs
locked like bumpers
that still rust away between us.

My children fill the house with departures.
Zippers close, trunks close, wire hangers jump
on the empty pole—ghosts without their sheets.
And I ask what strict gravity
pushes love down the steep incline
from father to child, always down?

October Funeral

FOR AG

The world is shedding
its thousand skins.
The snake goes naked,
and the needles of the pine fall out
like the teeth of a comb I broke
upon your hair last week.
The ghosts of dead leaves
haunt no one. Impossible
to give you to the weather,
to leave you locked in a killed tree.
No metaphysic has prepared us
for the simple act of turning
and walking away.

Journey's End

How hard we try to reach death safely,
luggage intact, each child accounted for,
the wounds of passage quickly bandaged up.
We treat the years like stops along the way
of a long flight from the catastrophe
we move to, thinking: home free all at last.
Wave, wave your hanky towards journey's end;
avert your eyes from windows grimed with twilight
where landscapes rush by, terrible and lovely.

A Dangerous Time

November is a dangerous time for trees;
November is a dangerous time.
The leaves darken,
the sun goes on and off
beyond strange clouds,
a wolf is at the door.
Upstairs the children toss through dreams,
hearing the wind in the keyholes of sleep,
hearing the sirens circle the house like coyotes.
I have tucked them in with the wolf's own story,
how it grew from a cub, devoured the bride,
blew down the house of straw—
how this was natural.
Now my eldest walks the freezing hills
crying wolf, wolf.
He is a prophet, he has warned before
that the stars will rise like gooseflesh,
and a wolf is at the door.

The Layers

Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.

Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go

wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice

directed me:

"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."

Though I lack the art
to decipher it,

no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.

I am not done with my changes.

"The hard, inescapable phenomenon to be faced is that we are living and dying at once. My commitment is to report that dialogue."

"I keep trying to improve my controls over language, so that I won't have to tell lies. And I keep reading the masters because they infect me with human possibility. The vainest ambition is to want an art separated from its heritage, as though the tradition were a cistern full of toads instead of a life-giving fountain. A poet without a sense of history is a deprived child."

"At the core of one's existence there is a pool of energy that has nothing to do with personal identity, but that falls away from self, blends into the natural universe. Man has only a bit part to play in the whole marvelous show of creation."

"Poems would be easy if our heads weren't so full of the day's clatter. The task is to get through to the other side, where we can hear the deep rhythms that connect us with the stars and the tides."

"The fatal temptation for any poet is to become grandiose, to write only out of inflated emotional states. The way to achieve nobility in art is through the commonplace. Not to over-reach, not to strain for highflown epithets or resolutions. But simply to be as true as one can to the grain of the life."

"I am no more reconciled that I ever was to the world's wrongs and injustices of time. The poetry I admire most is innocent, luminous, and true."

—from *A Kind of Order, A Kind of Folly,*
Essays and Conversations by Stanley Kunitz

Stanley Kunitz's forthcoming book of collected poems, *The Poems of Stanley Kunitz 1928-1978*, will be published in the spring by Atlantic, Little, Brown.

Stanley Kunitz

At Great Point

Let the waters of heaven be gathered
into one place... Genesis 1

Is this the very face
of an angry God, or simply
his instrument?
On calm mornings halos
of light hovering
over the water, a few
feathers on the sand,
as if an angel had passed--
all the grace and dazzle
of power. Until,
inexplicably, the dark sea rises
on its hind legs into
a tidal wave, shearing away
even the shore
that contains it.

Linda Pastan

THE GARDEN

By Louise
Glick

1 *The Fear of Birth*

One sound. Then the hiss and whirl
of houses gliding into their places.
And the wind
leaves through the bodies of animals—

But my body that could not content itself
with health—why should it be sprung back
into the chord of sunlight?

It will be the same again.
This fear, this inwardness,
until I am forced into a field
without immunity
even to the least shrub that walks
stiffly out of the dirt, trailing
the twisted signature of its root,
even to a tulip, a red claw.

And then the losses,
one after another,
all supportable.

2 *The Garden*

The garden admires you.
For your sake it smears itself with green pigment,
the ecstatic reds of the roses,
so that you will come to it with your lovers.

And the willows—
see how it has shaped these green
tents of silence. Yet
there is still something you need,
your body so soft, so alive, among the stone animals.

Admit that it is terrible to be like them,
beyond harm.

3 *The Fear of Love*

That body lying beside me like obedient stone—
once its eyes seemed to be opening,
we could have spoken.

At that time it was winter already.
By day the sun rose in its helmet of fire
and at night also, mirrored in the moon.
Its light passed over us freely,
as though we had lain down
in order to leave no shadows,
only these two shallow dents in the snow.
And the past, as always, stretched before us,
still, complex, impenetrable.

How long did we lie there
as, arm in arm in their cloaks of feathers,
the gods walked down
from the mountain we built for them?

4 *Origins*

As though a voice were saying
You should be asleep by now—
But there was no one. Nor
had the air darkened,
though the moon was there,
already filled in with marble.

As though, in a garden crowded with flowers,
a voice had said
How' dull they are, these golds,
so sonorous, so repetitious
until you closed your eyes,
lying among them, all
stammering flame:

And yet you could not sleep,
poor body, the earth
still clinging to you—

5 *The Fear of Burial*

In the empty field, in the morning,
the body waits to be claimed.
The spirit sits beside it, on a small rock—
nothing comes to give it form again.

Think of the body's loneliness.
At night pacing the sheared field,
its shadow buckled tightly around.
Such a long journey.
And already the remote, trembling lights of the village
not pausing for it as they scan the rows.
How far away they seem,
the wooden doors, the bread and milk
laid like weights on the table.

Love long dormant showing itself:
the large expected gods
caged really, the columns
sitting on the lawn, as though perfection
were not timeless but stationary—that
is the comedy, she thinks,
that they are paralyzed. Or like the matching swans,
insular, circling the pond: restraint so passionate
implies possession. They hardly speak.
On the other bank, a small boy throws bits of bread
into the water. The reflected monument
is stirred, briefly, stricken with light—
She can't touch his arm in innocence again.
They have to give that up and begin
as male and female, thrust and ache.

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New Republic

A MAJOR MINOR POET

Collected Poems 1947-1980

by Allen Ginsberg

(Harper & Row, 837 pp., \$27.50)

Remember Allen Ginsberg? Wasn't it he who published that noisy, tiring poem in the fifties—bad words, good tune—just offensive enough to win your heart? Naughty Allen, crazy Allen, the wild zaddik with a fondness for Blake, Wyatt, and Whitman above all, whirling dervishly in public, beard-curling, petal-strewing, eyes agog, dancing like a shaggy elf and playing finger cymbals for the delight of Hell's Angels. Barefoot anarchist with cheek. How they loved him, the kids of the sixties, cheering alongside their grandmothers. Remember Prague 1965, when the rebellious Czechs crowned Ginsberg King of the May? Remember Chicago 1968, Ginsberg chanting from a balcony in an effort to exorcise Mayor Daley? Eventually, he would say, the chanting worked.

Then off-again Allen into the seventies, delivering his "Plutonium Ode" to the Pentagon, and squatting like a guru on the railroad tracks in the path of a train carrying radioactive detritus from the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant. Tibet in Denver by way of Newark, San Francisco, and the Lower East Side. Ginsberg was everywhere: there for the Beats, the Hips, the Blacks, the Rocks, the Drugs, the Nukes. "If your soul is in your belly, no one can drive you out of your skull." Three years ago, he showed up at Columbia in a professorial suit and a striped tie to celebrate the 25th anniversary of "Howl." He played the reading for laughs. That Allen! What will he do next?

Or should the question be: What has he done at all? It seems a strangely sober act to pick up *Collected Poems 1947-1980*, all 800 pages of it, and read Ginsberg as if he had always, like any poet, asked to be judged by his work. No Jack Kerouac sits beside you beating out the rhythms on coffeehouse tables with the palms of his hands, and assuring you how important Allen's poetry is. This is Ginsberg on his own, sans bells, kids, grandmothers, presenting himself as if he were dead and the 20th century past and he had fallen into line with the poets of the age to see who will

make it into the American literature survey courses of 2001. Yet it does not feel fair to judge him in that company.

If one makes comparisons with Eliot, Pound, Lowell, Stevens, or even with Ransom or Robert Penn Warren, the collected Ginsberg does not stand a chance. What these 800 pages prove is that Ginsberg has always been a minor poet; that is, a poet who has produced a few remarkable pieces, but the bulk of whose work shows no philosophical growth (despite its ostentatiously philosophical preoccupations) and rarely any depth. It is no small thing to be a minor poet; few make the list in any century. Ginsberg seems to be aware of his place. In the introduction, he warns that this collection will allow readers to "observe poetic energy as cyclic, the continuum a panorama of valleys and plateaus with peaks of inspiration every few years."

So, in fact, we do observe. When one considers that these poems cover 33 years of personal and national history, most of them lived feverishly, there is a striking sameness to the body of this work. Only Ginsberg's musical brilliance, his perfect pitch, saves the sameness from monotony. In the early poems he sounds like someone who has submerged himself in a tub of Elizabethan lyrics, and as soon as he bubbled up for air, wrote: "Last night I dreamed—of one I love" ("The Night Apple"). That was written in 1950. In 1979 he announced, "After 53 years—I still cry tears—I still fall in love—I still improve" ("Some Love"). He does not, however, improve thematically. A young homosexual becomes an old homosexual. An eager poet becomes a tired one. His politics—if they may be called that—show no change whatever. In "A Poem on America," written in 1951, Ginsberg discovered that "America is like Russia." In "Capitol Air" of 1980, he came up with this: "Truth may be hard to find but Falsehood easy/ Read between the lines our Imperialism is sleazy/ But if you think the People's State your Heart's Desire/ Jump right back in the frying pan from the fire."

If one has a mind to resent such thoughts, Ginsberg can be terribly irritating; but it seems a mistake to take him seriously as a voice of ideas. His specialty is simply voice, sound. Here is how "Wales Visitation" begins:

White fog lifting & falling on mountain-brow

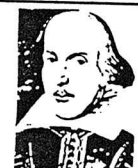
Trees moving in rivers of wind

The clouds arise
as on a wave, gigantic eddy lifting mist
above teeming ferns exquisitely swayed
along a green crag
glimpsed thru mullioned glass in valley
rairie—

In his *Journals*, published in 1977, Ginsberg wrote that as a young poet he wanted to be like Rimbaud, "and just write perfect things . . . where every word would be glittering and elegant and erotic and romantic and mystical." Grown older, he found himself "saddled now with huge bags of prosaic descriptions, sometimes incomprehensible scenes of incommunicable moments of dreams." For lesser stylists, the long poetic line is a cobra, always

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"THE EMACIATED BODIES of the Ethiopians speak as graphically of tyranny as the corpses at Auschwitz. Yet Kennedy scrupulously observed the convention of international progressive etiquette that forbids us to call the handiwork of Communism evidence of 'social injustice' or 'the need for systemic change.' Nor did he suggest that outside relief efforts, laudable as they are, address only the 'symptoms' rather than the 'root causes.' No, these clichés of liberal analysis are reserved for capitalist societies."

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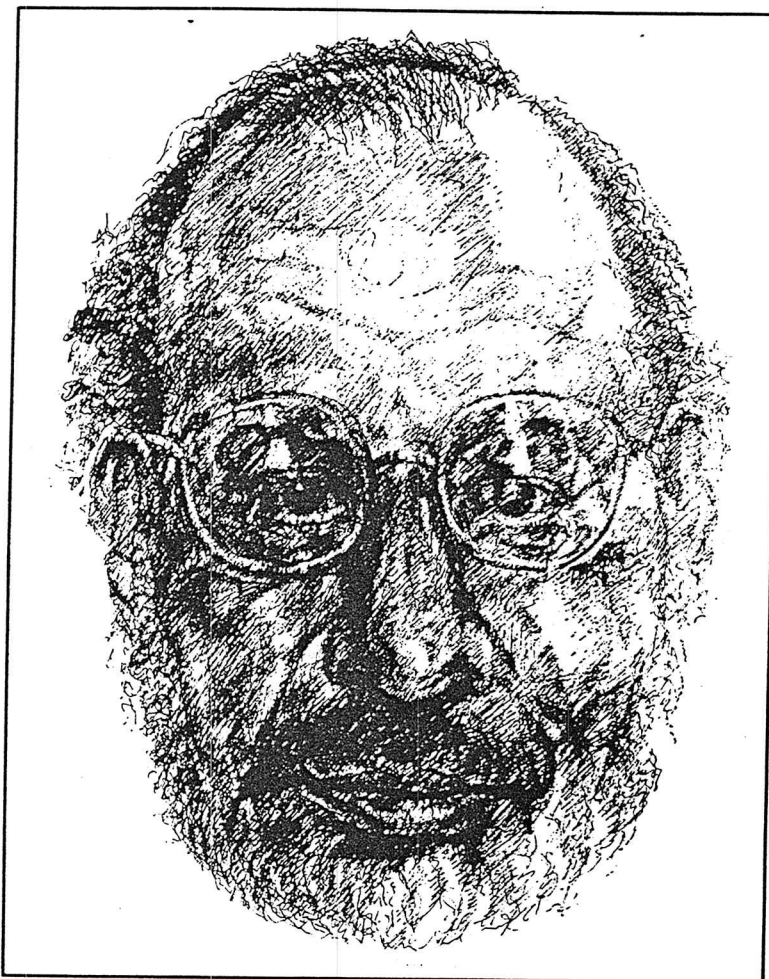
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threatening to uncoil into prose. With Ginsberg, his recriminations notwithstanding, nothing really ever sounds wrong—a gift that often protects some very silly lines: “O ass of mystery and night.” Then, too, there are lines nothing could protect: “O victory forget your underwear we’re free.”

That exuberance comes at the close of the famous “Howl.” It is a poem worth rereading, especially if one deluded oneself into liking it when it made its loud debut. Read it today, and Ginsberg’s self-mockery at the Columbia anniversary reading a few years ago makes great sense. One can grow giggly learning that “the best minds” of the poet’s generation “copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a/package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued/along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with/a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness.” It makes you wonder what the second best minds were doing. Yet even in “Howl” the voice is clear and arresting. And the generosity in all the poems is abundant. Ginsberg can no more write a cruel line than a dry one. On the whole, however, this is the poetry of language against meaning, words invoked to bring us to our knees, without our really knowing why.

Except for “Kaddish,” which is the one great poem in the collection. In his review of the *Collected Poems* in *The New York Times*, Harvey Shapiro described “Kaddish” as well as it might be described: “[Ginsberg] has been able to cut through and summon the dead, to recreate his insane mother, to make his peace with her, more than that, to make a muse of her.” Some muse. In the poem Naomi Ginsberg screams, glares, bats her wings to ward off Mussolini, Trotsky, poisons, tape recorders, the FBI. But

she will not, cannot, ward off her son. He dogs her through every stage and place of her madness, and she, crazy as she gets, will never lose sight of him. Each is the responsibility, the creator, of the other. Finally Ginsberg quotes a letter he received two days after her death: “The key is in the window, the/key is in the sunlight at the window—I have the key—Get married Allen/don’t take drugs—the key is in the bars, in the sunlight in the window.”



ALLEN GINSBERG BY DAVID SCHORR

One could close the book on that poem, call that the collected Ginsberg, and be satisfied, often pleased. With a “public poet,” however, there seems to be something more to take account of, especially when the poet has led a life as openly hectic as Ginsberg’s. Yet what exactly is a public poet? Someone whose poems one would rather listen to than read? Someone who says something about the public as well as to it, who, in a sense, makes a poem of the public? Whitman, Ginsberg’s presiding deity, did that. Has Ginsberg done it too, Ginsberg, this weirdness out of the

Book of Hosea, this “bearded American fairy dope poet,” as he called himself—the Voice of America?

There is a long, anti-Vietnam war poem in the collection, called “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” that seems to get at the public poet question, and to sum up Ginsberg as well. At the outset Ginsberg sees America seeing him. Immediately the public poet makes a spectacle of himself: “Kansas! Kansas! Shuddering at last!/PERSON appearing

in Kansas!/angry telephone calls to the university.” We get the picture, or we think we do. Ginsberg, cowboy priest and rabbi, rides into Kansas, plunking his banjo and absolving the place: “Thy sins are forgiven, Wichita.” Inevitably the poem becomes a freedom song:

What if I sang till Students
knew I was free
of Vietnam, trousers, free
of my own meat,
free to die in my thoughtful
shivering Throne?
freer than Nebraska, freer
than America—

May I disappear
in magic Joy-smoke! Pouf!

Here is Ginsberg in full flower-childishness. Drop your pants and win the war.

But then somewhere in the middle of “Wichita Vortex Sutra” a wholly new tone is taken: “I’m an old man now and a lonesome man in Kansas/but not afraid/ to speak my lonesomeness in a car/because not only my lonesomeness/it’s Ours, all over America.” Read strictly in the context of an anti-war protest, these lines mean little. Read as a dark statement about America’s history, they bring us to a pause. It seems true, what Ginsberg says. The country does feel lonesome—not as a consequence of politics, of recurrent isolationism, but as a basic condition. And the country, like Ginsberg, is getting on, an aging lonesome cowboy perpetually riding into Kansas. “Spoken lonesomeness is prophesy,” he says, explaining his role.

The other side of lonesomeness, of course, is extravagant hope. Toward the end of the poem, Ginsberg invites the future to be happy: "Come to my lone presence/into this Vortex named Kansas. . . I here declare the end of the War." Naturally he had to do that. The country hears its own voice echoing the poet's, a congregation in a college auditorium. We entered Kansas like Jesse James and wound up singing like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. Thus does Ginsberg create and sustain his public presence. He could not have survived as a poet had he not touched these simple American chords of self-doubt, self-love, self-confidence. It has been said that Ginsberg hates America. My guess is that he is crazy about it.

Which is not to say that he understands the country deeply, or that he thinks about it deeply, at least not in terms that come through in the writing. Analysis is not his strong suit. If one were to see "Wichita Vortex Sutra," or indeed most of Ginsberg's poems, as a mirror held up to the audience, the country would look awfully superficial. Is that what makes a public poet? Someone who handles superficialities beauti-

fully? Not everyone can do it, surely. Only a poet who feels the superficialities in his bones, who believes in everything he appears to contradict, can pull it off. Naomi seemed to realize this, even from the bottom of her madness. Somewhere in Ginsberg's howl is the married man who does not take drugs.

Does the collected Ginsberg represent the collected us? Certainly not, at least in the sense of reaching the nation's real complications. Still, as a guidebook to the national emotional highlights-of the past four decades, the book is indispensable. So, evidently, is Ginsberg. Continually changing shapes and sounds, he has managed to outlast better poets by remaining forever current, urgent, with it, whatever "it" happened to be. What a strange national Moses. But maybe not. The two qualities one takes from this collection are sinful innocence and innocent sin. Allen was always a good boy.

ROGER ROSENBLATT

Roger Rosenblatt is a senior writer and essayist for *Time* magazine.

inspired me with the greatest confidence. . . . Here was a man to whom I would willingly entrust my life.

Dr. Barnard also had occasion to record his impressions:

I . . . went down to D-I ward where I found Dr. Blaiberg dozing in bed. He looked like Santa Claus, with a tubby belly, red cheeks, blue ears, and a big mouth—except this was no laughing Santa. His mouth was open gasping for air. I nudged him slightly, and he looked at me with elfish eyes. "Dr. Blaiberg? I've come to introduce myself—or do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't."

"I'm Professor Barnard."

"I'm sorry, Professor. . . ."

"Well, I've come to say hello and see how you are."

"You can see . . . I'm not well. . . ."

"Do you know there is a possibility we can help you by doing a heart transplant on you?"

"Yes, I know."

"How do you feel about that?"

"The sooner, the better . . . I'll cooperate in every way." I looked into his eyes to see if there was fear. There was none. . . . He was a company man—one of many. But he was without fear. . . . "Good," I said, "I'll come again soon."

Katz shrewdly interprets both what was said and not said in this meeting. Blaiberg, instantly idolizing his "born surgeon," pledged "full cooperation." Not for him to ask about the odds of success, the drug regimen he would be on, or what Barnard was learning from his first (and unsuccessful) heart transplant. Barnard, perceiving Blaiberg as something other than an adult (Santa Claus, elfin), thought him complacent, and through some obscure intuition (but not by direct questioning), fearless. Not for him to explain the problem of organ rejection, infection, or other possible complications. Neither Blaiberg's nor Barnard's recollections, Katz notes, mention any other substantive discussion about the surgery.

Lest anyone think this encounter atypical, *The Silent World of Doctor and Patient* skillfully traces the deep roots of this medical style. Hippocrates instructed physicians to do their duties "calmly and adroitly, concealing most things from the patient while you are attending to him." A ninth-century physician, Isaac Israeli, counseled colleagues to "reassure the patient and declare his safety even though you may not be certain of it"; and Thomas Percival, in *Medical Ethics*, his widely read and often

PATIENCE WITH PATIENTS

The Silent World of Doctor and Patient
by Jay Katz, M.D.

(The Free Press, 263 pp., \$15.95)

We the Victors
by Curtis Bill Pepper

(Doubleday & Company, 322 pp., \$17.95)

To demonstrate how vast a silence suffuses the world of medicine, Jay Katz quotes two recollections of a dialogue between a patient and his doctor. According to Dr. Philip Blaiberg, the second person ever to receive a heart transplant, the conversation went like this:

I was lying in bed with eyes closed. . . when I sensed someone at the head of my bed. I opened my eyes and saw a man. He was tall, young, good looking. . . . His hands were beautiful; the hands of a born surgeon.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"No," I said with little interest, "I don't."

"I'm Professor Chris Barnard," he said.

"I'm sorry, Professor" I replied, "but I didn't recognize you. . . ."

He spoke earnestly. "Dr. Blaiberg, how do you feel about the prospect of a heart transplant operation? You probably know, don't you, that I am prepared to do you next?"

"The sooner the better," I said fervently, "and I promise you my full cooperation at all times."

Though our conversation was brief and he stayed only a few minutes, I was immediately impressed with the stature of the man and his air of buoyant optimism. He