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THESIS AND POEMS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of
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What This Essay Isn't

This essay is not about Darwinism. I do not purport herein to trace the effects of Darwin or Darwinian thought from Matthew Arnold to the post-modern poets. Such a task would be impossible because there is no poem, no writing in the Western World since 1859 that has not been touched or tainted or affected by Darwin's theory of evolution.

What This Essay Is

Starting with T.H. Huxley through Henri Bergson, Nicholas Berdyaev and Lewis Mumford, there is a hint and then a declaration that carries over into the poetry of the time of an evolution of or in man by which evolution man evolves or has evolved and is evolving physically, mentally, spiritually, socially and culturally. In this essay I attempt to trace this particular brand of evolution from Arnold to the post-moderns. The particular type of evolution I'm dealing with has been named "creative evolution" by Berdyaev and Bergson and that is the name I will use throughout this essay. In order to place creative evolution in its proper setting, I must place Darwin in his world. Before I can explain how creative evolution works in selected poetry

from Matthew Arnold through the post-moderns. I must place Darwin in his setting, because "creative evolution" does not happen without Darwin's evolution happening first.

Introduction

By the last decade of the nineteenth century Darwin's theories espoused in Origin of the Species and other writings were being lauded in the centers of learning in the western world. The purpose of this paper is to trace the development of those theories to their seemingly natural extensions through the poetry of the time up to and through the post-moderns. By the phrase "seemingly natural extensions" I refer particularly to the notion of creative evolution as espoused by Nicholas Berdyaev, Henri Bergson and Lewis Mumford.

Darwinism didn't happen overnite. It is only proper at this point to place it in its setting. Medieval times in Europe were ordered times. They were quiet and slow times at least in this—that nations were not exploring a newfound world and setting up colonies for the mother country. The Roman Catholic Church had extended its sphere of influence into nearly every facet of men's lives and very often

held the civil state together. With the Church's exact and exacting kind of discipline, society as it were was held together in one piece. Individualized thinking was not only discouraged but often punished as heresy.

Then came the guilds, the advent of the printing press, the discovery of America, the Protestant Reformation, which all combined with other things to bring about what we loosely term the Renaissance. During the period we refer to as the Renaissance there was a new and exciting concentration on the individual in the arts, as well as in the new mercantile society.

Lewis Mumford is a twentieth century writer, a teacher, philosopher and social commentator. (As a writer he is prolific.) He likes to say that Shakespeare's art, which he believes to be representative of the Renaissance, reflected the primacy of man. During the Middle Ages only a few wealthy had the time and opportunity to engage in or appreciate the arts and the arts were reposited in the Church. The poor during that time could not read; there were no books; and they had no time in which to enculturate themselves with fine arts since keeping body and soul together was a full time job. "The life of man was brutal,

nasty and short", to borrow a phrase from Hegel.

During the time of the Renaissance, however, the administration of Queen Elizabeth in England even fostered the arts. Although the arts were still essentially the province of the wealthy as far as enjoyment went, the rise of mercantilism created a larger and more financially able audience available that could read, communicate and appreciate.

Nothing happens without a cause or many causes and the Renaissance was no exception. It is oversimplification on my part to attempt to set out all the causes for the Renaissance here. And it is even more impossible to differentiate between the cause and effect.

But what happened to the Renaissance? When did it end? Who said when it would end? Who said it should end? Did it "cause" the American and French revolutions? I don't know.

Lewis Mumford likes to call the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "the period of expansionism". He believes that global exploration was the extension in man of the notion of the primacy of man felt so strongly in the Renaissance; that global exploration and its subsequent

conquest of other men was evil in that slavery was evil; that global exploration was the good of the notion of the primacy of man gone awry—perverted.

During the period of expansionism we see (or saw) the emergence of nationalism, a universally good quality in people in that it constitutes a reassertion of the group personality, but also perverted in the period of expansionism because its logical extension is war. The obvious example of that is German and Italian nationalism leading to World War II.

Probably Mumford's most interesting opinion on the period of expansionism is his belief that when men set out to conquer something, be it a trade route, a number of slaves, a mineral deposit, a rich agricultural area, there is usually something they intend to conquer even more important for them than the known goal. He believes that the goal is the conquest of fears, fear of the unknown in particular and fear of the unfamiliar in general. He believes that men use the desire to conquer and subdue additionally to justify in themselves an unwillingness to think, to think about themselves,about death, about their relationship to their Maker (or the Vital Force that keeps the sun in the sky),

about their relationship to each other, be it conqueror to conquered or husband to wife or parent to children. Witness the hostage situation in Iran and how it has joined people of many different political persuasions into one voice. And it's our collective fear of that situation and what it can lead to that gets our attention and makes us so patriotic. In any event, neither Genghis Khan nor Julius Ceasar nor Hannibal nor Attila the Hun nor Alexander the Great nor Erwin Rommel were known to have stopped the battle and to have rallied their soldiers to a good examination of conscience. What I am saying is that during times of conquest and exploration men do not take time for introspection; they do not look inward when their attention is drawn to the enemy, be that enemy another soldier or simply the unknown.

And this situation, generally speaking, is what we have during the period of time Mumford refers to as the period of expansionism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, that period of expansionism was drawing to a close. The physical world was known. The continents had been found and located on new maps. It was time to start appraising what had been accomplished, and Darwin's physical research

of flora and fauna was part of that appraisement. So also was Freud's research into the id.

Although Darwin's theories—survival of the fittest, and so forth—left out or failed to include the possibility of one person helping another to survive, they did act as a stamp of approval on man's conquest of other men. In that sense Darwin was a product of his time.

The publication of Darwin's Origin of the Species in England in November of 1859 caused quite a stir in academic circles. Churchmen condemned it; scientists lauded it. The theory is that all forms of life have evolved in their physical form from more primitive forms, and that the natural selection involved in the evolution is or was accidental, that is, no supreme being necessarily stood there watching and directing the course of the development. Darwin's treatise stopped with flora and fauna. It did not include the evolution of man from ape.

T.H. Huxley did it. He took Darwin from plants to apes. Huxley was an English zoologist who was born in 1825 and died in 1895. He was a personal friend of Darwin's and lauded the Origin. He too had done extensive research on a boat but the research was on marine life. He was to

become Darwin's defender and he went on to draw the conclusion that man evolved from the ape.[1] His defense of Darwin began with his writing of the Origin's first book review and lasted for many years through writings, public debates and teachings.

Huxley went still another step when in 1863 he published Man's Place in Nature, which book in addition to defending Darwin and linking man with ape, raised the loftier question of how man fit into the scheme of things. By the time Huxley was forty-five (1870) years old, he was a popular educator and speaker in England, and his lectures often dealt with the ethical structure which should be erected to serve man's purpose in a world illuminated by Darwinism.[2] In 1885 Huxley retired by reason of ill health but went on writing profusely about new ethical standards required of mankind, of the evolution of the evolution of man.[3]

Although Huxley was a professed agnostic, he says for the world that mankind must now, because of evolution, take on a new set of moral standards and man must do it because he is evolving. In other words, man is or was evolving in many more ways than physically, and what

sufficed in the past in the way of morally acceptable conduct, would not suffice now; that ethics change as man changes; that the greater the evolution, the stricter or more intricate or more exacting must be the rules of ethics.

Creative Evolution

Henri Bergson was a French philosopher and teacher whose most popular work is titled Creative Evolution, published in 1907.[4] Bergson carries Huxley's ideas about new ethics in man commensurate with man's evolutionary status even further. Broadly speaking, Bergson would have man participate in the divine by man's use of his creative faculty (which distinguishes him from animals) that creative urge being a part of what he called Vital Impetus,[5] which force he claimed existed from all time and which force is synonomous with a need for creative action in man. I repeat that the force (Vital Impetus) is the need in man to create. God or god is an urge to creative action.

Bergson believed that Darwin's evolution was a continuing process, was going on then and will continue; he believed that the major sphere of evolution in man

would be in the mind,[6] that man's intelligence would continue to develop. He pointed out that the ape, to find satisfaction, had only to satisfy a few instincts, but that man has more complex satisfactions to meet, such as morality and aesthetics. Man's basic difference from other higher forms of life is that he actively formulates values, and true human progress (evolution of the intellect) consists in increases in aesthetics, intellectual and spiritual experience and satisfaction.[7]

Bergson believed man could only understand reality through introspection, and the process of comprehending how the world fits together for man was commonly known as intuition.[8] Intuition was a complement to intellect and a parallel to it; and using it, man could arrive at absolute knowledge which is happiness. The creative urge in man then was the only way to arrive at absolute knowledge or happiness; and introspection by use of intuition and intellect as tools, was the means.[9]

The industrial revolution came to the United States soon after the turn of the century and prior to World War I. There was very little excellent poetry to come out of the United States during those years. At about the time

Bergson published Creative Evolution, in Russia Nicholas Berdyaev, a theologian, was writing prolifically of the new era, a time to come when man would by reason of his evolution, attain great things. Berdyaev's evolution of man was not a physical one altogether, but rather a spiritual evolution occuring simultaneously with the physical. He believed that man's understanding of himself, of God, of other men would or was increasing or had increased to the point where we were standing on the edge of an era in which man would no longer be inhumane, an era in which men would aspire to and reach global peace, global cooperation, global charity. Berdyaev believed that these capabilities in man were what makes him God-like; that it is in men's aspirations to oneness with God that he can acquire "salvation" or oneness with God.

For him religion is creativity and creativity is religion. To explain: as man evolves both physically and mentally, he also evolves spiritually to the point where he, in understanding himself, naturally aspires to oneness with God; and man at the same time knows that to reach that oneness, he must use his every faculty (that distinguishes him from animals) to its limit. The naturally evolving

use of those distinguishing faculties will ultimately lead man then to the fullness of his potential as a human being, with heavy emphasis on the spiritual side of man. Berdyaev himself says, "Man's consciousness of himself as the center of the world, bearing within himself the secret of the world, rising above all things of the world, is a prerequisite of all philosophy: without it one could not dare to philosophize."[10]

When World War I broke out, Berdyaev took the position that it was only a matter of time before the evolution would continue, that the war was merely a temporary relapse of man to his more animal nature.

It is interesting to note here that both Bergson and Berdyaev have these beliefs in common: a) the intellect of man is in a state of evolution, an adjunct to Darwin's evolution, b) creativity is the distinguishing faculty in man, differentiating him from all other higher forms of life, and c) introspection will lead man to happiness.

Lewis Mumford shares these beliefs. He does not state outright his belief in a) above, but it shows. He states emphatically that mankind <u>can</u> inherit man's <u>whole</u> estate, which is the "meaning and promise of the democratic

ideal." [11] In this area he sounds like a social darwinist. As an aside I note briefly that social darwinism is the carrying over of Darwinism into the social development of man. In other words Darwinism is to the singular man what Social Darwinism is to a large group of men. Karl Marx believed in writing Das Kapital that he was Darwin's parallel, and that communism was the end product of the evolution of government.[12]

On points b) and c), Mumford is in total agreement with Bergson and Berdyaev.[13]

Poetry and Creative Evolution

Walt Whitman is an enigma. How did he get where he was intellectually without first having had the exposure to Darwinian thought? I don't know.

During Matthew Arnold's time in England, Whitman was writing in the United States. He threw out old forms of rhyme and meter and wrote free verse in which rhythms were still important but meter was not the rule as it was for Arnold. Whitman's poetry was set in a young nation still testing within itself the strength of its own muscle. It

was an earthy poetry, a celebration of the individual person and all his strengths and weaknesses, all his good qualities and bad, all his animal and all his spiritual natures. Whitman had read extensively of Emerson and appeared to be influenced by Emerson's Eastern philosophies and for him the notion of Nirvana (or salvation) was attainable (according to Whitman) by man's perfection of himself.

Perfection was of course available to everyone simply by being the best individual he could be, whether he be farmer, poet, wife, cobbler, lawyer or Indian chief, and that perfection, that eternal happiness, was attainable now, immediately.

Whitman's images were generally homespun and less symbolic than Arnold's or other contemporaries and his idea of order in the universe was well worked out by the time of Leaves of Grass. Whitman's is an optimistic poetry, forward-looking, each man the master of his fate, each man a miracle, all men basically good and seeking good.

Some of Whitman's detractors would call him a Pantheist for his belief that oneness with the physical universe is divinity attained—"look for me underfoot!"[14]

Others would say in his defense that he only believes

each man is his own Christ (after the agony of self-discovery is over) and that when each man becomes his own Christ, then he has attained eternal salvation now, not after death, but now while he is alive and doing whatever it is that he does.

Perhaps Darwin and Bergson had no meaning at all for Whitman. Perhaps they were unnecessary. He believed that each and every one of us was perfect now, in at least the sense that we can achieve oneness with the universe now. That oneness was available by introspection, the whitelight of self-knowledge to everyone now.

There was no need for waiting around, in Whitman's view, for the intellect to evolve in order to achieve it. Every man's creativity (and we are all creative) would allow every man today the perfection man yearns for. I don't see Whitman's notion of that perfection however being evolutionary. The fact is that he would allow or at least not prohibit that perfection to man two thousand or four thousand or more years ago.

Mumford is a modern-day prophet calling out for social action, action he believes to be mandatory after the statement of his ideas. Whitman does not call out to his reader

for collective social action; his is a more personal poetry than that. He calls out only to the individual reader to look inside himself. He agrees with Mumford that the "....kelson of the creation is love."[15]

Matthew Arnold was a great poet of the latter part of the nineteenth century, as well as being more popularly known as an educator and critic. By reason of his close acquaitance with the educational system of England, he was acutely aware of the progress and effects that Darwinism was making and leaving in the universities of his time. For Arnold at the height of what we refer to as the "Victorian Age", life was an ordered thing. England was at peace, the empire covered the globe, and England was still in the process of (as it had been doing for some time) civilizing the world. The industrial revolution had not yet had its ultimate effect.

Along came the theory of evolution and its welcome and acceptance in academia and Arnold's world began to topple, to crumble. The very notion that human beings may have evolved from primates was abhorrent to him, not just because of any existing belief that God created man from dust but especially because of side issues raised thereby,

especially the divine right of monarchy.

In "Dover Beach" written in the year 1861, Arnold expresses some of the depression, fear and anxiety he feels at a world gone awry—his world. He is almost in tears, it seems, over his well ordered world toppling and he cries out to the reader his plan for dealing with it—love between two people. It was a hopeless poetry, depressing, fearful and withdrawn. It was repressive in that the solution is not thought out at all but is only evasive of the problem. If Arnold's world was collapsing then he should have worked out his idea of order with something more positive than love between a couple—in his historical and social situation such a solution amounted to burying his head in the sand.

Matthew Arnold wrote little poetry after "Dover Beach." Some critics say the reason is that he could not establish for himself in his own mind thereafter an idea of order, into and out of which perspective he could write good poetry.

Arnold was, however, primarily a critic, educator and lecturer. Most of his later years were given to these pursuits.[16]

But how does Arnold relate his poetry to the theory

of creative evolution. He doesn't. I have selected him particularly here because "Dover Beach" represents a poetic backlash against any theory of evolution. Arnold came to grips with the problem. In his later years he became a prolific lecturer advocating education in the liberal arts as opposed to a strictly scientific education in the schools. In his essay "Literature and Science", meant to be delivered as a lecture on a tour of America, Arnold accepts his age (it was 1883) as the age of science but argues well the classic claims which literature makes to have a pre-eminent place in education.[17]

In fact his essay is necessary to keep the Darwinians from placing too much emphasis on science on school curriculum. He states in that essay that it is instinctual, the desire in men to relate knowledge to our sense for conduct, sense for beauty, and knowledge for Arnold, of course, included scientific knowledge.[18]

T. S. Eliot, St. Louis born poet and critic, Harvard educated, expatriate to London about 1915, was of the "Ezra Pound School". It seems that at or near the time of World War I, some of our young men left the United States and settled in London which as a matter of fact was much more

literary-minded than the United States. We must remember that in 1915 the United States (or at least the Midwest) was only slightly removed from being a frontier; that its population was largely rural; and that the arts took second place to the industrial revolution in the cities. Eliot went to London to write poetry where he would be appreciated. Certainly for a time he was greatly disappointed in that he did not receive the recognition he wanted. In time, however, he became well-received for such poems as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the "Hollow Men."

Those two poems in particular, in that they are very representative of the good poetry at the time, are typical of the gloom and despair of the World War I era. Eliot seems (was) preoccupied with the notion that men don't perform, don't accomplish anything, don't get anything done.[19]

He laments the indecision and indirection, as if it is better to do something wrong than to do nothing. At least in the process, man proves he is alive.

I say these things bearing in mind that when Eliot was writing, we were in the middle of the industrial revolution, sweatshops were in vogue, child labor laws weren't yet in effect in the United States, man was losing

ground in the race with the machine, the dignity of man as man was losing its former importance, the "quick buck" had taken on new importance. We were entering upon or in an era when man was no longer master of his own fate. He was manipulated so to speak by the world around him, regardless of whether he operated a machine in a factory or he counted money behind a counter in a bank. In that manipulative process with all its speed, man was not acting; he was being acted upon, like a rudderless boat floating downstream, being pushed from one side of the stream to the other, the current taking man where it would.

Eliot contrasts "Prufrock's" incapacity (inability, indecision) to act with the self-fulfillment of those who have lived or do live by the instinct (or the principle) of creative activity. He ridicules and disparages the seemingly important trivialities of Prufrock's world and holds out hope that active self-fulfillment is the way to a meaningful life.

I add here parenthetically that what Eliot said in 1915 is all the more true today. One trip to the symphony on a Sunday afternoon is enough to convince me of that. I've met old professors there who are actively learning and

teaching and enjoying and grabbing hold of their lives and influencing the lives of people around them. I return to my farm in rural America where I find that men are measured by the length and breadth and width of their motor vehicles, their land holdings, their cigars. In this real world the accumulation of material things is all there is; learning is suspect if it is not mechanical and money-oriented; creativity is synonomous only with a deviousness directed at the further accumulation of things. Like Prufrock concerned with growing old and wearing the bottoms of his trousers rolled, in the real world, Prufrock worries about whether his automobile fits his image.

In the year 1927 Eliot joined the Anglican Church and some writers attribute his change in attitude in his subsequent poetry to his religious conversion.[20] The fact is that his writing took on after his conversion a whole new positive approach to life, involving renewal of man and regeneration. "Ash Wednesday" published in 1930 represents the new Eliot, the Eliot with his idea of order in the universe worked out.[21]

Tracing the theory of creative evolution requires discussing Eliot for the reason that he is clearly repre-

sentative of a poet who laments man's failure to create initially, laments the inconsequence of life of a non-creative man on the one hand and then as promptly as he works out his idea of order, joyously proceeds to give meaning (happiness) to the life of creative man thereafter.[22]

Wallace Stevens was an American poet who did most of his writing from the 1930's to and including most of the 1950's. He was austere. He was skeptical of everything and rejected religion and systematic philosophy outright. His writings show a great concern for questions of reality, perception and truth.[23]

Unlike Eliot who finally gleans his idea of order in the universe from the dogma of the Anglican Church, Stevens doesn't seem to grab onto any dogma at all. In fact, his idea of order is never quite clear to me although I can be sure he believes that there is and must be order in the universe. Sometimes I think his idea of eternal happiness or salvation would be a candlelit dinner of lobster and a superb white wine.

Fortunately for the human race skeptics are usually thinkers and Stevens was no exception. He believed that truth is identical with one's own experience; experience

is identical with one's state of consciousness at a given time and is the sum of perception and appearance—things seen are things as seen. As an example you would answer the question "How high is up?" totally different today than you would answer it on your tenth birthday.

Stevens, to get at truth, believed that we must clear away all that intervenes between the perceiving mind and the world as presently perceived. Cultural history is a threat to the mind seeking to relate itself to the world of the present. Language embodies perception in fossilized forms and hinders the vital activities of consciousness. Freedom is: ridding one's mind of cultural history and other minds. Beauty is born of the process of change and death. The mind can have satisfaction only if what it affirms is felt as true, and truth is perpetually changing in both the perceiving consciousness and in the world as perceived.

In other words, dogma is out; you and I and all of us and what we hold to be truth this minute are in; and tomorrow it may be, will be, different from what it is today.

For Stevens, there is a limit on the power of the imagination to surpass resemblance—goes back to cultural

history. The mind begets in resemblance; poetry is a satisfying of man's desire for resemblance and touches a sense of reality.[24]

Whitman and Stevens have a lot of ideas in common. For each of them individual man is the center of his own universe; each is fascinated by the process of birth and death (life cycle); each seems to reject reason for imagination as the way to truth; both accept evil and death as realities; and for each the poem is the occasion, not something written about it.

By the same token, for Whitman nature's order is a part of divine law, perhaps, and its organic order, including man's participation in it, is a dramatization of divine law. For Stevens, nature is indifferent to man and man does not really participate in its process.[25]

So how does Stevens relate to the theory of creative evolution? The fact is that he doesn't mention it directly. His concerns are such that he need not in that he touches the very thing without actively saying so. In "The Idea of Order at Key West" Stevens makes his statement (to himself) that order in the universe is good (perhaps because chaos is not good) and the further statement that each of us, you

and I, must work out that idea of order for ourselves.[26] Stevens had tremendous respect for the power of a deliberate choice.[27]

As I said earlier in this essay, Stevens believed that the mind could have satisfaction only if what it affirms is felt as true; further he believed that truth was perpetually changing in both the perceiving mind and in the world as perceived by that mind. That means, of course, that what is true for me is not true for you, and what is true for me today may not be true for me tomorrow.

Combine these things I've pointed out about Stevens and the conclusion is: each one of us must work out our idea of order by ourselves. No one can do it for us. What does that require of us? It requires us to think; it requires us to spend some time in introspection. And here we are again looking at the three beliefs held in common by Bergson, Berdyaev and Mumford. But I believe Stevens goes farther than any of them. The three of them (Bergson, Berdyaev and Mumford) are all theological to the extent that they talk about or refer to or give deference to a God, no matter that Bergson may call God or god Vital Impetus. Stevens doesn't mention God as any kind of

supreme power directing or guiding the life of man. Perhaps in that Stevens nudges along the evolution of the theory of creative evolution.

Robert Frost, born in 1875 and writing profusely from 1915 to the Sixties, is probably the greatest philosopher-poet in American history. One of the reasons, of course, for his greatness is that he could meld the good and the bad and see them all as of a piece. Evil and death are realities for Frost. There is an order in the world—an order that he learns from nature; that order is good. His poetry is the work of an observer only; he does not lament the fate of man as Eliot does, nor does he wring his hands and cry out his anguish. He doesn't sing songs of joy as Whitman does, nor shout his neighbor's greatness from his housetop. He only observes and occasionally smiles and occasionally sheds a tear. He passes no judgment. Frost's images are homespun but each speak at as many different levels as he has readers.

How does he treat the theories of Bergson and Berdyaev? He doesn't. But what Frost does say over and over again in a thousand different ways is that man needs to, should, give and receive love; he keeps repeating that for man to be happy,

love is a necessity; that somehow love is the cornerstone of man's existence. Frost doesn't say where man is going or the date on which man will arrive. He only says over and over: life is synonomous with love, and without love, there is no life. Frost's man doesn't evolve anthropologically as Berdyaev's does; his man does not participate in the divine in the same way that Bergson's does. Frost's man exists, good and bad, and he is happy when he is giving and receiving love. In fact Frost's man doesn't seem to know or be aware of the fact that love is the secret; at least he doesn't mention it. Frost does not lament that; he only observes it.

For a specific look at the way Frost treats love or the lack of it examine "A Servant to Servants" or "Death of The Hired Man". Frost pushes the old notions of creative evolution one step further than Stevens, who attempted to simply leave God out of it. Frost, by his refusal to shout out any answer for man to the loftier questions, emphasizes by understatement the necessity of his answer: love. Frost is the link between Steven's requirement for introspection and Mumford's full scale requirement for mankind's survival.

In 1918 the German Oswald Spengler wrote Downfall of

the Western World. The book was an additional help for Hitler on the way to world domination. In Spengler's world physical force is all there is; only the strong survive; poets and (other) intellectuals have no worth or value; and all of western civilization acted as premised, with its war to end war, and war to stop aggression, and war to defend liberty, and war to maintain the status quo and war in the name of Christ to stop the spread of godless communism.

No wonder after World War II and Korea we had people like Ferlingnetti passing off their prose as poetry in coffeehouses across the country. We as a country would listen to anything no matter how unhappy and uninterestingly intimate, if we could avoid being called or rallied or hyped to one more violent engagement with the enemy we had never met. We needed time. Introspection takes time.

The nation had no time between Korea and Vietnam. We were thrown into new conflict too quickly after Korea to be able to mentally handle Vietnam. There had been no time to think, to develop ourselves inwardly.

And just as soon as Vietnam was over, it was natural that we should be reading the poems of the terrible experiences of war, the poems of flowers in the hair, poems of

hate and cruelty and sex and romantic love, but it surely is difficult to find a Frost these days. No one really has time for an artist like Richard Eberhart, like Donald Justice or Howard Nemorov. The public isn't ready yet to accept art but can and will and does dote on the poet with a message (read Rod McKuen).

More women are publishing more of their poems today than ever before and generally women poets have decided that they <u>are</u> poets because they are sensitive. Many of them write of rape (except Maxine Kumin doesn't). Men write of death and are frightened by it. I'm referring specifically here to poems published in periodicals such as the <u>American Poetry Review</u>. They (both men and women) put all sorts of ugly images down on paper and call it poetry and if it is poetry then it's not pretty and it ought to be.

Breadth and depth, scope and intelligence and ardor are missing. Vagueness in the use of language and images are not missing. Many of today's poets believe (suppose) that vagueness in language and images means that they are astute and the reader (if he is not stupid) can let his mind race to fill the space with the appropriate meaning. Not so.

For a poem to be a poem the artist must first be an excellent mechanic. Just because someone deems himself or herself sensitive, that doesn't mean he or she is therefore an artist. A prerequisite for a poem should be (if it isn't) that the language conveys the sense of the poem.

Much of today's poetry contains the individual's lament and despair at his plight, and it doesn't wear well with me. I get tired of hearing it. It seems when I've read a little too much of that stuf I want to tell the author, "Well, if that's the way it is, they why don't you grab yourself by your buttocks and go change it."

Valarie Trueblood, current self-styled critic and sometime poet, claims there is no silence in today's poetry. She refers to silence as an idea, not just quiet, not just an interval. I prefer to refer to the unblushing individualism of today's poetry as a spring that won't stay coiled. If a poem is a spring and it's good if it's coiled, today's poets keep on uncoiling the spring (in the poem) by expending all the energy in the spring; they ruin the poem. And what they have left is prose inclined unfortunately to melancholy.

There are some good things: Eberhart, Justice, Kumin and Nemerov are writing prolifically. There is an increasing

concern for the well-being of Mother Earth. There is an increasing respect for second grader's Haiku poems, songs of illiterate Appalachian mountaineers, the arts and crafts of Ozark backwoodsmen and the stories (in the oral tradition) of heroes of illiterate peoples. These are signs of an interest that exists in our society, that allows us to hold out hope that we need not yet hold a funeral for the arts.

But these post-moderns can't seem to handle the idea of order; they are unclear as to how the sun stays up there in the sky and who makes it do that. They don't come to terms with their concept of God, muddled as it is. For most of the post-moderns, they don't come far enough to worry about order; the tone urges the primacy of man, but instead of celebrating man, they lament him. On a recent trip I took a holiday in Bangkok. While visiting my brother-in-law there, I suggested we call John Doe from St. Louis and have a beer with him. I hadn't seen John Doe in five years. My borther-in-law suggested we let John Doe alone; that an evening with John Doe is depressing; that negative people sap your energy. That describes a lot of the new poetry. I want (he wants, we all want) to hear of your hopes and dreams, not of your failures and your inability to cope, to act.

The post-moderns can't seem to relate to creative evolution. The borrowing of Whitman's earthiness doesn't elevate their poems to the level of Whitman. If they could reverse the direction of their doting individualism to the positive, they would be on the right track. But how did they arrive at the point where they are? Is it an historical development? In much the same way that Eliot's poetry prior to his religious conversion was an historical development? I think so. I was born in 1940 and as a child we planted crops and took grain to town with teams of horses. And I have also watched on television men walk on the moon. The changes wrought in Arnold's and Eliot's world were miniscule by comparison to the last few decades. When they were alive wars were fought with guns; now we talk of neutron bombs killing only people and leaving buildings intact. And the threat of war is real. Mass communications are unbelievably speedy and and accurate; we know today what the weather will be next Tuesday. The media convinces us that we are out of step unless we comb our hair like Farrah Fawcett, brush our teeth with this, cleanse our bodies with that. And the bombardment of our senses with all that enforcement of the hard-sell leaves us convinced.

There is no time. There is no time to think. There is only time to work, to keep body and soul together, and so we accept by necessity what others tell us. We let others do our thinking for us—like Madison Avenue. And what we really need to do is to satisfy our deep down need to work it out ourselves. We go to church on Sunday and decide we won't do that again because the way the preacher worked it out for us just doesn't suit, and rightly so. But instead of working it out ourselves, we simply refuse to touch the subject mentally again. We wander around then, rudderless, refusing to accept the fact that we need, desperately, to work out our own notion of order in the universe, life and death, life eternal.

If we can stop talking of war, if we can stop talking of fears and attacks and crises and hostages and treaties and bombers and violence, then maybe we can turn this thing around. If we had a leader who was or is goal directed to the real needs of men and not to his own need for power or to the avariciousness of men, then maybe we would have a chance. If we had a spokesman for men's inner needs rather than his physical needs, we would have a chance.

I do not assume so much as Bergson and Berdyaev do

about the inherent goodness and evolving goodness of men. Since I live in a very real world, I know that men must be rallied and cajoled and hyped to global charity, global cooperation. There is no one highly visible now except Mumford who even espouses what we need. But the situation is right, we can handle now (men can) a period of introspection on an individual, national and global basis, from which can follow the yearning for action to good, the impulse, and then the act. The seed for such a progression is in the individualized poetry of the postmoderns.

Elaine Pagels recently published The Gnostic Gospels. She is a professor of religion at Barnard College in New York. Her book consists of the results of her translations and studies of alleged gospels of the apostles Thomas and Philip, Mary Magdalen and unknown others. Supposedly these gospels were found in the past few years and the reason why they had been lost is that the early Church had condemned them as heresy. The reason for the condemnation was in the gospels themselves in that they espouse introspection followed by each man's working out for himself his relationship to God. Of course, no organized church

can espouse that its members work out individually their relationship to God; the result is no organization, no dogma. Pagels believes that the suppression of the gnostic gospels and the holding of the four accepted gospels as true accounted for the rise of the early church as a church, as an organization and a structure. Only a structure (which implies and supplies rigidity) can survive, and the Holy Roman Catholic Church has survived.

According to Pagels, the gnostic gospels were almost Eastern in philosophy and they allowed happiness now, rather than following this vale of tears. She claims that historical events in the setting caused the selection of the true gospels versus the "heresy". Without referring to Mumford, she reinforces his belief that Paul of Tarsus turned and twisted and modified and screwed up Christianity to the point where Christianity today is almost more Paulist than Christian. If Paul were followed as closely as he would have like to have been followed, of course, Christians would have unwittingly committed race suicide.

The gnostic gospels are "Whitmanesque". They celebrate man in this: "The Kingdom of God is within you". Taken to its logical extension if we are to believe the phrase,

everybody, you and I, John Doe, the guy across the back-yard fence, all are capable of having eternal happiness now, not by actively doing good works or saying Rosaries, not by giving all our money to the poor and burning incense. We must today start looking inside ourselves for the answer to the question of what is our relationship to God or the Vital Impetus or Buddha or Allah or Whoever or Whatever it is that holds the sun up in the sky for us. We must start to determine today for ourselves an idea of order in the universe. It must be our individual answer to the question. We must sort and sort until we find it; no one can answer the question for us. And when we have answered our own question, then we have found the Kingdom of God.[28]

Conclusion

The answer, whatever the answer is, is available to us today by introspection. Your answer will not be mine and mine will be different from your neighbor's and your friend's. And all the answers will be correct. Wouldn't it be a shame if we found out in an afterlife that the Kingdom of God was within us all along and we failed to find it because we didn't look inside ourselves.

we will love. It's not that simple and certainly it is not automatic.

Introspection teaches us of ourselves, so that we can understand ourselves and then because of that understanding find ourselves and find ourselves lovable—first. Once we love ourselves and treat ourselves with the dignity we deserve, it becomes automatic that we treat our neighbor with the same dignity, our neighbor first being our spouses, our children, the guy across the fence, in the next county, the next state, across the ocean, until every human creature treats his neighbor as he would like to be treated himself.

Bronowski capsulizes the state of creative evolution in the arts today when he says, "Self-knowledge, at last bringing together the experience of the arts and the explanation of science, waits ahead of us."[30]

FOOTNOTES

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26. Ibid,p. 144.

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29. Mumford, Lewis, The Condition of Man, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1973, p. 381.

30. Bronowski, J., The Ascent of Man, Little, Brown and Company, Boston/Toronto, 1973, p. 437.

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Correspondence with Timothy Eberhardt, B.S., M.A.

Conversations with Ellen M. Burkemper, R.N., B.S.

PREFACE TO POEMS

The poems in this volume are in no particular order as to time or subject matter or quality except in this: "Shadow-Boxing" is the lead poem in that it establishes that there will be no order, no ascending to climax.

And that is what an education in poetry is all about: no answers at all, but only a succession of more highly complex questions, never getting anything established.

Thomas B. Burkemper
May 24, 1980

SHADOW-BOXING

like a snowflake in a flurry,
like two bulls separated by a fence,
like lawyers without a jury,
like a revolving stage before an audience,

like lovers in a hurry,
we can't seem
to get anything
established.

A CONVERSATION WITH MY FATHER

ON HIS RETIREMENT

While we're wating for your brothers and sisters
to arrive to celebrate Thanksgiving Day,
we've got some time to walk the farm.
I'll give you my advice on handling it next year.

Be sure you wear your ear muffs,
the northwest wind is cold today.

You know its sad for me to think the home place
belongs to you and I'm your guest.
Your children look so much like you
I close my eyes and go back thirty years.

Don't walk so fast, I can't keep up with you.
It used to be, you'd say, "Wait for me, Dad."

All of Lots 72 and 79,
Prarie Haute Tract,
in Survey 3035,
Township 48 North,
Range 2 East
of the 5th P.M.

I'd put the South eighty in corn,
it's close to the silo, but do what you want.
The growing season will give you time
for fence-mending with Cousin Ernie.
I've owned a lot of bulls for a man my age,
and never could keep them from Ernie's heifers.

Just last spring I remember Achilles
woke up one morning bellowing,
belligerent, and I knew he'd leave the farm by noon.
After dawn I watched him
provoke fighting in gentle cows
until finally he walked off
toward the fence.

From a quarter-mile off
I could see him shaking
his ponderous head at
imaginary bulls,
Could hear him challenging
them, muscles taut, neck arched,

The fence is just over the hill there.
I didn't have to be there
to know the damage he was doing
to the fence, his legs and belly,
to Cousin Ernie's precious heifers.

When he goes, there's no use trying
to bring him home until he's spent.
Give him a few hours.
When you finally go to get him,
be sure to carry a club.
Not to say that he'll attack you.
He needs the club to justify the show
he'll put on for the girls.

I don't know why he acts as he does,
He has the ideal here, you know,
A hundred wives, manicured, loving.
And hi-bred too.
Why, they can trace their ancestry
to Holland before this farm was.

In spite of himself he'll go to Ernie's
and mix with those orphans Ernie got off
a truck from some state down south;
They don't know who their mother was.

Ernie gets a new batch each year,
He only fattens them for slaughter.
He never gets to know them well
And I have generations of families here.

They'd be lost if they left this farm;
A generation's only two years long.

All of Lots 67 and 68,
Prairie Haute Tract,
in Survey 3035,
Township 48 North,
Range 2 East
of the 5th P.M.

On the north eighty I'd go to wheat,
then back to corn, and keep the center
field for hay and pasture, Cows are
curious creatures, and like to be around the house.

I remember sowing wheat at nite there.
I'd caution you about the coyotes
and the danger to calves in that field.
Crowds of coyotes live in that woods
just across the property line.
They'll get your calves if they can.
It seems the last few years coyotes have changed.
It used to be they were ugly, scrawny, scraggly,
and all my neighbors banned together regularly
with guns and dogs to rid the country of them.
Now the bounty's been removed by law.
So now by law we cannot kill them
Soon coyotes will be king.

This year they're fat and sleek, big and fluffy.
They're devious, you know, will make
circles around your tractor at nite in
the fields to let you know they're there.
Not in a threatening way, but just as if
they're curious.
They're predators, you know.

So when you have to kill a few,
do it quietly and bury the carcass.
You must do what you must
to rid this farm of predators,
if not for cows and calves,
then for your children.

All of Lots 69 and 70,
Prairie Haute Tract,
In Survey 3035,
Township 48 North,
Range 2 East,
of the 5th P.M.

Let's look at the east eighty acres,
the steepest part of this farm.
It's been in pasture all these years.
Suppose you'll want to do the same.

You say you want to crop that ground?
My God, you can't do that;
It's not been done before.
But then I know it's yours,
And if you want to burn your wings,
there is nothing Dad can do.

But see those geese above us,
flying over us in perfect form,
pure white bellies in plain view,
I want that you can soar
so high, and I can spend retirement
watching you from a distance.

All of Lots 77 and 78,
Prairie Haute Tract,
in Survey 3035,
Township 48 North,
Range 2 East
of the 5th P.M.

Now on the west eighty acres, I'd
take an early clover crop and then
plow down stubble for silage corn.
Late corn likely won't make much crop,
but you can take the chance to get the hay.

Farming this farm's a gamble at best.
You'll only know you've made a mistake
the following fall. So never stay
on dead center; plant the seed
and take the crop luck throws your way.

I see your sister Cynthia's here
I'm sure she's brought the pumpkin pie.
It's time we got back to the house.
Our walking here has made me tired.

It'll soon be dark
and time to have
the celebration.
Suppose you'll all sing,

"For he's a jolly good fellow"

RESTRAINT

I separate heifers by age.
Two year olds pasture with
Oscar, our herd sire.

Yearlings stay close to the barn
where I can regulate their diets.

I check my animals every day
to detect heat cycles, and note
that yearlings cycle hotter.

At the beach last summer I saw
that sixteen year old girls wear
the scantiest bikinis.

Yesterday I learned my friend
died jogging—thirty-three—
never sick a day.

And Uncle Felix led a docile life
until he had his heart attack
at eighty-two; now they tie
him to his bed.

THE CHAIN STORE

On Saturday nights the neighbors
go to the Chain Store
and wait for Blackie
to fetch the Sunday papers
about nine-thirty P.M.

We tell stories there, mostly lies,
about the wars,
bushels per acre,
some whore in Singapore
and just how good our cows are.

We eat men-type meals
of rabbit, squirrel,
mountain oysters,
rooster soup, and
carp caught in a hoop net.

Last Saturday night one big loud man
told how in 1945 in the Phillipines
they had two monkeys for mascots;

how he'd aggravate the New York dagos by
separating the monkeys and
listening to them squeal;

how when the monkeys were together again
they'd hold onto each other for dear life.
Everybody laughed.

To Billie

You are exceptional, but hardly respectable;
You don't give a damn about things; you
don't worry about tomorrow; you only love.

I wrote your parent's document in trust for you,
their accumulation of things to support you in
style; I endured their worry and charged them
for it while you counted snowflakes thru the pane.

This past October you and I sowed winter rye--I'll
never forget it. I explained to you the precise order
in which I wanted the field disced. I remember
smiling helplessly as you drove off on that tractor in your
own direction, circles in the field, adding your own
tractor noise to the din. "Did I do a good job?"

And the only reason you were there at all
was that my precisely 2 hired men were
precisely off that weekend; but weekends are
just other days of sweet sympathy for you. "Did
I do a good job?"

You accumulate no money or things except a pretty
rock collection and 2 Johnny Cash album. Without
a mother to tell you so, you'd not accumulate
clothes, and only wear your mittens on orders.

Certainly you're not respectable; you're
not ambitious. You don't give a rat's ass
about tomorrow. You don't envy any one any thing.

Certainly you're not respectable; when we were
filling the silo with 150° corn that
100° day, you were busy counting
muddobber's nests.

Certainly you're not respectable; you
neither toil or spin. You just smile
and ask me often "Did I do a good job?"
"Can I come back again?"

I have 100 tenants just like you--docile,
quiet, watching, loving. But what I
want to know is: if none of you are
respectable, why the contented look in your eyes.

You neither toil or spin.

Yesterday in the tenth pew
I drowsily recalled reading
the sophisticated kiddies'
new kinds of thinking poetry.

Lifetimes of now
futures of yesterdays
past tense tomorrow
statutes that stare

Father sermonized:
Christ on the cross, its your fault
You are evil, sin is death
Repent, be sad; Repent, be saved.

I fantasized:
babies crying in church;
children picking their noses;
teenagers ogling girl friends;
betrothed touching fingertips;
cheap perfume on unwashed bodies;
dirty fingernails and hook noses;
dandruff on a 40's lapel;
big butts encased in corsets;
hands wrapped in rosaries;
beer bellies and blue noses;

and someday I write a poem called,
"watching the sinkhole sink."

At the mouth of the Humptulips River,
where it pours out the crystal water
and pieces of Olympic Mountains
into the Pacific Ocean,

We sat on driftwood and
watched round black rocks
shift slowly among themselves
on their way to the sea.

The Humptulips was quiet there;
it gurgled rather than roared.

I wondered how long
the black rock took
to arrive there, round and mellow,
from those mountain peaks;

thought of its first fifty years,
leaping from crevice to crevice,
about soaring so high
those split seconds;

about crashing against other rocks,
honing its jagged edges,
and submersion--
as preparation--
for leaps and crashes.

So you've got another
bad bladder infection.
Don't expect any
sympathy from me.

Doctor told you what
to do about it.
You keep on belting
down the beer.

Until your eyes are watery,
your speech is slurred,
you can hardly walk,
smell like a brewery.

Do you think I like
talking to a drunk?

Last night your were babbling
something about a white cloud
battering the top of a mountain
just west of Seattle--the Olympics.

Can't decipher what you said.
You've just got to do something
about your drinking.

Since the hired man left
I've done a lot of outside work.
My hands are too rough now
to hold my children's faces,
my wife's hand.

And yesterday at my desk
half consciously I ran my
thumb from the tip
of my ring finger to my palm,
noticing the absence of feeling
there, and the hardness of the callouses.

I wonder now if there's any
correlation between callouses
of the hand and of the heart.

I've heard that I'm a bad boss,
hard, demanding, difficult to talk to.
And so I've had more hired
hands than years I've been a farmer.

The education they've given me
been useful (if not expensive) and
I wouldn't trade it for anything
except one good man.

But what I think's the funniest
is that each one, when he leaves me,
leaves his boots behind, like
Mary Martin washing her hair.

My father measures men by the
length of their cigars and cars,
and really successful men wear
diamonds on their pinkie.

I pride myself on the purity
of my values, and Whitman-like,
love land. I enjoy watching
the life-cycles and understanding my
own oneness with the universe.

But every time a hired man quits
and I must do that outside work,
developing the biggest biceps in
the bar association, with no time
for hurt muscles to heal, I
begin to wonder:

Wouldn't it be nice to give
myself over to cars and cigars,
broads and booze; let those muscles
sag to my middle. I was made
for comfort, not for speed.

When I was 12 years old there
on the homeplace I remember
that on entering a field on
moonlight nights the wind
created with the trees along
the edge only friendly goblins.

It mixed and molded and re-created
and howled, but the goblins
remained friendly, safe, secure.

And just last month I bought
the homeplace and moved my family there.
At 4:00 A.M. last Sunday by moonlight
I walked through that same
pasture. The goblins are new,
strange, not old friends. It was lonesome.

But yesterday I went back home
to disc some land for sudan pasture.
My goblins there all dipped
and bowed to welcome me.

Just last week the fellow approached
me, shy, accused of felonious
stabbing, and said,
"I'm sure everybody says this,
but I really am innocent. You see,
I'm a coward and I wouldn't
fight with anybody or stab anybody."

Lawyer-like I didn't believe him but
only questioned him the more until
I was convinced: he tells the truth.

And driving home that evening, I was
reminded of the time some 20 years
ago when the Cottleville bully poured
out my root beer and stomped on my
white bucs.

I saw him just last summer one hot
nite in a rock joint, girls half-naked,
hot and sweaty. He was at the table
in the corner, alone, long sleeves just
not covering one wooden arm.

And another thing about youth
being wasted on the young: when
June and January were all the same,
I never knew the seasons changed.

And now beset by bad knees and allergies,
senses gradually being desensitized,
eyes squinting over crows feet,
with an arthritic knee screaming
the coming rain.

I finally am able to see without
seeing clearly, to hear if I cock
my head just right, to smell
if I get up close enough.

And on warm March days the
sun shines only for me, the
birds sing only for me,
grass grows only for me.
After dark winter days its
velocity blinding, stunning.
(I can tell by the smile on my body)

RING AROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH

There in that property corner where the Henningfeld place, the Hoelting place and the home place meet, instead of being marked by old sunken stones there rises to the sky near 60 feet the largest mulberry tree I've ever seen.

Its branches spread over all three farms at that point, its trunk a good 3 feet in diameter. Down the trunk there is an unhealed lightning scar at least 10 year old, now a residence for termites.

Grandpa told when I was 12 with my first Christmas 4-10 shotgun that if I'd arrive at that mulberry tree before dawn on June mornings, I could have fried squirrel for lunch. I've spent some mornings there.

And as I picknicked there last Sunday evening under those broad branches, and Mummy played Ring Around the Mulberry Bush with Laura and Adam, I climbed that tree with twofold purpose:

first to view those properties marked by this monument, and second to introduce my children to the joys of June mulberries.

Rachel asked me then why the farms next door were known as such-and-such-a-place, and I explained they were in the same families for generations.

She asked me then if the home place would stay in our family for generations. "Rachel", I told her, "that's up to you children".

And as the sun was setting to the west, our children counted each young squirrel as it appeared on those branches, while Mummy and I sat on the blanket, held hands and stared south, where a light fog was filling up the valley. We didn't say a word.

My dearest Ben, when we left that ballgame
last night and you were blinking back the
tears because you struck out, I was
relieved the car was dark on the way home
so you couldn't see Daddy's red eyes.

I wanted more than anything to hold you
under my umbrella arm to protect you
from the painful rain. But dads can't really
do that, except some.

You've got a physical problem too, you see,
your skin's not very thick and with
your genetic makeup, there's no great
hope for changing that in the future.

You are me in miniature. You are
a miracle of birth, growth and intelligence.
Without being able to do it, I want your
hurts on me. I think I'm saying I love you.

And in this law office I see so much
hatred, so much hurt intentionally inflicted,
I wonder how little boys grow up at all.
I wonder if you'll be 36 too before you understand.

When we were Catholic children we were
given to wear around our necks things called
scapulors guaranteed to keep the devil away

And this morning at 8:00 Mass I saw a
genuine virgin right here in 1977, snugly
between her parents. I could scarcely believe
my eyes. I could see her scapulor
beneath that white blouse tied so securely
at her neck.

Her hair was frizzy like 1940, and 20 year olds
don't dress that modestly any more. I
noticed she was pretty, appeared to be soft
and wondered if, like me, she was busy picking
potential sex partners there in church.

Sermon time: its Father's Day and then I
looked at Rachel and Laura, so pretty and innocent.
By communion time I was praying they'd
be wearing their scapulors 10 years from now.

Last Sunday I saw old Joe Haddock
return from Communion at the 10:00 Mass,
walking with a cane, grimacing with pain.
I'd heard he'd been stoved up with
rheumatism for years.

And Saturday nite we went to
Mordt's Tractor Sales for their free
fish fry, Falstaff and country music.

By midnight old Joe was doing
a watersmooth quick do-si-do
that'd put Arthur Murray to shame.

But this Sunday there was old
Joe again, same cane, same pain.
No do-si-do today.

And what I'm wondering about is:
What is his comment on--the
food, the drink, or the music.
(Hope it was the music)

You people who read these things,
you don't know
about being rich
and having to deal
with the poor.

You people who live in school,
you don't know
about the poor
having the spine
of a snake.

You people who read these things,
you don't know
about fertility and
intelligence and
inverse ratios.

But what I want to know is,
why when she was dying
did my gentle grandma
become so violent.

My client named Claude is 45,
3 kids in school, barely alive
His wife is having a sordid affair
And Claude says that ain't never fair

He'll hurt her good, he'll take the kids
Then she'll be sorry she ever did
a dastardly thing like that to MAN.
Tell me, lawyer, think I can?
(I am so despondent)

Surely, Claude, lets hurt her good.
But first I want it understood
if she contests, if she would,
You'll wonder sometimes if you should.
(Get the co-respondent)

Trial time came and Sarah said, Claude
I've thought it over and by-God
I think that you can have your way
I've worked too long; its time to play.
(Talk about a burst baloon)

Claude's not typical in this respect:
Now client Claude is child-pecked.
Calling me nearly every day
I'm tied down here, can't get away
(Leisure suit; white on maroon)

And if I leave this house a minute
The place is ruined, everything in it.
She should be here, its her chore
Instead of living like a whore.
(Learn your lesson, you baboon)

I need help raising these kids,
I have my own life to live
And so last nite I said to Ellen,
Why don't you take in a movie?
(Learned lesson--used soon)

AT GRANNY'S HOUSE

Its good to see you and,
I'm glad that grandson sent you by,
he never comes to see me anymore,
I know he's awful busy,
him with all his children,
being on the road a lot,
But sit down a while and
tell me again what your name is,
you say that you're his secretary,
how do you like working for him,
they say he's got a temper
he gets that from his mother's side.
Just last week he came by the hospital to see me.
It sure is good to be home,
its so lonesome there away from the folks.
Am I feeling better now, of sure, thank you.
I'm just tired from all the tests;
the doctor says it's hardening of the arteries.
I shouldn't walk the stairs without help,
but what does he know,
here I am living alone since Al died.
Don't speck the doctor to wash my clothes for me,
Here, have some oatmeal cookies,
I just made them yesterday in hopes some of the folks would stop by.
My son, you know, stops by for coffee and cookies
at least once a day, rain or shine.
Does the doctor know I bake cookies,
sakes no I didn't tell him that,
no I couldn't buy them,
the folks don't like the storebought kind
and my bread, goodness, it disappears in a hurry,
But go on sit down, I don't need no help
and tell me about your family.
I guess you know all my folks, Norbert and all.
Well, I've lived here since 38,
bought the place from Norbert
and he took over the farm when Tom wasn't even born yet.
We liked it here, close to Church,
so I can go to morning Mass except lately.
Seems I get so dizzy walking now that
Norbert doesn't want me out unless he's along,
I don't like to stay penned up here all the time.
Al's sister Eugenia married my brother Henry
and sure nuf they had five kids in a hurry.
Eugenia was never well and each time she had a baby she got weaker.
Al and I told them to stop
that ain't nothing for us to meddle in.

She sure did it, she just up and died right after
Esther was born and Henry brought up his babies for awhile.
And then Henry died and all five of them were ours.
We only had the one of our own, Norbert, you know,
and from that time on, we sure had to work to feed them all.
Al got to acting funny every now and then,
and kinda left the job of feeding them to me.
He worked hard, poor soul, and never had much fun, so solemn.
I never told him but it always hurt
we didn't have more than one of our own.
Well look at me with tears in my eyes,
land sakes, what am I talking about.
Here, have some more coffee.
You have to go, well come back when you can stay longer.
I'll try to have fresher cookies next time.
What you say your name was?