

The Duty of Delight

The Memoirs of William Alfred

The 1930s, The 1940s, The 1950s

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The following pages complete what we have of William Alfred's autobiography. They comprise a sequel to those memoirs published in *Fiction*,² accounts which take us up to the mid-1930s. The accounts added here proceed with Alfred's continued family strife and his studies at St. Francis Prep and Brooklyn College through the war years and into his first years at Harvard and the premiere of his first play, *Agamemnon*.

After entering Brooklyn College, William Alfred comes under the influence of a genial professor and works on the staff of a new periodical *The American Poet*. This begins his literary career. Meanwhile his parents continue to engage in the deep quarrels that are to wound and scar his growing up. Then in 1943 he is dragged out of Brooklyn to become part of the World War II. Deeply pacific, he is fortunate enough never to fire a shot. After playing a part in the tank corps that often crosses over into low comedy, he goes to language school and learns Bulgarian. Consequently, the army, with the army's

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This is his grand tour, his introduction to the wide world. Raw recruit that he is, he is already armed with the strong moral courage he attributes to his mother's influence. His depiction of wartime, moreover, carries with it a commentary. Implicit in the narrative is the idea that although leaders were often villains, soldiers were for the most part innocents. The nightmare vision he has towards the end of the war³ suggests a moral seriousness elevated out of sight of patriotism or politics. If this war was "the good war," it wasn't good enough for him.⁴

He comes home to peace-keeping duty in the demilitarized zone between his parents' lives and to his pursuit of a vocation. His mother, protagonist of his early memoirs, returns as the central beloved figure in his life. She and he go off on their own for a while and settle in Manhattan. There he finishes his degree at Brooklyn College. He describes himself as a desultory undergraduate (although the enthusiastic support of his teachers at Brooklyn College seems to belie that). He is accepted for graduate study at Harvard and he is undisciplined enough during his first semester to risk flunking out. His turnaround is sudden, activated by a strong will. Although he understates the outcome, his oral exams are evidently a triumph. And, after one false start, he finds a thesis topic and settles on his field of medieval studies. His account of those early years at Harvard also includes the production of his *Agamemnon* at Sanders Theatre. Thus, his academic career and his career as a playwright are launched simultaneously. His story leaves off with Alfred as a section man in the English department and a tutor Kirkland House.

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That sense of humor, which was often irreverent, easily coexisted with a deep religious faith. The happiness of this contrast was part of what he meant by “the duty of delight.” He went to Mass every morning. Readers of the 1950s chapter will get a sense of how strong his Catholicism was and, to an extent, why it was that strong. The ecstatic moment he experiences for a few moments in his 20s gives a final and indefatigable form to his devotion.

His faith did clash, however with the general spirit of the Harvard community, where a mild ambience of agnosticism ruled. He sees the dominant spirit of the place as contemptuous of his Catholicism, treating it as aberrant and provincial. This contempt for his beliefs causes him pain. It sometimes makes him very angry. This is something he expresses to some of his friends, but with his students he shows no sign of the conflict. His devotion is as unobtrusive as it is intense. Perhaps this is because he sees nothing exclusive about his faith. If he is heartened by his religious observances, he sees nothing wrong in those who do not believe as he does or even those who do not believe at all. Of all the rules of his religion, he seems to find the injunction against judging paramount.

And so it has to be, because it is his nature to delight in people, and that is apparent throughout his memoirs from his accounts of his early childhood friends through the strong bonds he shares with fellow soldiers and fellow students and through his establishment of a coterie of highly distinguished friends at Harvard and on Broadway. “Lillian Hellman used to say that I loved people as compulsively as dog-lovers did dogs. She was right.”⁵ He celebrates his friends to create a special celebrity for both the

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Since his friends constituted a great joy of his life, and since it is clearly his intention to give some of them the fame and visibility that life denied them, I have made it my duty to identify them and their accomplishments. When he talks about the people he loved most, the rich lyricism of his prose gives him away. Clearly his early friendship with the poet Shirley Freisinger is of an extraordinary intensity, and I have found where some of her poems were published. I wanted to find out more about her but could not. His description of her, however, grants her a memorability to make up for her biographical obscurity.

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Other early friends die young, like the brilliant young Talbot, a classmate at Saint Francis Prep, who is killed in the war, and Martin Berman, a talented translator, who dies of disease, before making much of a mark. Then there is the child Helen, dead of peritonitis, whom he has fixed in my memory when he says he can still see her

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Had he gone on to write this chapter on celebrity, perhaps he would have left us some thoughts about his own. Given the ordeals of his childhood and the war and his lifelong fascination with fame, I imagine that the success of *Hogan’s Goat* must have delighted this man deeply. It is heartening to know that so beautifully kind and humble a man was eventually, finally, so rarely satisfied with his life. Could he ever, who in his youth “knew [he] had the chances of a cockroach in the Plaza ballroom of ever being respectable. . .” have imagined so fine a success?

But the chapter lies unwritten. The text strands us somewhere in the 1950s with Alfred climbing through the lower academic ranks. He is a resident tutor at Kirkland House and a section-man in the English Department. He has had his quarrels with Harvard, but at the end of his account he seems to be at peace with the place and happy. I think that if this was not the end of what William Alfred wanted to say, it still has a ring of consonance, a sense of resolution, all dissonance resolved, to the tonic chord. Perhaps he stopped when his health sapped his energy, but maybe he took time to revisit that abruptness and, following his duty as a writer, made it into an ending at last.

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Three years later in Flatbush, when hostilities broke out again in my parents' Civil War, my father beat a retreat to the Hotel Dixie above the BMI entrance onto Forty Second Street ("A radio in every room.") Two days later, when I got home from school, he was waiting for me downstairs. He asked me if since he'd left I'd heard a man's voice in the living room after my mother sent me off to bed. I told him no. He put me in the car and drove me back to New York, and bought me a box of blocks in the stationery store across Third from our old apartment. That shook me up. In time as well as space. I was too old for blocks, and too near St. Anne's for comfort. On the steering wheel, his right thumb kept massaging the web of skin between his fourth finger and pinky. He faced the oncoming traffic with the unfocussed stare I once saw on his face when he lost a dime or thought he had, and took apart the steel green Windsor bed he shared with my mother in search of it.

On the way back to Brooklyn, he cross-examined me. "You didn't even hear a man's voice on the radio?" "Maybe. I might have." "Are you sure it was on the radio? Were there visitors? Miggsy, maybe?" "I don't remember. I was half asleep." "You aren't sure it was Miggsy?" "No. I'm not." By then my mother [was] walking home after work with the supper groceries [and] asked me what I was doing in my father's car. I jumped out with a box of blocks in my hands. "What's that?" she asked. "He gave it to me," I said. She looked at me. "You rat," she said. "Then I'm right," he said. "You dirty, rotten thing," she said to me, and ran upstairs.

He followed, and holding the blocks like eggs, I hung back behind them. Their voices rang up the stairwell. Doors opened and slammed on the landings. My mother unlocked our door and shot through it. I ran into the bedroom and lay down on my bed. Topsy jumped up from beneath it to join me. It lasted only minutes; my father made for the

door, my mother slammed it behind him, and glared into the bedroom. "Go with him, you, why don't you? You're his, not mine."

Topsy jumped back under the bed. My mother turned her back on me and stabbed back to the living room on her high heels. I sat tight. Twenty minutes later she called in coldly: "Your supper's on the table. Do your homework and go to bed." She put on her hat and coat, and left me there. I ate, fed Topsy, washed and dried the dishes, and went to bed. I lay there till near ten when her step woke me. Through slitted eyes, I saw her look in on me. She walked back to the living room. She didn't talk to me then or speak a word to me for the rest of the week. I read myself to sleep as best I could.

I turned away from the memory of my parent's infuriated faces as I turned away from the frown on Anna Maria dead, and the smile on the boy next door looking down at the boat his father made him. Like my great-uncle Mutton before me, what I could not control I deflected my gaze from and would not "deign to notice."

Dealing with death, that seemed to work; life was a different matter. Imperceptibly my body changed. By twelve my arms and legs were downing, and I felt an irresistible elation. Why I did not know, for raised as I was by celibate nuns and brothers and edgy parents, I did not know a single thing about my body. Because of the distance kept from me by my father, it was my mother that gave me intimate instruction. When I was mistaking nocturnal emissions for bed-wetting, she said I was to shave and shower each day (I was thirteen), making sure to wash and rinse beneath my foreskin. The other boys were as virginal as I. Sometimes in summer when the sap ran high, underneath the shrubbery in the Park, we'd drop our pants and with twigs for scalpels, take turns playing doctor with each other.

Only once, did we see a girl in what we called "the altogether," standing on the kitchen-table in her apartment, after which she may as well have been the Whore of Babylon,

poor soul, so deep and frigid was the Coventry she was sent to. Our ruttishness we took for “animal spirits,” and drained it off in the violence of play, winters in tag, shoving and punching each other in the muscles, summers, at Ravenwood Pool in Coney Island, our elastic locker anklets rattling on the concrete, snapping our knotted towels at each other's backsides. One boy's favorite pulp, “Doc Savage,” was passed from hand to hand, its black, blurred woodcuts of half-naked girls about to be beaten for “having proven false.” When it came round to me, my mother tore it in pieces and told me never to bring such filth in the house again. To our minds, attraction and violence went together. Once Helen's mother asked me to hear her spelling, and when she spelled a word wrong, I banged her marbleized notebook down hard on her head. Years later, in the Leicester Square public convenience in London, I recoiled and looked away from a message scrawled there: “MASTER WANTS SLAVE” in crazy-looking jagged capitals, and under it, in the same jagged hand, but tiny, “slave wants master.” That madness seems to have figured in accounts of loving from Catullus on, if not even earlier, entranced subjection then enraged rejection. Perhaps it goes beyond gender to animal condition. Augustine thought so when he identified the primal sin as pride, the satanic first under whose spell,

Each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have
Not universal love,
But to be loved alone.

All that going on in me, I deflected my gaze from in the next two years. At thirteen, I was so full of baffled “ragerye” (as Chaucer called it) that I made a male dummy which I bound and flung downstairs.

Up to then, my evasions worked, mostly through reading. Summer and winter I devoured book on book: *Oliver Twist*, the story of the bastard who turned out well born (one of my fantasies was I was the dead Tsarevich), Jo the girl in *Little Women* with

boy's hair, and the books of the founder of the naturalistic novel, Horatio Alger, where boys on their own bested vicious foes and made themselves millionaires. And beside the books, there was the weekend glamour of New York, the dream of the wild nobility to be won by art.

Imperceptibly as my manhood, my future deepened. Commencement finally came in 1936. I've lost the picture they took of all of us, the boys in blue suit coats and long cream flannels (for some our first longs), the girls [in] starched white dresses to the shin, Evangeline-caps on their hair of delicate, stiffened chiffon. Soon we moved to a house near Brooklyn College, four subway stops away, my father pooled his bonus money with Miggsy to buy. There, to celebrate my fourteenth birthday, they gave me my first party (Miggsy, the strait-laced widow next door and my mother and father, the sole guests) where Miggsy danced his "goat-dance" and yelled that if he drank another drop of lager, he'd have a "wet dream", meaning he'd piss himself, at which the widow next door turned the color of blanc-mange.

Two weeks later (we left no forwarding address and had no telephone) I learned that Helen had died of peritonitis on the operating table. I put it out of mind. But sometimes, even now, when I'm doing something automatic, I see her racing Topsy past the Parade Grounds tree-roots, a winged maple seed on the bridge of her nose, her crisp hair bouncing as her heels hit earth.

Repeal made facing losses easier. Saturdays, my parents would take Topsy and me to Bock and MacCarthy's, a tavern facing Seventeenth Street on Church, and drink themselves mellow on three pitchers of beer while I took in the neighborhood dirt the regulars were dishing and sneakily matched the both of them glass for glass. We had to take Topsy. Much though she hated the smell of the malt and the shoes charging in and out the tables, she loved the potato-chips; and left home, she would howl like the Hound of the Baskervilles, gnaw anything in reach to splinters, and soak the floor in a one-dog

Johnstown Flood. There, as my mother had in the second place kitchen, I learned the lives of grown-ups by transfusion.

The Mitchells and MacShanes were my best teachers. Kathleen MacShane was the secretary of one of the partners in Hemphill, Noyes, where my mother ran the switchboard. As such, in rank she was to my mother what a full colonel [is] to a corporal. She was married to a gentle southerner, the son of an Episcopalian prelate, and every weekend her husband and she entertained their “star-border,” a droll, handsome man who, marinated as jar of pickled herring, kept them laughing in a soft, sighing way with outlandish fancies (I will trade you the Brooklyn Bridge for the Empire State Building, but only if you wrap it first in brown paper.) They had a set of Dickens, onion-skin and limp-leather. They sometimes brought me to look at in their apartment, picking up a pint of chocolate ice cream on the way. They’d down one stiff Tom Collins after another while I downed the ice cream out of the carton, washed my hands and covetously turned the Dickens page by page, decoding the plot from the Cruikshank illustrations.

Families were vibrant enough those days in New York and Brooklyn to evolve into legends. Through my mother, I had the luck to be admitted into one of them, the Mitchell Family. Children of an Ancient Mariner of a retired policeman and a daughter of the American Revolution, they had their father’s mesmeric fascination and the poise that was the heritage of their dead mother. If beauty is nature’s wealth, they were millionaires. Dorothy, the eldest, trim as Chanel, and as definitively chic, was married to a solid and generous bail-bondsman and lived in an apartment house “with a canopy” down Twenty-first near Dorchester, the *Faubourg St. Honoré* of Flatbush. Up from there, in a seraglio of a railroad flat on Regent’s Place, their eldest sister, Margaret, Peggy, thin and tough as a poker, but tirelessly loving, kept house for her pasha of a father and his breathtaking court. Patricia, long-legged, soft but lithe as panther with a black bob shaggy as her monkey skin coat, and a sardonic tongue as quick as her breasty high-shouldered lope, and opal-eyed Joan, christened Adelaide, blonde and

cherishing as summer light, at whose passing I have seen Times Square mounted cops pretend to swoon, worked as showgirls in the Broadway nightclubs. James, six foot when that height was still princely, of whom Gary Cooper seemed a mere working copy, clerked in Purchase-and-Sales at Fenner Beane on Wall Street. The eldest sister was, they all said, the only one that really “had the looks.” She had taken the prize as the loveliest girl in Brooklyn, married early and died bearing her first child, Rita, near my age, who'd sit spellbound over a book with cantilevered heels, twirling a lock of her hair, whenever Peggy ran the carpet-sweeper straight at her shins.

It was my New York Saturdays with Albert Geiger¹ that truly laid the ground of my education. Along with such necessary certainties as my faith, the multiplication tables, and how to spell, my vague caravanserai through Holy Innocents' left me with a loose confetti of such facts as “Haverstraw is famous for its bricks; and Troy is famous for its washable collars.” Those didn't earn me the grades to get into St. Augustine's, the diocesan high School. Cash was for the moment easy enough for my mother to offer me the choice of Brooklyn Prep, the Jesuit Academy on Crown Heights, or St. Francis Preparatory, the high-school run by Franciscan Brothers in Anna Maria's neighborhood. Hierarchies still obtained then in everything from hand-laundries to religious orders. Jesuits were to Brooklyn what they were to Joyce's Dublin, the major-domos of respectability, the ushers into the world of the lace curtains. I would no more have dreamed of aspiring to that world than of waltzing into the posh Flatbush Avenue Schraffts in my ripe corduroy knickers and joining some lady in her kidskin gloves over “The Tomato Surprise.” Deluded as I was about my ambition of becoming “a great American writer,” I knew I had the chances of a cockroach in the Plaza ballroom of ever being respectable. I took one look at the prim registrar behind the gleaming counter at Brooklyn Prep, turned tail and ran.

¹ 1922– A highly popular and prolific designer of women's clothes.

What sold me on St. Francis was where it was. Fronting Baltic Street, shaded by two elephant-leg sycamores, like the Portuguese mahogany bookcase in Gertrude's back-parlor it had a look of having made a rakish peace with change. A stately brick L built in the ample days of the eighteen forties as a Protestant seminary, its three tall stories of Pugin Gothic windows cradled a yard, once grass, now slated over. Its dignity shone through what it had weathered as good-naturedly as Marguerite Dumont's the wild attentions of all four Marx Brothers. Bridging Court Street and Smith, it symbolized the social mobility it offered as casually as its eroding precincts did what such mobility might cost. It had the air of invincible generosity. Its gate wide open to a homey street edited out for me the pain of St. Anne's soccer yard. Behind it was a capital "I" of grass, with a toy-fountained gazebo in its middle at the foot of a broad flight of stairs from the long monastery Saratogan verandah. It was two of a very hot July afternoon that I walked down them, and still except for the trickling of the fountain. I asked a dozing old brother in a shabby cassock where I should go. (He was Brother Vincent, I later discovered, an admired acquaintance of President Roosevelt's.) He looked at me deeply. "The way is through there dear," he said, and reclosed his eyes. It was through there in every sense of that phrase there is.

St. Francis was a subway school, all boys, predominantly Brooklyn working-class. It took almost a full hour hip to hip in the morning Brighton Local (what it now takes to fly to New York from Boston) to get from Avenue H to Borough Hall, plus fifteen minutes more at a dead trot, bright, dim or wet, to make it down Court from Montague Street to Baltic. I was always late. That cost a nickel fine for a "tardy slip" and a glare from the first period brother that could have dropped a charging wolf to its belly. I didn't care. There was a skit of Grock's², says Erich Heller³, where a drunken man in white tie and tails reads the gutter underneath a street lamp in search of a lost key. A policeman asks

² Charles Adrien Wettach, 1880–1959. A famous Swiss clown.

³ 1911–1990. Writer and scholar with a special interest in in German philosophy.

him if he is sure that's where he lost it. "No," the man replies, "but here the light is better."

Court Street was that to me, a site of memory where light erases loss. Down it, consecrated and retouched into a holy picture like the photo of a modern saint, lay the stoop at Second Place, Anna Maria on it with her lapful of kittens, her stories and her lunges towards the clarity of learning. Four years had cushioned me that well from the horror her death. And every day the subway-ride from Flatbush put the troubled certainty of home behind. When I came out of subway dark into the light of common day, the street belonged to me as much as to any energetic stranger hurtling past to offices or college (Brooklyn College, as scattered then as my brain, was holding classes on random floors throughout the downtown buildings). I felt the panicky elation I used to feel on Champlain, when, untaught to swim, the water-lights in my eyes, I dived off the big boys' diving board into the rubber snake that was all that stood between me and the smothering muck below. My mother's hope was that I would be the first in the family to finish high-school and maybe even college if the luck held out. The luck held out, but more heroically, so did my mother's purpose.

Hard up like everybody, it was not only a pink slip we feared, but a policeman at the door as in Seventy-Sixth Street. We lived fugitive, the name on the letter box the alias I still live by, the phone when we could at last afford one unlisted. We therefore prayed for luck. Ten o'clock Tuesday morning never passed without my mother's having said nine "Our Father"s, "Hail Mary"s and "Glory Be"s in honor of St. Anthony, patron saint of lost persons and things. And my father, in the full stare of his insomniac remorse, every week put a fresh buck from his pay under his chipped doll of the Infant of Prague. Everyone on the job did something like that; and those without a religion prayed as best they could, by chain letters, sweepstake tickets and the pari-mutuel numbers in the back of *The Daily Mirror*. Turner's wide West had shrunk to the corner newsstand, but its dream of Eldorado never died, perhaps because it was as absurd as the nightmare

of Depression that had canceled the idea of security of income and with it the mirage of the inviolability of home.

The more implausible the mirage, the more irresistible its allure. After the fiasco of sharing the house with Miggsy, we finecombed the *Eagle* real-estate pages every Sunday. We moved four times in four years. The apartment I loved most was four rooms on the top floor of a completely renovated tenement house, Eighth Street near Third, at the run-down heels of Park Slope. Its plaster hard as marble and dazzling white as a hospital surgery, light shot through it North to South all day. It fronted on a street out of Currier and Ives, what those days was called an “island street,” an oasis in a slum, tight-bricked four-storied houses, with swept stoops and sidewalks, preserved from disorder by the strict ties of the Italian families that owned them and the Mafia that served them as police. Its rear windows held all Bedford-Stuyvesant in fee, the Williamsburg bank with its golden filigreed clock throbbing into light as the sky went navy-blue behind it and my mother's heels on the stairs sent Topsy into her nightly tap-dance.

The soul of the day was that hour life returned to the rooms as breath to stunned body. I would open the door and in she would fling, rosy with sunset: hugging the big brown grocery bags to her like babies, her own person the first time that huddled day. She rarely came in without something special or droll she had picked up from a posh place or a toy peddler, a flawless Bartlett pear and a quarter pound of English Stilton wrapped in the distinctive white ribbed paper with the white twine double knot of Callahan's, the rich brokers' delicatessen in the Fulton Market, a dog house she'd set up, her back turned toward you, stand back from and shout, which shot a tin Boston Bull out onto the table, a piece of waked string passed through a needle's eye in the bottom of topless tin can, which yipped “Hello Sweet Tart!” in piercing soprano when you pulled the string through fast, and drove Topsy mad, thick tablets of Baker's chocolate in their small blue boxes, the *Belle Chocolatière* on it in the colors of an old book.

Food was numinous to her, our supper her Mass. Nothing she touched did not transubstantiate into life's flavor, not even the pound of chopped round steak when the week's cash sank ("Cut all the fat off: I'm on a doctor's diet"), which she deepened the taste of with a peeled, crushed tomato, or turned into Burgoo King (an A and P stew out of Woman's Day) [which] she turned into *Boeuf Bourguignon* with her own Masonically secret spices ("That's the secret!" she'd say, with ill-concealed triumph [dried basil].) She served that with Irish boiled potatoes that laughed out of their skins and exploded into lightness crowned with "the best tub-butter" we bought by the half-pound and used with abandon ("To Hell with poverty!"). While she was cooking, I'd take Topsy out for a dash in and out [of] the scruffy lots along Third Avenue in and out [of] their cowlicked weeds "to read the papers" as my mother called her navigation by nose. Occasionally I'd hotfoot it to Ebingers near the full state of Sixth Avenue for a rugged-crust caraway rye and three Othellos, sliced round spongecakes sandwiching butter cream so good you felt the chocolate had died and gone to chocolate-heaven.

More often, waiting for my father, she would make her own desert, sometimes cream-custard laced with chewy rice, or in season a thin-crust rhubarb pie, its latticed top as buttery as the "best imported toffee." My father adored the custard so much he once spooned down a half pound bowl of it before the pork chops made it to the table.

Those last three years at St. Francis in order to measure up to my best friend, Talbot, who got the best grades in every course in the school and pitched a no-hit game his junior year, I moved out of my long sulk at duty and promised myself I would work hard and learn. Up to then such a sense of purpose used to come and go with the red paper leaves and marbled notebooks in the Five-and-Dime windows. It wasn't reading texts that I held back from, but the stupefying boredom of their style.

But from 1936 on, the world invaded Brooklyn. Friday nights on Albemarle Road and Flatbush, Father Coughlin's Christian Front, a pro-Franco group, harangued the passers-by with threats of the red menace and Jewish domination, that in a largely

Jewish neighborhood in years when the venom of Fascism was slowly paralyzing Europe from Berlin to Madrid. Even if you never read the papers, you could not help but see what was happening. My refugee doctor on King's Highway was treating me Thursdays for sinus. While I was waiting, a woman, in black from head to foot, would be led in by two young men. I never saw her face. She wore a satin-hemmed widow's veil to her waist, and never opened her mouth to either escort as she waited her turn. Shy though I was at seventeen, I finally dared to ask the Doctor what she suffered from. "The Nazis murdered her husband in front of her," he said. "I'm giving her injections. They seem to help." Our French Teacher spoke at one Christian Front meeting, with a Mack Truck of a boy from the Literary Club standing guard beside him. Two of my idols, Dorothy Parker and Hemingway, gave me the guts to try and make a stand. I typed out a pro-loyalist plea based on Christian Charity and tacked it on the Sycamore to the right of the schoolyard gate. You'd have thought I was Luther. The French teacher put me into Coventry and the beefy member of the literary club delicately suggested that people who did not know what they were talking about generally got into more trouble than they were trying to cause. I typed a second manifesto out and posted it. When I went out at noon, it had been taken down; and I was summoned by Brother Charles, the Principal, to his office. "You are to post no more 'manifestos' on that tree," he said. I tried my skinny best to assume the burly indomitability of Paul Muni as Emile Zola. He smiled. "Because, you see, I have instructed them under the counsel of charity that as members of a Franciscan school, they are strictly bound by, that they are never again to vent social hatred on Flatbush Avenue on the Jewish Sabbath, or even to stand by while it is being vented. You've won. Go back to class, for the love of God." I was moved as I always have been by unexpected decency.

Up to then, my religious education having been straight Baltimore Catechism. I had not as yet seen the famous prayer ascribed to St. Francis) which put that root of that decency into words:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace:
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is resentment, forgiveness;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light.
O divine Master, may I not seek to be consoled,
Not to be understood, but to understand,
Not to be loved, but to love;
Because in giving we receive,
In pardoning we will obtain Thy Pardon;
In dying in Thee we are born to eternal life.

And even though I had been appointed Novice-Master of our branch of The Third Order Secular of St. Francis (a lay order dedicated to deepening the spirituality of souls in ordinary life) I had never been shown the one letter that is provably by the saint, to a young follower who had been scandalized by someone in his community (cited by Auerbach in *Mimesis*):

All those things which get in the way of your loving the Lord God, and anyone—members of the community or others—who creates a stumbling-block, even if he beats you, you must hold as a grace.

And you are to want it that way and not otherwise. And that must be your true obedience to the Lord God and me, because I know for sure that is what it is. And love those who do these things to you, and you are not to wish anything else from them except such as the Lord may have given you, and you are not to wish that they be better Christians. And through that, I will understand whether you love God and me, His servant.

Yet from my very first sight of Brother Vincent by the fountain, I sensed that charity every day around me like good weather. Once, however, I felt its rougher side, and deserved to. Brother Patrick, our Latin teacher, was my particular hero. He embodied the highest stage of the Franciscan ideal, Franciscan poverty, doing without with not a second's repining. The arm with which he wrote out the steeplechase of paradigms he put us laughing through had been warped by birth or disease. His cassock, separating at seams and hem, shiny and scuffed by turns as an old patent leather shoe, shone for me like the biblical wedding garment. And yet once when I mocked a boy in the class for using a word wrong, he landed on me like a falling wall, made me see the hurt he saw in the boy's face. Arrogant and skinless though I was, I bore the scalding without resentment. I moved a quarter inch toward manhood.

Most of the time, however, I was the star of an interior extravaganza that would have beggared the Radio City Music Hall to produce. My faith in that figmentary majesty, a mirage of glory plagiarized from good books and bad movies, and lit by my adoring mother (I was at that time, her "tall, slender jackrose") made an image of me, the kind, as Yeats wrote, nuns and mothers worship.⁴

How compelling such images are, you have only to leaf through the pictures of the young in the Sunday ads to grasp, as virginal as Narcissus, as inhuman as flowers. At any rate, mine took classmates in as wholly as my mother. I too had my day-dream Elysium. Its Pan was the Picasso of the blue period; its tutelary genius was Gertrude Stein. Even then I saw that Picasso wanted to be what he imagined, the arrogantly beautiful gipsy boy of "Youth," unmoved by anything else but his untouched self. I saw that the gipsy meant to him what the Indian guide did to me in the Smitty Comic book my parents gave me when

⁴ V "Among School Children."

they brought me back from camp and gave me back my home, a visual mantra of who I really was. The statue of Miss Stein by Davidson that stands, the Lord be praised, in Bryant Park captures what she meant to me those days. The careless topknot, the open lap turned her into an avatar of Anna Maria. My generation was the first of which it was said, "when good Americans die, they go to Paris." Our gospel was *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. I read it spineless, as well as its sequel, *Everybody's Autobiography*. I wrote Miss Stein several times, the last time about a childhood book we had in common. Albert and I had saved enough to go to the first-run of Garbo in *Ninotchka*. On the way out to the subway, I opened the downstairs letter box, and was stunned to find an answer, on paper the color of the morning sky, in a script that would have blinded a young eagle:

My dear William Alfred

That is a funny name but rather a nice one yes I do think I had the other two letters and now there are three and I am pleased about Donald and Dorothy (the eighteen-nineties Mary Mapes Dodge serial we had in common). It did have something to do with tasting a piece of cloth to see if it had salt water in it did it not and I do tell the Saturday Club opening November 4 to keep on going if you can't read you should write and if you cannot write you should read but the happiest are those who both read and write and I hope the Saturday Club will be full up with them the amount of the poem is rather interesting write when you like I always like to read and I always like to write

Always

Gertrude St

The Saturday Club was what Albert and I began to call our jaunts to New York. That I now belong to the Saturday Club founded by Emerson and Hawthorne in Boston is owing to that letter from Miss Stein. It was my passport to Parnassus.

To this day my heart ripples like a lake under breeze when I think of my classmates at St. Francis and what they meant to me, the only place I felt at ease outside my family, Talbot, handsome in soul and mind and person, McCarthy, sensitively vibrant and inventively hilarious, Nelson, pensive and sage, mooring us to earth. That sense of safety the thought of them gave me did not leave me even on that warm Sunday when the Nazis crossed the Polish Corridor, and returning home from Mass at Saint Savior's, I heard out of the open windows down Ninth Street, the exhausted voice of Chamberlain declaring war. I don't know where Nelson is now. McCarthy is a Xaverian brother in Louisville. Talbot waved to me in Denver station as I was shipping in and he shipping out. Of the one hundred twenty members of our senior class, twelve were killed in the war. Talbot was one of them.

My college blessed me as deeply as my high-school. We could not afford St. Francis or St. John's. The best I could manage was an automatic admission through my B average to Brooklyn College, where tuition was eighteen dollars a year. Peaceable Kingdom that St. Francis was, its glory was also its limit, innocence. The curriculum there, 1936 to 1940, was still a version of the *quadrivium* and *trivium* that had held fossilized sway since Charlemagne's school at Aachen. Latin, taught through drill, imparted Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric by osmosis. Arithmetic and Geometry were no longer preparations for Astronomy; and Music unless the blows in the skull I suffered learning it (*ad astra per ardua*⁵) were meant to give a foretaste of the music of the spheres.⁶ Ecclesiastical History had shrunk from the bloody gorgeousness of Eusebius and Bede to the dry cathetical annals of Barclay Street hacks. The triumph of Christianity over human

⁵ to the stars through difficulties.

⁶ A word or two must be missing here. The gist of what Alfred is saying, though, is clear enough. The curriculum was outmoded and had drifted from its original set of relationships. (All four elements of the quadrivium were all originally seen as mathematical, with "music" defined as the study of harmonics.)

cowardice, for instance, was driven home by rote repetitions of the three categories of apostates, *sacrificati*, *thurificati* and *libellatici* (those who sacrificed to pagan gods, those who offered them incense, and those who bought forged documents claiming that [they] did both), memorized with sacrilegious relish as “*sacrificati*, *thurificati*, and Balls McCarthy.” Physics, being less precarious to the soul, was taught with larger, if puzzling, freedom. We were to deduce the laws of motion by watching a rusted roller-skate roll down a warped floorboard. English was mostly spelling and parsing. (I once had to make up for misspelling “possessive” by writing it out five hundred times.) Literature was Reading, policed as an occasion of sin as full of pitfalls as Surf Avenue in Coney Island. I remember listening as a sophomore to a book-report on *Joe Strong, the Boy “Fish,”* a best seller from the Five and Dime. As for what Radcliffe called “Jolly UPS” in the wild fifties, the one that comes first to mind is a party held in the cellar-gymnasium “Come to the Gala Fiesta / To be held in the Prep School Palaestra), in which after wolfing down boiled hot-dogs and Pepsi Cola (more for a nickel), the guests, all males in their late teens, joined hands and circled to the right, singing, “You put your right foot in, etc.”

The Brooklyn College Gymnasium where I underwent the physical required for entrance was my initiation into the larger society of the City. Up to then what passed between me and any doctor I consulted always had been private. Here they went over each of us like inspectors at the end of an assembly line, and handed each of us a printed list where they checked whatever defect had been discovered. I passed to my relief without a blemish. As we were leaving to put our clothes back on, the young Don Quixote in front of me showed me his card with a wounded grin: “Odoriferous Feet.”

The first year might have given even Talbot the bends. I who had had to memorize The *Elements of Euclid* in order to get out of high school now had to master the labyrinth of non-Euclidian geometry in order to get through my first term. I also seemed to have been led up the garden path in history: According to our text-book, the persecution of the Catholic Church in President Calles’s Mexico—the fiercest anywhere,

Graham Greene believed, since the reign of Elizabeth—was the necessary first step towards democracy. Every morning from the subway station to the Glenwood Road college-gate we ran through a long gauntlet of mimeographed propagandists, ranging from the Nazi apologetics of the German American Bund through those vociferously aspiring to the Young Communist League. I knew no Bundists. I suppose they won their memberships by some kind of blood-test. Would-be socialists, whom I knew by the dozens, qualified for the League by a kind of infiltration-course, the boys by letting Wall Street have it in public places and refusing to leave degrading tips for waitresses to drive home to them the wretchedness of their plight; the girls by selling *The Daily Worker* near the Union Square subway with bourgeois-infuriating Camels, preferably lit with kitchen matches, dangling from lower lips. One day, socialists and nonsocialists alike, sat hip to hip on the steps of Boylan Hall blocking the passage of some Nazi bigwig on his way to pay a courtesy call on our President Gideonse, and singing, to the tune of “Here We go Round the Mulberry Bush,”

We're a bunch of non-aryans,
Non-aryans, non-aryans . . .

with gusto. Given that kind of excitement and my natural talent for procrastination, it is a miracle I earned enough credit for my sophomore year.

In my sophomore year, 1941, I met James Philip Meagher and my life first took on the shape it still bears. Registration at Brooklyn was as chaotic as a Longshoremen's shape-up. Seniors registered first and got first crack at slots in the limited enrollment of famous courses, like Leonard J. M. J. Balet's *Fine Arts* and Harry Slochower's *Modern Continental Novel*. The same system obtained in the choice of sections in surveys, the staples of concentration. I was lucky enough to make it into Mr. Meagher's section.

The classroom was on the dark side of Boylan and Mr. Meagher lectured from the window-sill, his back to most of the class, his profile, silhouetted in the glance of light

and shadow off Midwood High, like those tan sun pictures they sold in candy stores, in spring as the hour passed. He spoke in what Shirley Freisinger, not at all the least of his gifts to me, called “his well-slept voice,” hoarse and gently low, tracing the tap-roots of the texts, however deep they lay, to the tendrils of feeling springing to growth in ourselves, always freshly washed hair a soft smoke above his brow. It was in the spring term, as I remember, that he sold his spinet piano, and founded *The American Poet*, a national monthly. At any rate it was then that I joined his circle, its cadre, graduates of his versification course, Martin Berman, Dorothy Bischoff, Ann Celano, Harold Levitt⁷, Angelina Viviani, and its unmistakable glory, Shirley Freisinger⁸. I began by addressing penny post-cards soliciting subscriptions, then went on to help proof-reading the issues and sending them out.

Mr. Meagher shared an apartment with an English Department colleague, whom we hardly ever saw. It was on Kenilworth Place, a short block from the campus back-gate, on the top floor, above an aisle of heavy-leaved maples. Facing the door down a single step was a long narrow living room, two windows at its end, furnished, it looked to me, out of the Livingstone Street Auction, against the right wall a long delicate Louis XVI table, facing it a small Louis XV sofa and two chairs in pastille brocade, so incongruously dainty that I imagined it had been chosen by Mr. Meagher’s first wife, a cultivated Greek girl from Park slope, by all reports as beautiful as she was rich. We never sat in the room, because we found its fragility forbidding. But we stood around in it as if for a levee when he gave us an occasional party in thanks for our help. At the parties, he assigned themes as fanfare for each of us, and played [them] on the phonograph as we rode up on the elevator and entered the apartment. I don’t recall what mine was. Shirley’s was a huge breaker of a cadenza from Ravel’s *Daphnis and Chloe*, and I still can see her dashing in, laughing, petit and “saftig,” the bleached tin-tin cowlick of hair above her brow ablaze with the springdusk that caught the plastic bubbles she was the first at Brooklyn to sport rainbowing her fine heart of a face. Girls

⁷ Teacher and Playwright 1920–2013

⁸ A poet who published frequently, as did Alfred, in *The Hudson Review*.

dressed for daily life as they did for a grand occasion. Glamor, like movie-schedules, was a continuous performance. I use “girls” deliberately: My mother was a girl. Girls did not become women (or in Schraffts, ladies) until they slowed into their seventies, or puckered into their fifties behind counters in the five and ten. In the small kitchen between the living room and the two bedrooms, we worked on subscriptions or read manuscripts from three in the afternoon to past eight, then gorged on “becheese-its,” Birds Eye squares of frozen Hamburger topped with slices of American Cheese and Pepsis. Mr. Meagher matched our Pepsis with and rye and gingers, ate so little (when he switched to No-Cal ginger ale for the sake of his figure), Shirley warned him he would starve to death.

Although we ate everything in sight we had no need for liquor. We were drunk on his company. He would take some Sancho Panza inanity from our mouths and transfigure it into an airy bagatelle from Congreve. In March when the days softened and light lasted longer, he would sometimes take us on the Brighton Beach to Coney Island to tilt for the gold ring on the carrousel, or walk the deserted boardwalk to the Half Moon Hotel doubling back along the salty sand at the wave's edge. Once Mr. Meagher, whom the cadre called JM, insisted on trying out the parachute ride imported from the World's Fair and got stuck in it so high up his voice came down to us like a deepening register of wind,

Let me dow-oon. Let me dow-oon
I'm too old to die.

The days we dummied the next issue we worked past midnight; then I would walk Shirley home, down Kenilworth Place to Farragut Road, down Farragut to Nineteenth Street, then up to the brand-new apartment house Shirley had moved into with Stanley Ascher her new husband, a cadet of the California family which had invented “Coming Attractions.” In those small hours of oncoming spring we might as well [have] been the

only people in the world, so still it was in the filigreed light the street lamps made of winged maple seedlings overhead. I don't know how Stanley put up with us. We so delighted in each other she sometimes would walk me home to the battered twenties elevator building with a tattered awning and a plastered doorman, the “good entrance” my mother had finally achieved, and I would turn around and walk her back to her door. Our two-room apartment was on the sixth floor above the empty lot behind Church Avenue Station I had rampaged through as a child. My mother would wait up hours, watching for me, a fact I never knew until I caught a flash of her night-gown at the kitchen window in the sandy light of daybreak.

Our Paris cafe was the college cafeteria, ripe with the smell of spoiling fruit-salad and coffee as miraculously weak as it was scorched. There we sat through hours of cut classes ripping the staff of *The Observer*⁹ up the back and preening each other's feathers. Across its sticky aisles, I am sure they did the same for us in spades, committed socialists all: Chester Kallman¹⁰, their Mayakovsky, with his movie idol's looks, Aaron Kramer¹¹, in our eyes, a young Lenin; and Dora Friedman, his Krupskaya¹², her lank silken Prince Val hairdo, the dead spit of what the mannequin wore who served the Dali drowned-taxi¹³ exhibit on the World's Fair runway as its ravishing shill. Auden, their mentor, had led them out of the Laburnum arbors¹⁴ we still haunted into the strict Zen-Garden of Eliot¹⁵.

The household Auden presided over on Middagh Street on Brooklyn Heights made it the Montmartre of that era. Louis MacNeice, a double Oxford first, his fellow poet, Carson McCullers and her husband; Gipsy Rose Lee and Julio di Diego, her friend, the

⁹ The Brooklyn College literary magazine.

¹⁰ Poet and librettist, 1921–1975, known for his collaborations with Auden and Stravinsky, also a contributor to *The Observer* during the early 1940s.

¹¹ Poet, and critic, 1921–1997. He was a frequent contributor to *The Observer* during the early 1940s.

¹² Lenin's wife.

¹³ Actually *The Rainy Taxi* or *Mannequin Rotting in a Taxi Cab*.

¹⁴ A reference, I believe, to the influence of W. B. Yeats.

¹⁵ If Alfred is alluding to anything specific here, I think it would be “At the still point of the turning world, . . .” In Eliot's *Burnt Norton*.

painter, who could imitate an oyster on the half-shell wincing at the acid smart of the lemon, Salvador Dali, Oliver Smith the stage designer¹⁶, and Pola, the Yugoslav housemaid with big feet, who, MacNeice years later told me, though he lived there weeks on weeks, [he] never realized was a man. How could we vie in cachet, national monthly to their college quarterly notwithstanding, our avant-garde status attested by the Cummings¹⁷ lower case of our title and the “moderne” pin-headed twins on cover (Auden called them “cretins” and said he'd not subscribe until they were jettisoned) with that perpetual *Douanier Rousseau*¹⁸ banquet on Middagh Street. We compensated by telling ourselves our rivals were rags on Auden's English kite, whereas we were halcyons of a true-blue American banner that would outsoar and outlast theirs,

Sailing with supreme dominion
Thro' the azure deep of air!¹⁹

I say we; I don't include Martin Berman and Shirley Freisinger. They could have built a nest in my ear and flown out²⁰. A brute ambition was my ignorant sole asset. Both of them, born with perfect metrical pitch, read the poetry of that time with knowing passion and daringly searched out ways to truer music. By then the barricades flung up in Chicago by Pound and Eliot had been landscaped into a shrine. From first page to last, *Poetry* magazine read like the work of one person. The meter Eliot had stripped Victorian opulence down to, the direct heir of the four beat line late Old English singers learned their law by—

¹⁶ 1918—1994. Prolific designer of sets for ballet and Broadway.

¹⁷ A font designed by E. E. Cummings, which tried to depict ideas and emotions. The covers I have seen, however, are not set in this type, and Alfred may be referring to Cummings as a marker for unconventional fonts in general. Here is one of the covers, complete with “pin-headed” twins:
<http://www.lornebair.com/pages/books/29465/james-meagher-ed/american-poet-vol-i-no-ii-may-1941>.

¹⁸ Nickname for Henri Rousseau, French primitivist painter, 1844–1910.

¹⁹ Thomas Gray, “The Progress of Poesy.”

²⁰ This expression usually refers to flatterers, but clearly Alfred does not use it in any pejorative sense. It could be construed here to equal “They could do whatever they wanted to me or I could find no fault in them.”

*Laga sceal on leode luflice leornan
Lof se de on lande syl nele leosan.*

He who has no mind to mar his good name shall
Learn by heart lovingly the laws of his country

And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you²¹

—had carried the age as fully as the pentameter couplet had the eighteenth century. In our late teens in the early forties when the barbarians were in Paris who had bombed the bricks of Rotterdam to ashes, the dying fall of that measure brought our hackles up. We recoiled from the skull beneath the skin its Giacometti spareness seemed to coronate, and worked with heart and soul to find themes and cadences to contradict disaster, Martin in his beloved nineteenth century and Shirley in the music which was her second glory.

The poem by Martin I best remember is “Friday Afternoon in Russell Square,” its deft, incantatory pentameters freshened, with Stravinskian wit, by a swift Castle-walk²² of assonances:

See, she stands on light, with light behind,

²¹ From *The Waste Land*, 27–29.

²² Rag-time dance.

She stands in light of sunset windows, slack
Across the square. She stands in light to bind
A vagrant sight with chains of green and black;
Subject to none but worlds, she bends the world
To proper shade, to bombazine pretense,
With satin shirred to shutters, soon unfurled,
Slashing sun to fit a shrunken sense.

Of his versions of Ronsard and Baudelaire, Andre Maurois wrote

. . . the miracle is sometimes brought forth. A poet chances upon a foreign poet capable of recreating at once the sense and rhythm of his thought. This is the case with the translations... which were brought to me by one of the staff of *The American Poet*, Paul Martin (Martin's pen-name).

He was the best of company. Like all of us, he was his own invention. And what a library of masks he had! There was no one he could not mimic flawlessly, from a Helen Hokinson book-club chairwoman, reciting "Oh World, I cannot hold thee close enough," perilously at the point of soprano orgasm, to his downstairs neighbor in Brownsville kvetching about the heat in her apartment in long inventive half-Yiddish tirades that would have done high credit to Rachel. Outwardly the culture was healthy enough then [so that] people did not mistake the assumption [of] an accent as racist mockery. Jews and gentiles alike rocked with laughter through *The French Lesson* in which that national treasure, the vaudevillian Willie Howard, in a huge outrageous eggplant beret, taught us how to argue a morose French landlord out of his rent:

Landlord: *Ah vous! Ah Vous-*

Howard : *Ah, vous ! Ah vous !*
Ah wo tut Ihr weh, ah, wo.
*Ah. wo tut Ihr weh.*²³

What gave that comedy its edge was how near the bone it was, like making faces at oneself in a funhouse mirror becoming for a moment the caricature bigoted fellow-citizens made of you. [When] James Meagher later wrote of him [Martin]:

He was sometimes deliberately outrageous with strangers because he was innately shy and he feared them. Although it was easy to make him laugh, many people did not like him... However delicate in execution and seemingly innocent in content, his work stands as a frightful indictment of the adult society to which we imperiously demand our children's adjustment.

he was addressing the disparity between who Martin was in the splendor of his promise and what prejudice against his aesthetic looks and the Jewishness that was ineradicably part of his glory did to dash his merited sense of his distinction. In July 1941 he had a bout of rheumatic fever, and Shirley and I visited him in Beth Israel Hospital in Bushwick diagonally across from Muller's greenhouse where Miggsy had his Florist Shop.

²³ The "*Ah vous!*" expresses exasperation and anger, the way English does in an expression like "Why you (dirty, rotten, scoundrel)." Howard responds, "Where does it hurt, sir?" (Here I am assuming that by "*wo*" Alfred meant "*vu.*") Earlier in this famous sketch, Howard's friend asks him what to tell the French landlord, Howard responds with "*Avec,*" French for "with" but Yiddish ("*Avek*") for "Go away."

I made for the Empyrean to remake some Miltonic dream of Christmas to the tune of the flashy Bach out of Stokowski's *Fantasia*;

Aloft his lightening plumes he vastly rears
Who the crevasse of evening worlds astounds
Then headlong through the tidal wind careers
And a prone comet orbitless confounds
The retching welkin with his circling swounds
Till embering, he on marshy cloudland tears
A sunlike smolder at its eastern bounds
Which wonder in her praying eyes enspheres
That on earth's vespering brow a second sun appears.

Shirley, a superb pianist from childhood, [was] drawn forward by a siren meaning beyond the ordinary measure at that time. [She] had a cadence, unique as her flow of breath, and a syntax that cadence dictated—verbs arrested to nouns, nouns and adjectives leaping into verbs, patterned after phrases of musicians or threading the strict dances of French form, the young voice deepened by remembered and anticipated pain:

Darling, I awake: my faithless tears are sleeping,
Tell me of forgive; they smile in dreams of you.
Brighting strange my world: this day will weep no weeping,
Happy in the sun: sweet traitor to my rue.
Bitter not in bitter: they cannot know their part,
Sorrow is no sorrow like sorrow of my heart.

Whether we like it or not, Plato is right. Poets are out of their own control. At best, they are sibyls. They say more than they know. Meters possess them; they must find words to fill.

It was 1941. For all our daydreams of poetic fulfillment, “How with that rage shall beauty hold a plea,/ Whose action is no stronger than a flower?” Try though we did, somehow the eternal beat of sadness washed our sound. Brilliant Martin died of meningitis that very year. Early in December Shirley and Stanley took me to a pianist's debut at Town Hall. She began beautifully, but suddenly faltered, stopped, shot up and made for the wings. The house-manager told us why. The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Going home on subway, we didn't realize what lay before us.

Ten to eight the morning of the sixth of January 1943 my mother and father walked me to the BMT Church Avenue subway, the first stage of my entrance into the army. When I turned to wave good-bye from the top of the stairs, my father was crying but my mother was dry-eyed. I remember no more how I got to New York than I do how I got to St. Anne's Academy my first day there. They put us on a train to Fort Dix. Greasy tussocks of brown grass flashed by the dusty window in the refinery-barrens near Elizabeth; and the green frieze of the pre-World-War coach-seats, stiff with dirt like the pelt of some watchdog in a used auto parts lot, ringed our nails and blackened the heels of our hands. Whatever edgy talk we struck up with seatmate trailed off, hampered as it was by the New York bristle at strangers we were born to and our apprehensiveness [about] what lay before us. Wet under the arms, my stomach rolled at the ice of the air on the platform (the first hangover in my life from Mr. Meagher's farewell party). We were huddled into busses and out of them into a gym of a room and told to form three wide circles, drop our pants and shorts and wait. A skinny corporal in his fifties slid into our circle, and moving clockwise had each of us milk his penis down for signs of gonorrheal discharge. When he had made his rounds, he told us to pull up our pants and wait. An even skinnier PFC then handed us each an unwrapped baloney sandwich on Bond bread and a waxed gill of warm milk. When we'd eaten, they collected our containers, and hustled us into another barn of a room where we were told by a different set of non-coms to form three large circles, drop our pants and shorts and wait. Without a word of explanation, a second long-in-the-tooth corporal repeated the inspectorial round. This time we got no sandwich. "You can't even call your balls your own!" someone yelled as we were quick-marched to our next proof of the maxim, "there's a right way and a wrong way, then there's the army way." That was our first exposure to "the short arm"¹ (WACs called their version "the big eye"): a process as inevitable as death and taxes. ("Fall-out in raincoats, shoes and helmet-liners.") The last stateside one I remember was Oakland at the Pacific Port of Embarkation when we were double-timed past an exasperated sergeant who signaled "next" by banging the side of his pencil against the green tin shade of his inspection lamp.

We were then stampeded into a fourth gym, where with a hangover like brain-surgery without anesthetic, I took the Army Intelligence Test and achieved a score that testified that though I was not officer-material, I was qualified to wrap packages and make uncomplicated change. That first night, the mess-hall [having] sprung ribbons of green

¹ Inspection of men's genitals. "Short-arm" was also 1940s slang for "penis."

crepe paper suspending a wilting red-tissue-paper ball, had a look of Christmas-Eve-in-the-poorhouse that would have deadened the heart of Pollyanna; and the reek of years of bacon fat and steam-table sodden boiled bulldog drove home my excommunication from the daily mass of my mother's table.

A soft man in his thirties (the rest of us ranged from eighteen to twenty) suffering from dyspepsia had taken a cruet of vinegar from the mess-hall. The overflowing toilet of abuse the rye-soaked mutt of a corporal in charge let loose at him would have turned the stomach of a Sands Street pimp. We stiffened with the realization that we could not tell him to go to hell, turn on our heels and go home. It dawned on me that moment how sheltered my education had kept me. Six-thirty the raw next morning, they fed us flapjacks thick as manhole-covers, ran us through our first close-order drill, shot us with typhoid and tetanus ("the hook"), gave us twine to bundle our civilian clothes with, dressed us army-style from the skin out, and loaded us with two mustard colored bags of clothes and equipment to lug back to the barracks and lash to the foot of the bunk. After lunch they showed two training films, on how to take a shower and take a pro,² followed by an orientation-lecture in which we were told by a fat first lieutenant to "always be sure to wash our public hair" and print KIIYP in our overseas caps, "Keep It in Your Pants." Next morning after calisthenics and breakfast, they packed us into trucks and back into pre-World-War-I coaches. Frigid though the wind was, we were clammy with sweat. By then our common cause against the mouth of the barracks' corporal had made us one in mind and heart. More or less at random we paired off, exchanging as catchwords the under-the-breath wise-cracks we had shared the last two days. The seats, filthy with fifty summers of engine soot, were the kind with smelly brass handles you could pull back to make foursomes out of. We flung our barracks bags on the racks above and gave ourselves to the ping-pong of rumors troops play on the move from one place to another. I was the first to ask just where Camp Webb was and be answered "up the spider's ass."

Outside the clouds were frozen ashes in a gutter, but inside all of us were sweating gumdrops. The smut of the seats and their tarnished sticky handles passed from our hands to our faces. The only water in any of the toilets was iced. The windows were sealed tight as coffins in a plague. Passing from one car to the next back and forth from the mess car, we breathed the outside blasts as deep as we could. As night came on, the temperature rose with the dark. We stripped to our underwear and started to bed down. Some curled up like embryonic babies in beds they made from two seats pulled apart. Some padded the aisle with barracks bags and flopped on them. The third day near dawn we sighed to a full stop. Bearded as werewolves and in dirty drawers we

² I.e., to make use of a "pro-kit," an ensemble of soap and ointment meant to prevent venereal disease.

crowded to the windows. We hurried back and began to throw on clothes. It was Xenia, Ohio. Along the icy platform in the dingy light ten women in their thirties, hatted and dressed as if for church were trundling a baggage cart before them, loaded with back-number magazines, gallon thermoses of hot water and hot coffee, baskets of fresh doughnuts, and trays of apple pies sliced on paper plates. They boarded the train and passed from car to car to cheers and loud applause, policed the leftovers back on to the cart, got off and shoved it back up the platform. As the train pulled out, we waved. We never asked them their names.

The trip took sixty-five hours from Dix to Brownwood, Texas, and my first assignment, the 747 Medium Tank Battalion at Camp Bowie. The landscape was scoured by a wind-driven dust that could have cured leather. Dry as it was, it was fragrant with the soil it had been shaved from. Our tar-paper barracks trembled and the two small gas stoves snuffled in the draft from beneath all night. We pulled our extra socks on and thickened our blankets with our GI overcoats, yet woke ourselves shivering off and on all night.

Five thirty the tap-dance of sticks on a drum rattled us awake and a sergeant in a voice as softly southern as his Gaylord Ravenal mustache told us: "Rise and shine, but warm the family jewels above the gas stoves and bundle up before you go outside or you'll be answering roll-call in a high soprano. From behind me a West-Virginian sang falsetto:

Wake up, boys, and piss on a rock,
It ain't daylight but it's four o'clock!

Thirty-six pairs of feet hit the splintery floors. Above the importunate tapping of the reveille drumsticks the reveille bugle sneered:

There's a sergeant in the grass
With a feather up his ass.
Take it out. Take it out.
Take it out. Take it out!

Clothes flung on, out onto the bitter company street. Dress right. Roll Call. At strict attention we saluted the base flag a good half mile back from the latrine which in fact we were facing. Then back for our "ditty-bags" (canvas sacks for toilet things [given] you when you were drafted, four I ended up with, not to mention the six money belts I never used) and to the latrine-mirrors, elbowing each other for the morning shave, then breakfast and piss-call, two hours of close-order drill in wind like a cleaver, then to the

rec-hall (I never once saw it used for recreation) for yet more anti-VD movies: gruesome close-ups of soft chancres and Samuel Hinds, the actor who played stern fathers and sterner judges in the movies explaining to some rookie white as bridal veils that what he had was "commonly known as blue-balls," after which the company Casanovas assured us: "Don't worry. Picking up a nail's no worse than a bad cold." That to the likes of me who thought twice before I would use a public toilet, then red-raw hungry a roast pork lunch that would have slowed a boa constrictor down, then drill again, then field-stripping the Thompson submachine guns, our "pieces." "This," the sergeant would say, clutching his crotch with his right hand "is your gun". "This," brandishing the Thompson over his head, "this, you silly bastards, is your piece." Then another film about how to memorize your general orders and stand guard:

To walk my post in a military manner,
And take no shit from the company Commander.

God help those who dozed in the warm dark; they had to stand for the rest of orientation lectures. Ordered about every which way every minute, always uncertain, we lived in dread of making the false step that would single us out as we did falling out of step on the drill field. Attachments grew quick and held fast. Friendships struck root fast and held deep. Bob Foster, in the bunk beside me, was a flesh and blood mantra of home. He lived in Bracebridge Hall, a high-toned apartment house on Ocean Avenue, two blocks from the tattered canopy of mine. He showed me a picture of his fiancée, Jean Colleran, a Wave, on *American Magazine*; I showed him a poem of Shirley's in *The American Poet*. Then, all of a sudden, the 747 was ordered to Camp Hood and I was transferred to the 749 for reassignment to the Sixth Tank Group, the Camp Bowie headquarters of three Tank Battalions. I ached like a broken bone. Pillaged as I had been of private affections, the only ones left were army ones. The supply sergeant helped me get my gear through the five-above zero streets. That same afternoon in yet another orientation film on standing guard, a stray dog slipped in out of the wind and was passed from lap to lap like a worn doll in Mrs. Meany's orphanage, our need for kindness disguised in the giving of it.

In the 749, I had the luck to meet John Boswell. Like me he was slated for the Sixth Tank Group; like me he had been drafted in his sophomore year in college. That, and the comparative purity of our talk (we were just beginning to talk college and were not about to regress to talking smut) led our fellow rookies to say: "They wouldn't say shit if they had a mouthful." But as the iron of basic training entered our souls, that reluctance gave in the daily pressure: five-mile hikes in full pack (five miles each way) during which they flung tear gas full into our faces; overnight bivouacs in which "the enemy" fell on us at three in the morning, kicked in our pup tents and pummeled us in them till we came

up fighting (we didn't lose a single tent stake), the night infiltration course, crawling on our bellies, with fifty-caliber machine guns firing bursts a foot and a half over our heads, eating Texas dust by the peck, and hoping against hope you wouldn't meet a rattler; and every week the famous GI party, barracks dusted down from joists to floor; windows washed with newspapers and water, pails of Kirkman Soap suds flooded across the floors, scrubbed in and swept out into the street; latrine shined whiter than a Powers model's smile ("I'll do the urinals; you do the arsenals"); then laying out the tops of our footlockers as neat as the top layer of a Whitman's Sampler; then staggering through the opalescent footbaths, which, even changed, looked as if they could rot the feet off King Kong; then in and out the shower to get the sweat off, scrubbing down the shower-room floor behind us; then into bed and to limp, boneless sleep.

When we finally passed the inspection that ended basic, another college snotnose in our barracks, his green and white piped overseas-cap proudly tilted left (the Tank Corps way!), offered us all a recruiting-poster salute that would have given George Patten goose bumps, with what we had learned to call his shit-eating grin, said "What the Fuck, Jack!" and darted out the door for wild, wild Brownwood.

Moving to the Sixth Tank Group was like winning the Sweepstakes. The commissioned and non-commissioned officers treated us like people, the men in our barracks were easy to get along with, and the barracks themselves were the amplest on the base—no double-decker beds, and space enough around them to imagine you could call the world you own. The Commanding Officer was Francis Furman Fainter, a full West Point colonel in his fifties, in the distinguished southern military tradition, who would not allow his men to go through anything he had not.³ When, for instance, we went through the night-infiltration course, he mingled with us without our knowing. One man behind him kept yelling: "Move it, Fat-ass!" It was his jeep-driver, who did not recognize him from that angle. At the end of the course, the Colonel looked at him from under his dusty eyebrow, and said: "Here's hoping you can move it as fast as I can when you're my age," and walked back to his Jeep, the driver behind him with his chin in his sternum. It wasn't all peanut brittle and fudge kisses of course on the Big Rock Candy Mountain. On the first anniversary of the Group, the Colonel and the officers threw us a party into which beer stronger than "the canary piss 3.2" allowed on base had been smuggled. A sergeant broke a corporal's nose, penitently drove with him to the dispensary, then staggered back to the barracks and conked off. Twenty minutes later, bloody but unbowed, the corporal returned and broke the sergeant's arm with a baseball bat. The next morning there were big heads but no hard feelings.

³ Sometimes spelled "Painter" in the typescript, this is probably Francis Furman Fainter, who received a Silver Star for Conspicuous Gallantry in Action in 1944.

The sergeant in the company mess we ate at hated our guts and showed it every time our turn came up for KP, he would dismiss his company KP's right after supper, and keep us cleaning grease-traps till well past ten. On a night of driving rain when we were still pot-walloping at nearly eleven, the mess hall door opened and Colonel Painter, buttoned to the throat, came in dripping. "What," he said, "are these men doing here this time of night?" "Their work," said the mess sergeant with a dismissive smile. The smile froze when the Colonel unbuttoned his coat and flashed his eagles. "Get into the Jeep; we're going home," he said to us. And turning to the mess sergeant, "If you ever keep my men this late again, believe me, you surely will have cause to regret it." He never did.

The jawbreaker in the candy jar was I could not for the life of me learn to drive. The teacher was a sergeant with a Florida accent thicker than gumbo, and heat under the collar that would have melted a McIlhenny's sauce bottle. It was he who had broken the corporal's nose at the party. Coordinating the toe-dance from starter to accelerator with the Balinese handplay on the broken H of the gear-shift was beyond me. Sometimes I managed to get the Jeep waving its rear end a minute or so like a piddling puppy. Sometimes I got it to prance in fits and start like a shying horse. And once to sarcastic cheers from fair-weather friends, I drove a beeline the whole edge of the drill-field only to bear down on a squad of men who had the sense to scatter like shot off a shovel. The sergeant braked us down. Most of the time my little contretemps turned the air around me blue as a Maxwell Parrish sundown. This time it was as still as a hurricane's eye. "Get out of the vehicle," the sergeant said, accenting the last word on "hic," the tank-corps way. I did what the sergeant said, and I did it fast. The made me the code clerk and the dispatcher.

I wasn't through with the sergeant yet. He was the Commander of our Sherman Tank: I was "assistant-driver," a title as nominal as the King of England's. The Commander stood in the turret; I sat in one cubbyhole below at the driver's right, and over the roar of the motor relayed the orders the Tank Commander gave through a throat-microphone he was not supposed to cover. We all wore football helmets with microphoned earlaps and generally because of the heat rode with our heads sticking out. Besides the near Gullah of the sergeant's accent, the roar of the motor and the fact that he always insisted on grasping his throat like Garbo in "Camille" when he gave me a message, I couldn't understand a single thing he said. In addition, my football helmet was too small and perched above my ears like plum on a pumpkin. "I beg your pardon," I would bellow politely. A second bilge of words would come from on high to no avail. I would turn like a damned fool and give him a puzzled look. That would set him waving his arms like a banking condor but still emitting what seemed a phlegmy gargle. I would shrug. Then he

would tear boughs off trees and bang me squarely on the helmet with them making my earlaps flap up and down against my ear-tops. That would set the driver and me laughing until the Commander gestured the driver to stop, jumped down from the turret and screamed the landscape void of flora and fauna.

The "detail" (army for "chore") John and I enjoyed most was surveying. The only fault of Captain Schubach, a fine, big-boned captain with a scrub-brush mustache, was driving as if in bloodthirsty pursuit of the German Army. I hammered my helmet-liner down as tight as it went and hugged the struts of the Jeep in the crook of [my] elbow as we cycloned up and down the short hills of that part of Texas, my helmet-lined skull ricocheting from roof to windshield like a bounced coconut. John did the same, wild eyed in the looser back seat. But once there, it was worth it. From the highest hill, our station, stretched miles of wind-combed trees vibrant with singing birds, breathing the smell of leaves from every side. I was instructed to watch from there across the little valleys to where the Captain was sighting on our rod through his transit from two hills away. He would signal with his handkerchief to the right or left where the pole was to be moved, then up and down if it was where he wanted. Once he had us dashing back and forth in a solitary czardas. We stared. Then suddenly, a handkerchief in both hands and one in his mouth he wiggy-waggied at [us] with all his might, then fell on the ground laughing so loud we heard it above the dusty whistle of the wind. Lord, we loved him. We took our time going home, stopping from time to time to search for arrowheads, of which we never found a single one.

The end of April 1943 our Tank Group was to be transferred to Indio, California. Although we knew it was the desert training center, visions of the Hollywood Canteen danced in our heads. They were confirmed by the style of our transportation. Usually, even enlisted men's deluxe was three men sharing an upper and lower berth, one man getting a chance at least once to sleep by himself. This time enlisted men as well as officers traveled two to a stateroom. Our daydreams grew as gorgeous as our accommodations. We went to bed the last night expecting Xanadu. Dawn, the engine disengaging woke us. John and I jumped out of our bunks and off the train barefoot. Indio was a rail-coach buffer, a kind of enormous bedspring stranded in miles of sand. We slumped down on broiling tracks. "Well," John said, "it could snow shit." His talk had grown saltier over the months.

We trucked to Camp Laguna outside Yuma. After we'd lashed four squad tents together to hold the office equipment and the phones, we got our four-men tents up in nothing flat. We slept on canvas cots that [under] our weight sank deep into the sand, fronting cliffs they told us were the foothills of the Rockies. Sunset, they burned ruby and turned

us red as Apaches as we showered and scrubbed our clothes out on the duckboards with strong lye soap that smelled like strong black pepper. Dry as camels after two-week treks, we drank Grape Nehi after Grape Nehi till we gasped and went to suppers almost as good as home. Thanks to the Colonel, our mess cooks were the envy of the base. We'd sink down in the sand as the black sky frosted with stars to see a movie. On the way back to the tents, the sagebrush smelled like the diesel in our Shermans. We'd pick the movie plots to tatters then conk out boneless.

Since we had first met in the 749 John and I nursed the hope that our smattering of college German might somehow get us into Intelligence OCS at Ritchie, Maryland. The sniper in our barracks downed us with one shot: "You'd better practice standing on your heads. You'll never make it there as long as your assholes point to the ground." From where he stood, he was right. Tank-men, we were told, could only transfer up; and up was the Air Force. Besides that, neither John nor I had the 115 you had to have in the Army IQ to qualify as Officer Material. When we got to the Sixth Tank Group, Major Swanson and Lieutenant Arrington, the Tank-Group Chaplain, told we could take the IQ over just at the time when a high priority new program opened, the Army Specialized Training Program. Lt. Arrington (from 96, South Carolina, Tel: 3), a saint if ever I saw one, arranged it for us, and, with Major Swanson, cut six months off the process. We got the requisite grades. In addition, with Corporal Nowak, our friend, we got the three-day pass for Los Angeles we'd negotiated weeks for. We were like balloons on strings. After the weeks of the sands' blinding dazzle, the sight and smell of a belt of fresh green alfalfa we passed through on the ride we hitched to Yuma Depot brought our hearts up into our mouths. We must have looked like escapees from Devil's Island with our unpressed khakis and eyelash-length desert haircuts. We put our other uniforms in the overnight tailor's, and for a dollar each a night we booked three beds in the ballroom of a hotel near the Pantages Theater, a vast frame boardinghouse out of a Charlie Chaplin silent with a wraparound porch. One of our fellow guests was Nils Asther, booked in his first starring feature as "the male Garbo"! We rushed out to see who else we could see, ate in an Italian restaurant, and went to *The More the Merrier*, a movie featuring Charles Coburn, whom I liked because he looked like Colonel Painter. We had a snack at the Hollywood Canteen in which we gaped at Joan Leslie and Deanna Durbin, had an enormous Sauerbraten meal at a Hofbrau, and waddled home to bed starry eyed from our first experience of the Hollywood Olympus. The next day we went to Paramount Pictures, where Stanton Griffis, one of my mother's bosses, had arranged to have us admitted to two sets, *The Angels Sing* with Dorothy Lamour and Fred MacMurray and *The Uninvited* with Ruth Hussey and Ray Milland, We picked up the uniforms we had left in the tailor's, showered, shaved, took a few deep breaths and went to Preston Sturges' restaurant, The Players, because we had read about it in the Hollywood columns that were the Court Circulars of Hollywood royalty, and my mother had been told by a dashing French customer's man at her firm that its kitchen was easily on a par

with the Pavillion on 57 and Park, the only *cordon bleu* kitchen in the City he thought worth the rating. I was nineteen and near enough to Holy Innocents to remember the prickles rising on my neck when I first cased the Flatbush Avenue Schrafft's as a possible place to take Theresa Ann O'Reilly for a soda. New York sophisticate that I thought myself this was the first time in my life I was put through the triple play of being seated at a first-class restaurant, maître d' to head waiter to waiter. "Unnecessary" was the Brooklyn phrase for what I felt as we were led to a table beside the door into the kitchen, and to my relief, we were not flung down some chute, but seated. We were the only enlisted men in the room. Although the last time I had had a drink before dinner was when Mr. Meagher took me to dinner in the Times Square Steuben's and I puked in my umbrella and had to be taken home on the subway, "to hell with poverty," I told myself as my mother would have, and ordered us daiquiris. Then, in all the rationing it made us feel we were dreaming, buttery onion soup thick with grated cheese, double loin lamb chops, thicker than our fists, and cherries in red wine. Just as the soup was set before us a silence fell on the room. Behind the maître de, Jean Gabin was leading Marlene Dietrich to a special table. Miss Dietrich wore a black cartwheel hat and was laughing as she started to sit down. She saw us and spoke to Mr. Gabin. He rose and had the waiter move his party nearer us, ordered champagne, and grew deeply engrossed in French conversation. The daiquiris had made us bold. I sent a note to their table in French asking if they would sign Boswell's three-day pass to prove we had seen them. They rose and came over to our table and shook hands all around in the French fashion. They called God's blessing on us, shook hands again, and went back to their table.

The waiter came to us with a bottle of champagne from Mr. Gabin. He opened it and filled our glasses for us. Miss Dietrich, Mr. Gabin, and their whole table lifted their glasses to us. We rose and did the same. They finished their champagne, waved goodbye to us, and left the restaurant. Next week I learned from the papers Mr. Gabin had flown to North Africa to join the Free French in the fight.⁴ Their goodness was as unforgettable as her beauty.

The next morning, we, of course, overslept, missed the 8:30 train to Yuma which would have guaranteed our getting back to camp before reveille and not being AWOL. As an associated editor of *The American Poet*, I had written Thomas Mann asking him to do a small preface to an issue of the magazine dedicated to translations from poets of the great German tradition, to remind the country that Nazism was not the German nation. He had written he would. I talked the others into helping me try to find Doctor Mann in Pacific Palisades. We took a bus through Beverly Hills to Santa Monica and were told

⁴ Serving under Charles de Gaulle in North Africa, Gabin won a *Médaille militaire* and a *Croix de guerre*.

Thomas Mann lived near Brentwood. I asked some men who were picking lemons in a grove directions, but they were Mexican and didn't understand us. I rang the doorbell of a little cottage, and a lady telephoned Dr. Mann for us, put us in her Buick and drove us to a very modern-looking house. I rang the back doorbell and a maid came out and told us Dr. Mann was on his post-luncheon walk with the dog. "Look for the dog," she said. "He'll be somewhere behind him." We walked to where the dog came from. Suddenly, out of a lemon grove Dr. Mann appeared with the dog's leash in his hand. I had pictured him in scale with his achievement. He was a short, trim, sturdy man in a double-breasted suit and Homburg, wearing European deep-blue sunglasses with golden struts. "I have lost my dog!" he said ruefully with a deep asthmatic sigh. We pulled off our caps, and told him that we had come on a pilgrimage. He looked at us gravely. "Because you admire me or admire my books?" he asked. "Both," we answered. He motioned us back where he'd come from and walked us to [a] clearing from which we could see a fine view below.

His voice was very gentle. I asked him about the Joseph novel. He told us he'd finished it, but that good woman that his translator, Mrs. Lowe Porter was, she was "intolerably slow" and the volume would not come out in English before spring 1944, next year. He looked so deeply at me his eyes gleamed in the dusk of his dark glasses. He pointed to the PFC stripe on my sleeve. "My son Klaus comes on leave today," he said. "My son Klaus is a 'Boswill's Sieur,' Staff Sergeant," he said proudly, and then with bronchial sigh like someone tearing cloth, "Klaus is thirty-six, but I am an old man." "Oh no!" I said. "Yes," he said; "I am sixty-eight." We talked a little more about his work. When I told him how staggered I was about the research he must have done for Joseph in Egypt, he shrugged and said, "I read a few books." We could hear from the tenderness in his voice when he spoke of his son how happy he was that he was coming home. Nowak looked at his watch to remind me of our schedule. I told him he would be hearing from me about the makeup of the proposed German issue of *The American Poet*. We shook hands with him; his hand was firm and the color of old freckled ivory. He turned and walked back to his house erectly. We watched him into the trees. We picked our way back through the lush Goethean lemon grove, and were given a hitch to Los Angeles Station almost the moment we hit the street below. Dead tired and broke, we left for Yuma on the five o'clock train, and we were let off miles away from our Group Camp at three o'clock in the morning. After walking hours through the unlandmarked sand, we managed to make it back to our camp before reveille

That was the first week of June [1943]. By the last week, the good officers of Lieutenant Arrington and Majors Baggett and Swanson had got us transferred to the first stage of the Army Specialized Training Program. Colonel Fainter lacked all faith in the program and was strongly opposed to our going, but they talked him around by convincing him we had our hearts set on going. He was justifiably angry that such was the case; and

the last week he showed it by ignoring our gaze in the Headquarters Tent. But when my orders came—John's came later—he drove me to Yuma. He was silent all the way from Camp Laguna to the depot. But he walked me to the car for Pasadena where I was to be tested and assigned accordingly. He lunged and cordially shook hands with me, looking me straight in the eyes. I mounted the steps and when I turned to wave good-bye, he, whom I had never heard say a single improper word in an enlisted man's presence, flung his fine head back, bellowed "Piss on Laguna!" turned on his heel and strode erectly away. I felt I had betrayed him. Looking back, I blush at my willful ambition and the disloyalty my leaving just before maneuvers must have seemed to him, and [am] deeply moved at his generosity in letting me go. He went on to lead the Sixth Tank Group through the terrible winter of Bastogne without a single death. He was the caliber of General Marshall. On the way to Pasadena, I remembered a Saturday inspection in which a new second lieutenant in spotless white gloves craned up to pass his hand over the top of a splintery joist in our barracks and held his smutted fingers out for the Colonel's attention. Colonel Fainter looked the lieutenant fixedly in the eye until the lieutenant had the grace to lower his hand and move on.

Of Pasadena, I wrote my mother it reminded me of New York around the Plaza and the Flatbush of the handsome Dutch Colonials from Cortelyou Road down Foster Avenue. By that I meant it had comfortable dash. And the light those days before the smog transfigured everything it played across even worn stucco house walls and uneven curbstones. The Colonel had made sure I would have a free day before reporting. I slept on springs in a dollar a night hotel and had bananas and cream, flapjacks and sausages, and coffee for 65 cents at what I took to be the California Schrafft's, The Pig 'n Whistle. Reconnoitering afterwards, I came across a used bookshop, where for \$3.55 including postage, I bought and sent home a calf[-bound] eight-volume set of the Hume-Smollett *History of England* and a calf-bound second edition of *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* that its flyleaf said had come to California over the Oregon Trail in the 1850s. John and I were reunited there until his assignment came through for St. Louis. The separation was as usual hard, as all separations have always been, since those Saturdays my mother walked down the subway stairs and I rushed round to walk up the iron stairs at St. Anne's. I was assigned to Regis College in Denver, and I was taken aback when at the station I was marched to a yawning freighter with triple decker bunks the length of it. But my greedy heart soon lifted when they marched us in for lunch in a boxcar kitchen with an iron stove out of the Civil War and fed us a meal even my mother would have approved of. After it, I clambered up to my top bunk, with the Everyman's *Anna Karenina* I had picked out of the USO bins at the railroad station. I opened it but quickly put it down, as Utah and Wyoming and Nevada unfolded full mile on summer mile through the open doors of the boxcars until the stars exploded after the slow sundown. I heard a shout as I got off in Denver—Talbot waving good-bye on the way to his new assignment. It was good-bye. He died within the year.

The air was like the breath off fresh snow; and the mile-high openness to night of streets uncowed by blackout as they were in the East made every weekend pass a carnival. Regis College was late vintage St. Francis, wooden-framed Gothic windows on granite sills and brick that shimmered as the sunset turned it geranium. All day the air dazzled our sight like aerated water. Underfoot everything sprang with warm, seated vigor till suddenly in early afternoon a gust of rain would play across the drying grass till it sweetened and the light resumed its coolness. And unforgettably once, weeks later, an afterglow as it was darkening enough to switch the lights on and we were we were settling down to next day's lessons, the whole sky outside kindled, everything blazed and all of us rushed outdoors bewildered by the sight of our hands and faces and the ground around us transfigured by the garnet dazzle

They put us cot by cot in a room like a gym; and I had the luck to get the cot next to Philip Drapkin. He had and still has the gift of notice. He saw people, places, and things in their uniqueness, cherishing what he saw as he moved to understand it. A master craftsman in the tradition of Rembrandt through Hopper, he saw through the dazzle of talk and looks and build to the essential loam of being, fostered by the gentle rigor of his gaze.

We were given a choice of German, Hungarian, Bulgarian or Japanese, which we were to learn from the vowels up for three twelve-week periods before we were assigned to Officers' Training. I chose Bulgarian for its Slavic roots and its cousinship to Russian, which I suspected might become the post war *lingua franca*. There were thirty of us in that platoon; and after a few weeks, drilling, sleeping and eating the language (we were not supposed to pass each other things at meals unless requested to in Bulgarian), we were fused into the blithest of Balkan families. Our teachers were Esther Dimchevska and Emilia Racheva, the first a highborn lady from Sofia, the second a socialist intellectual from Plovdiv. They were complemented by Edward Hasell, the son of American missionaries in Bulgaria, who taught us the geography and Boris Kremenliev, a brilliant musicologist, who was imported explicitly from California to teach us obscenities I suspect neither Miss Dimchevska nor Miss Racheva had ever heard. We were moved into El Jebel, a Shriners' Temple, next to the City Golf Course, a block or so away from a little knot of shops around the western terminal of the round, yellow pot-bellied downtown streetcar. Our day ran from reveille at five thirty through lights out at eleven, with three comfortable sized breaks: morning, when we dashed up the steps for coffee at the golf club cafeteria (once joined by Miss Dimchevska, who pulled her skirt into a tight diaper and joined us in rolling down the snowy hill); afternoon, when we strolled along a creek to a farm where the pigs came to recognize us and crossed fields to have us scratch between their adoring eyes, then doubled back into the knot of shops

by the streetcar stop where in a bakery run by a lady who'd just lost her husband we'd practice our German on her loneliness and buy her fine cake and cookies for our final break at ten thirty when we ended the day with talk and hijinks over mess hall coffee before lights out at eleven. The married men sneaked off to their wives till dawn in AWOLs ignored by the kind brass. One bachelor, erect as a Prussian prince of the blood and presumably rich, taxied nightly to his room at the Brown Palace and marinated himself in booze for the next day's exertion. The Jesuits from Regis said daily mass, and to this day I feel lost without it.

Saturday, noon on, after inspection, the weekend was ours till supper time Sunday. In 1943 American cities and towns had cultures as recognizably their own as the ring of the language in their citizens' mouths. Once an hour's army layover in Sweetwater Texas might as well have been a furlough in Shangri-La: the calm of its shaded streets made Berlin seem as remote as Aldebaran. Denver, its poise as uncorrupted as its air, was what everyone said it was, "The Queen of the West." From the Brown Palace Hotel, its tons of American flags hanging free in its eight story well over the slipper-soft chairs of the lobby to the tower of Daniel's and Fisher's Department Store, with its pert "so there" adaptation of the campanile in St. Mark's Square in Venice, it was as imperially itself as Paris; and its people, equally unselfconscious, were blessed with that merry indulgence of whim that is the unfailing index of style. At a ballet opening we'd gotten passes for, for instance, a woman tall as Gary Cooper strode in, wearing a flawlessly kept couturier's gown from France before the war, the thick, black hair above her fine-boned face pulled back into an Apache bun around her center part by a bandeau of diamonds in lieu of a beaded thong. Philip Drapkin and I scouted the glories of the place from the Cultural Center on Colefax Avenue behind the Capitol to Joe and Sam's Pawn Shop on Arapahoe Street where I used to hock my watch between paydays ("Joe and Sam, here I am!"). With Carl Malouf who'd been a New York commercial artist, Ernst Buchholz from Germany (when I asked him if the black man who sold fruit at Berlin Zoo had a southern accent, he said how should he know, the only thing he ever heard him say was "Banan!"), and Haworth X. White from Kansas (he never would tell us what the X stood for) with a blond smile like a field of wheat in summer that once made a sedate matron want in Union Station to buy him books, we soon made up the arty set of the platoon. Buchholz had an uncle, a piano tuner, who every Sunday in the *Tiergarten* recited spicy pasquinades about the Nazi bigwigs, got carted off to the police station, beaten bloody, only to return the following week with a new batch. By providence, he survived to make it to New York in one piece before the war. Ernst, like his uncle was an unregenerate German radical and would open a political discussion with "I think Ernst Toller was a greater man als Jesu Christ!" and close it, when he was roundly landed on, often physically, "Ooh, you treat me so lousy!" Saturday afternoon we did the parks and zoo, museums and libraries and had a bang up dinner at the Navarre, a restaurant across from the Brown Palace, served in black pin-seal booths by old waiters

who treated us like grandsons (a champagne cocktail, three oysters, half a lobster, ranch house apple pie, and coffee strong as brandy, \$3.50). In 1902 when it was founded it had been a gambling den and sporting house respectable men could get to under ground from the Brown Palace basement. It is now the Museum of Western Art. Later we'd make our way to the movies, one of which was the Tabor Opera House, which Horace Tabor, who had won and lost two fortunes, built for his beloved, Baby Doe, sometimes rumored to have been sighted walking down Arapahoe with an oversized man's work cap over her legendary golden hair.⁵

Often moving from army post to post we would read with longing the lighted windows that flashed by with "looking for a home," as in the "Boll Weevil" song. It was to satisfy that kind of longing I think that we rented two furnished rooms (one with a gas stove) in a battered rooming house by *The Rocky Mountain News* where we could listen to good music, write and draw, and sometimes even enjoy a meal or two. I particularly remember an *arroz con pollo* Carl (he was reared in Cuba) so crammed with saffroned rice it exploded like a blockbuster in our dollhouse oven, and a tea party we gave for our high-toned Denver University friends, for which Carl spent hours shaving the crusts off loaves of Wonder Bread and turning them into seven layer cakes of iniquitously dyed cream cheese, and to which our fellow roomers came, including two enterprising Native Americans peddling toy birchbark canoes from the Five and Dime. The Bulgarian Community gave us a wonderful party in the Denver Museum of Modern Art where we wolfed our way through trays of delicious food and hand in hand snaked up and down the stairs past Renoirs and Monets with Miss Dimchevka, all rattling beads and bracelets, leading and Miss Racheva dancing anchor woman.

Suddenly it came to an end. April 1944 the ASTP was dissolved, its dissolution brought about, we were told, by Colonel McCormick's editorials in *The Chicago Tribune* calling the various units communist cells.⁶ Where he got that information Heaven only knows. Our teaching staff was so rightwing that one of our art teachers was teaching Nazi Heartland geography straight out of the *Volkischer Beobachter*.⁷ As we waved good-bye from the Army bus to the station, the reflection of our married friends' wet cheeks in the dusty windows gliding by the tight faces of their wives brought the war back on us with a vengeance.

⁵ Elizabeth McCourt Tabor, a famous beauty and fashion plate, died in 1935, and so this memory of her is remote.

⁶ And there was at least one congressional "probe" into what was soon proved the ridiculous indictment that some ASTPers were taught Communism as part of their Russian language courses. <http://www.pierce-evans.org/ASTPinWWII.htm>

⁷ Or *Folk Observer*, a prime print organ of the Nazi party.

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Of the entire language school at El Jebel, ten students from the German Platoon were sent to Oxford University for military government and eighty from the Japanese to Tampa for military intelligence. The rest of us were condemned to the outer darkness of casual status with the Fourth Army [and] Forty-Fourth Infantry Division then under its aegis wallowing through a second year's maneuvers in Louisiana like a school of beached whales. Casuals in the army were what refugees without passports were on the roads of Europe. We were huddled through a soaking drizzle into a city of moldy squad tents under dank acres of pine trees on the outskirts of Camp Polk to await by woodless stoves whatever fates the Russian roulette of Army placement would allot us. At first Philip, Carl, Haworth, and I and our fifth, indomitably cheerful musketeer, Nicky Roux, managed to stick together, our hearts in our mouths, through the morning ordeals of reading the rosters which daily decimated the ranks. My edginess showed and a strange corporal offered me a Philip Morris to calm me and hooked me on tobacco for years on years to come. After that (at the sound or reveille bustle), five of us would scatter away from the tents like the herds of half-starved pigs farmers there let loose to forage in the woods. That way we got out of the dirty work Headquarters dreamed up to keep us out of mischief: "You, you, you and you, police up the area: All as I want to see is asses and elbows." We would carry large branches at shoulder arms, so that if stopped, we could say we were on a detail (accent on the first syllable) gathering wood for the officer's stoves. Then we would go looking for sassafras roots and pine knots till lunchtime, repeating the process in the afternoon. It worked. The only detail I drew (by duty roster) was a day's KP; and more than made up for that by stealing enough loaves of bread for the rest of us to devour around the illegal fire they had spent the day gathering pine knots for.

Phillip was first to go. It was like amputation. Then one by one, the rest. The latrine rumor was we were to be assigned to "service units" (signal corps, medics, the Quartermaster) from which we could be recalled the very instant some inspired Putsch into the tough backside of Europe would make it into Tsar Osvoboditel Square in Sofia. My unit was the 4164 Quartermaster Depot Company in which, stripped of my figmentary ASTP rank of Cadet, I reverted to the rank I seemed born to, buck private. Since the outfit was newly constituted I had to repeat the two months' basic training with the recruits. What made those hell weeks bearable were my fellow broken cadets in the company from different parts of the country who helped me nourish the hope that Washington would suddenly see reason and call us to the offices we were trained for, a hope as forlorn as that the Soviet Union might redeem Tsarist war bonds. Work was allotted not by past experience but by Tables of Organization, where certain ranks were reserved for certain jobs. In the Sixth Tank Group my name for being death on wheels prompted them to cut down my risk factor by making me a dispatcher, a clerk typist, a

code clerk and a draftsman. I was the first dispatcher to keep working files of past and present trips in the Group's history, so got the reputation of being an administrative genius. Years of composing on the typewriter and writing business and editorial letters for *The American Poet* had made me the Yella Fessel⁸ of the typewriter, and the code machine was just a kind of hermetic Remington, so I passed muster there. What I am proudest of, however, is a bookcase I drew plans for which for all I know is still standing in Camp Bowie Texas.

The 4164 put me on Ration Breakdown, which distributed the provisions to companies in our section of Camp Polk. I was the butcher. At the siding waiting my turn for the meat hooks, I used to meet the *Feldwebel* who did the same job for the Polk contingent of the imprisoned Afrika Corps with whom I exchanged some phonograph needles for a package of ersatz cigarettes from Hamburg, which I sent to Thomas Mann. His men were demon marchers who marked cadence with enthusiastic renditions of "*Lieg' den Luger ab, Babe, Lieg' den Luger ab, Lugerpackende Mama, Lieg' den Luger ab!*"⁹

One of them was secretly buying US War bonds. Their bakers made the unbeatable bitter black pumpnickel Headquarters sent us when we went on maneuvers, each big round loaf with a Swastika squarely in the middle. After fraternizing with what Mann in his thank you letter called "these dangerous enemy aliens," I wrestled sides of beef out of freight cars onto trucks and off trucks into a long barn of a shed, where I threw them on brown paper and hacked them into bits with carving knives and cleavers. My disadvantage was I did not know one cut of beef from another and kept assigning the same scrawny chuck and tattered flank steak to mess halls with their gums set for choice sirloin. Their unlucky cooks tried to bribe me with their tastiest pies. Finally, they realized my ignorance and wised me up in no uncertain terms: We laid the meat out first then did the canned goods, condiments, flour, potatoes and vegetables. I thought the high demand for cornmeal was owing to the craving of the large percentage of tar heels in the outfits for breakfast grits, till my new mentor Corporal Hyde Buller, a wise Harvard lawyer (he has given me aide and counsel ever since) explained to me the ins and outs of moonshine.

As April simmered into June and went into the long rolling boil of a Louisiana July and August, I looked back on the New York heat waves under the tin roof of our top floor of

⁸ Austrian expatriate harpsichordist and pianist, 1906–1991.

⁹ A valiant attempt to translate the American hit song *Pistol-Packin' Mama* (1943).

two fanless rooms on East Seventy-sixth Street with bitter nostalgia. At least there the spells broke when the wind blew right:

When the wind blows North from South,
We all can taste the dust in our mouth;
But when the wind blows river to river,
We think that we will live forever.

Here the temperature kept rising with the pitch of the cicadas raging in the breathless underbrush between landscape thunder and lightning star that kept us close indoors while the humidity thickened as ruthlessly as the Fahrenheit soared. Embarkation was in the air. Eight hundred more men had been assigned to us to ration, so that when everything had been laid out in the various bays for the troops, two of us would lie down on the benches either side of a picnic table and go out like lights for an hour. I rejoiced that the crates in our Supply Room were marked "POE New York." Carl Malouf and Philip Drapkin were in France, and war or no war, I longed to be reunited with them there. The pre-embarkation maneuvers, nose to nose in pup tents in the pine barrens, were at least out in the air in the cooling night wind, the vagaries of nature notwithstanding. One of my best new friends, Claude Trimble from Nebraska who had taught me the Omaha polite morning exchange of salutations ("Haryew? Ratfan!"), joined with his architectural-minded tent mate in digging four-foot-deep into the clay to make a kind of conversation pit which made up in headroom what it lacked in hip-room, only to have as his guest a marauding brush pig as upset as they were. ("We got [to get] out here fast. They bite like timber wolves.") My two weeks' embarkation-furlough came up the last part of August (my parents were then living in Quonset, Rhode Island) and it was well worth having to stand from Shreveport to St Louis in coaches packed as the state room in *A Night at the Opera*. Topsy, now a reverend fourteen, ran the whole length darkening platform at Kingston and leapt wriggling in to my arms. When I set her down to embrace my mother and father she danced around our heels like a new-weaned pup. The breeze on the way home felt like October on my cheeks, and as we turned into the base at Quonset smelled of salt like the sea.

When I returned, the port of embarkation had been changed from New York to San Francisco. On the way to Camp Stoneman in Oakland, we had a layover in Los Angeles when we were given a three-hour pass, during which on the way to a Chinese restaurant we were solicited by a blonde cur of a Tech Sergeant to join other GIs in a raid on the barrio to teach the Chicanos manners. We refused, but that raid went through and has been a legend of infamy ever since. To the relief of the Company Commander, everyone got back to the station on time, with only one so plastered he had to be rolled aboard on a wheelchair. The Stoneman milkshakes were said to be so

thick you could stand a trenching shovel up in one. They were. After the one-man anvil chorus of the short arm I earlier described, we were loaded into holds deep in a merchant ship, hundreds of us in multiple bunks floor to ceiling. We would be at sea a long time, they told us, because, traveling without a convoy as we were, we would have to change course every seven minutes, the time it took a submarine to sight on a target. If that were not enough to give us butterflies, they required us to wear life preservers called Mae Wests, which made us look like an invasion force of crazed Mongolian babies. But it was not fear of submarine action that distressed me but fear of the action of the sea itself. Up to then my only experience with a sea was an Armistice Eve flounder fishing off Sheepshead Bay in a November ground swell that would have given a Maldivian shark the heaves. After three hours of inward vomiting watching the madmen on one side of the boat catch the lines of the madmen on the other, I exploded like Krakatoa and was ignominiously exiled aft to the rail. When I wobbled onto the pier at Emmons Avenue, I would have sung *Amazing Grace* if I had had the strength.

I dreaded being put on kitchen police for fear the very smell of food and the pitch of the ship would combine to make the crossing a fate worse than death. I managed to avoid KP only to be assigned latrine duty for the remainder of the voyage. From three hours out men began to turn ashen and make for the johns or the rails. There weren't any efficient sea-sickness pills then. Those afflicted trailed from bunk to toilet to rail and back again, getting whiter and whiter, their steel helmets dangling from the chinstraps off their wrists like the handbags from the forearms of society girls moving from room to room in posh English movies. The first three days were hell on earth to me and the rest of the mop and bucket brigade; yet amazingly enough none of us got sick from the States to our destination. My occasional breaks on deck in the brisk air made me hungry as a stevedore. Several men were so reduced to skin and bone they had to be sedated in the sick bay, but most, thank heaven for us as well as them, got their sea legs at last.

After two weeks at sea, the landfall at Finschhafen, Australian New Guinea, had the look of Eden. They had us clamber down the landing net to the landing crafts, our duffel bags and rifles on our shoulders. The Company Commander stood in the lead craft like Washington leading his troops against the Hessians. On the shore two Melanesians in beehive henna hairdos and sarongs were playing volleyball with two skinny GIs in their drawers. Hyde Buller said we may have come on the invasion wave after the Boy Scouts but at least we'd got there before the DAR. It was an army snafu. We were there only overnight. Since we were not expected, we bunked-in foodless. Since the night sky was ablaze with southern stars we did not pitch our pup tents, but wrapped ourselves in our shelter-halves¹⁰ and blankets. There was, of course, a cloud burst near three in the

¹⁰ Rudimentary pup tent.

morning. At first we huddled round what fires we could rake together, wringing out our blankets when, just at dawn, two trucks roared down among us to the sound of cheering. It was the Salvation Army with pails of strong coffee and crisp warm doughnuts. Near noon, we were loaded back on the ship, which took us to Hollandia on Humboldt Bay.

From the harbor ringed with tan cyclopean boulders, they drove us inshore upland to an encampment in a plantation of tall coconut palms, where we were assigned four to a squad-tent between an improvised company street and a ditch with a runnel of oiled water trickling through it. The legs of our cots were on boards, under them the trodden dirt that was the mother soil of the trees. Around the center tent pole was a table of rough-cut boards with four metal folding chairs round it. We stowed our helmets and our shaving kits on the side shelves above each cot to which we tied the mosquito nets they gave us (called *furchtbars*¹¹ by veterans of the ASTP German platoons). We laid a kind of bed of mattress cover and blankets on the cot. It was not until the gruesome battle photographs of the Vietnam War that it dawned on me that the mattress covers were our shrouds. Headquarters was off the main road at the end of the street, the mess tent and showers at its foot, and an appreciable distance away, beyond thick underbrush, the eight-holer latrine with its dust-clogged screens. We were cautioned to wear our dog tags to bed because, rumor had it, in the first days of the landing, Melanesians used to creep up on sleeping men in the dark, and with two foot machetes strike the heads off those who had Japanese shaped dog tags or none at all. Rumors like that came and went like the trots. Once, however, a guerilla band of half-starved Japanese did infiltrate through the forbidden higher country separating our territory from that of the Melanesians and beheaded two men. We walked double guard for two weeks after that, during which one dead of night the kitchen cat clawed up the mosquito net of a man next door and elicited screams from him that would have done the Bride of Frankenstein proud. That was the nearest we came to enemy action. Up to then, we had been put through as much orientation as close order drill. I still remember how to field strip, clean, and oil a carbine, because you got a gig for dirty one. And no one can forget the stunning documentaries, *Why We Fight*, that made the saddest sacks among us feel heroic. But once overseas, no one ever told us what the hell we [were] doing there. Little by little, history taught us and in the most telling way.

When an invasion moved upcountry from a beach to the hills, as it did in Hollandia, supplies were unloaded by a Quartermaster Depot Company under constant shelling and harrowingly random rifle fire. Toppling undunnaged stacks would often sink five or six feet into the soil. The Quartermaster in the first wave at Hollandia must have been

¹¹ "horrors"

as understaffed as it was hard beset. Eight months later chaos still obtained. Assigned to the Class I Dump (Food), we worked three shift days as stevedores, salvaging what we could of what was there at the same time we were organizing the new supplies as they came in. I was one of six crews working the 1600-2400 (8 PM to midnight)¹², unloading as many as twenty-four trucks a shift of everything from heavy cases of number ten cans of grapefruit juice to hardwood boxes of Australian salt hams that would have ruptured a gorilla to heave. When we stumbled off the trucks returning home, we had to peel the clothes from our backs; they we so salted with the sweat the night wind dried them stiff. Malaria regulations or not, we rushed to the showers wrapped only in towels, before the midnight dinner that was waiting for us. We were next assigned to class II and IV, eight huge warehouses under corrugated iron roofs directly on Humboldt Bay, in the fields behind which you could find everything from the garbage cans the Army served coffee from (Can, GI) to notebooks (Book, Note Loose-Leaf, three-ring, 8 x 10 with filler). The confusion in the warehouses was as wild as that in the fields behind them. Our task was to arrange what was there according to classes and institute a system of stock accounting (how many and where located) at least 80% accurate based on the inventories to be taken when the supplies were arranged according to class and stock numbers. Finally, our base (we were now the Base Depot Company) was the most orderly and efficiently run in the southwest Pacific Command. Of 80% of the items registered according to the seventy or so class and stock numbers in the Quartermaster Catalogue, from GI shoes to enormous mobile refrigerators (amazingly, they were the hardest to keep track of), our inventory was 93% accurate.

I was then transferred to the day shift as a clerk typist and never got off my backside for the rest of the war. All day, seven days a week, I typed Shipping Documents (8 or 9 copies), Shipping Reports (up to 32 copies), Letters, Manifests (16 copies) and Cargo Space Requests (8 copies). The documents leapt from one code name to another, OS SO (Tacloban, Leyte), GETE, (Lingayen Gulf), and UCIP(Manila), without [my] then knowing what the code names stood for. It was not until I came down from base one morning and found Humboldt Bay so chockablock filled with ships that there hardly seemed two feet between keel and keel that I realized what all the typing meant: we had been outfitting the Philippine invasion. Almost overnight the Bay was as vacant as the sky. Then two days later relay upon relay of ambulances, bumper to bumper, their lights lit day and night plied back and forth from Bay to the Base Hospitals. There were calls upon calls for blood; and when we went to give it, we would bring things from the PX we thought the wounded might need or like. We brought a couple of boxes of Chuckles to a nineteen-year-old, his neck swathed in bandages. Like us he had never seen battle. Like me, a typist, he had been assigned as a casual to an outfit in need of a company

¹² Mr. Alfred might have nodded here. 1600 is 4 P.M.

clerk. He [l]anded carting his gear and portable; he started where they pointed him to go, a squad of men a hundred yards away from the foot of the boat. They did not warn him about Japanese snipers. Shot through the throat, he collapsed in the sand, gear and all. Miraculously the bullet had not sheered his artery or gullet. He gasped with laughter as he told the story. Watching his shoulders shake, I remembered the one time Shirley and me had nearly died. In the September purge, a killer undertow off Rockaway exhausted us and pulled us under twice. We looked into each other's eyes and exploded into laughter as we went down for the third time. Perhaps Hazlitt was right, no one young believes he will ever die. That certainly seemed the case in that ward that day.

A week later the USO company of *Oklahoma* came through. The theater was benches in the open air behind the hospital; and we gave a hand getting the men in wheelchairs into places they could see from. Everyone had ponchos because it was threatening rain. From the very start, the show was spellbinding. Then the rain broke like Niagara but no one took his eyes from the stage. We sat there dripping huddled in our ponchos. The stage was awash. The cast kept singing and dancing with all their might, slipping and sliding through the deepening puddles without giving a damn about the risk to the legs that were their livelihood. The rain never let up and neither did they. When they took their bows, our cheers could have been heard miles out to sea.

Each company on the base was a small town in itself, with its own classes, its own codes, its good citizens and bad, even its own barber and laundry. Wyvise C. Lucky from near the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia who peppered his scrambled eggs enough to set the table sneezing did our laundry for us dirt cheap, with nothing between his bald head and the sulfuric sun. Heaven rewarded him for his goodness with a thick down of new red hair, which he said came from the live lye on his hand when he wiped sweat off his scalp, his fingers foamy with strong GI soap. One sergeant distilled jungle juice that would have eaten out a crankcase from dried fruit left to ferment in the dank brush behind the eight-seater latrine, and sold it at Johnny Walker Black Label prices. Heaven sent him into Coventry¹³. He was as ignored as the bad smell that fumed off his still. The heroes of the company were the softball stars whose games we watched till the dark called them. Poet though I thought myself, my small boy's envy of the sharp-shooting eye of the batter and his careless lope round the bases elicited this mean s
squib:

I wish I had a baseball bat.

¹³ That is, no one would speak to him. He was ignored.

I'd show the Major what is what.
I'd hit the ball so goddam far
He'd see I was a baseball star.
He'd give me cigars and protect me.
He'd passionately respect me.

Sometimes the joshing turned wicked. Coming back after lunch from picking up a package I found the company barber flat on his back with his tent mate's knee in his sternum, being choked cobalt blue because he'd dared to call him a Pollack. "Stop that," I bleated plaintively to the strangler, famous for biting dimes in half and for having broken his mother-in-law's jaw on his wedding night. Amazingly, he did. Hyde Buller and I had our own private barber in our tent, a West Virginian with a voice as soft as his smile, who could read or write nothing but his name. He had to dictate letters to his wife and have hers read to him the infrequent times they arrived. Hyde taught him how to read and write; and I remember to this day the smile of blissful wonder on his face when for the first time he read through a whole letter from his wife on his own. Letters were, of course, our life's blood. Few or none of them sent us into a tailspin. When two weeks of silence had my chin down to my shoe tongues, I heard a shuffling behind me at the tent flap and looked up to see three Melanesian men wearing piss bleached beehives who sped through a version of the old Camp Polk Afrika Corps favorite, *Pistol-Packin' Mama*, which Hyde had bribed them to belt out for two packs of Camels a piece. I was so grateful I gave them a picture postcard of the New York skyline I had tacked on the tent pole, and explained that people there did not work on the ground like us here but in layer on layer of offices in towers higher than the summits of the mountains they had to crane their necks to look at. "I don't believe!" they said, ashamed by my whopper. But they took the postcard.

As valuable as letters from home were our memories of home and the hours we spent exchanging them. Remembered places gave us a common memory. Hyde Buller's wife lived a block from my mother's on Albemarle Road; and Isaac Gnesin with a New York Russian Jewish accent like the man who sold us butter on Church Avenue worked in civilian life in the main branch of the Post Office near Grand central and brought back the shadowy ravine of Lexington Avenue from the Chrysler Building to the Fifty-ninth Street BMT [where] Albert Geiger and I made our way home down Saturday afternoons of department stores and galleries.

A godless Socialist of testy probity like the best of my committed fellow students at Brooklyn College, he made me his friend for life when he helped me recruit a chorus for the carols we sang around a makeshift tree of palm fronds that Christmas Eve the Army SNAFU aborted in Finnschafften. Bill Slout, who, though he was born in a trunk in a

Bible Belt Toby tent show¹⁴ ("I'm the sheriff of this here county; and I've got a warrant for your arrest!"), looked so much like Ed Talbot at St. Francis, it was as if Ed had never died, gave me a chance to rehearse the glorious days on Broadway of the Guthrie McClintic productions my mother got us passes for all during the thirties, when people dressed as gorgeously for theatre as for opera. I told him of the moment Katharine Cornell as Shaw's resurrected St. Joan lifted up her sword and asked "How long; O Lord, how long?" [and] the sword's reflected light flashed on the gold leafed eyelids of a lady in the row before me, her faultless makeup smearing in the wake of her tears and how the glorious young Burgess Meredith so filled the stage with the radiance of his Mio in the first week of *Winterset* [that] we all felt Anderson had written a second *Hamlet*. I suppose it was then I first began my kind of teaching, inciting people to set their sights sky high by sterling examples of power. But we all taught each other, one way or another; our man from northern California, Stanley King, taught me to peel a navel orange with the address of the Captain at the Paris Ritz; and Tommy Thomson from Philadelphia taught me to eat pretzels with my ice cream like any ordinary human being. There were, of course, the blowhard Lotharios, "This blonde gets on at Shreveport and by the time we're pulling into St. Louis, her kid is calling me Daddy, and I'm wiring the wife I have to take this overnight layover, see?" Most of the time, after the softball games and movies it wasn't women we talked ourselves asleep with, but an endless "Go Fish" of ideal plans and menus, except for me with my wild dreams of epic, not high flown, but somehow something somewhere in our grasp, being an optometrist, a druggist, an accountant. The accountant's debate with promise was the only one romance came into at all. Which of the two girls he loved did we think he should marry, the Brenda Frazier of the neighborhood or the ministering angel of the Grand Concourse kitchen? After the war, he cut the knot of indecision by falling in love with a third girl and marrying her out of hand.

Huddled together day on day there were times we turned upon each other. Just to see a man clipping his fingernails on his cot was a enough of a violation of our privacy to make the blood boil. Those times we went for a walk and wrote letters under some tree asserting our ties to home, to who we knew we were and knew we would be again. We all had private tricks to imagine ourselves out of uniform. Mine was the meerschaum cigarette holder my mother sent me from Macy's. It not only made me think of Thirty-fourth and Sixth; every time I lit up (Philip Morris were four cents a pack), it made me an exalted civilian like President Roosevelt. Unmilitary smells were the most common way to the day dream; Cashmere Bouquet Toilet Soap, Old Spice aftershave and Yardley's Talc made the barracks smell like a girls' dormitory before a dance. One man powdered and anointed himself so lovingly after his showers that a tent mate asked him how long

¹⁴ Traveling shows named for a lead character, a country-bumpkin named "Toby".

he'd been shacking up with himself. Just before we moved camp to the harbor, they assigned us for noon rations to a mess alongside a pool in a deep basin of granite boulders; and hungry though we were from the morning typing, we'd fling our clothes off as we leapt off the truck into that water down from the cold high mountain that numbed us to the bone. It was a kind of baptism in the cells: we enjoyed plunging up from the ice melt of its surface at the cast husks of fatigues heaped on our shoes. It helped us still to believe there was something deep in us the war could never root out or even touch.

Near this natural baptistery stood the Base church, built by the CB's with Melanesian labor. Fifteen or twenty feet above the simple altar soared an unglassed Gothic arch shaped of whole bent tree-trunks through which the light off the jungle it gave on seemed to drink the coolness shed by the tall roof. Dedicated to Bernadette Soubirous (the little Basque girl who said of the Lady she saw at Lourdes, "Her feet were very cold, and she smelled of incense"), it was unmistakably sacred ground. Crossing its threshold arrested the heart as high mountain water did the breath in the rock pool nearby. That is why once when they had an honor squad present arms at the elevation of the Host, I shrank from the sacrilege of that, as from Daniel's Abomination of Desolation in the holy place," a place no field manual could control or desecrate or a place that answered the silence in me I turned to after lights out when under my mattress cover I thumbed the mysteries of the rosary through my tight, concealing fist. Although there may have been no atheists overseas, there weren't many open Christians either. My sense of the mysteries was childish still, out of the rosaries rattled through in grade school, icons of safety like holy cards at Christmas, the baby warm on the virgin's lap under a sky ablaze with angels and stars.

But it was not safety I was praying for. "Home in the Army" that I had found in the Quartermaster, I felt invulnerable. Office procedure filled my mind all day, and projected poems and whole epics my nightly talk and letters. On the off-chance the army might call me back for my language skills, I read every issue of *Narodna Volya*¹⁵, *Aufbau*¹⁶, and *Pour la Victoire*¹⁷ from the headlines to the personals. I took the ignorant archaized eclogues I was grinding out as a Virgilian apprenticeship as passports to glory. Not only did my friends in the army humor me in that delusion, but [so did] Shirley Freisinger, Mister Meagher, and, as the Allies moved deeper into France, Gertrude Stein, who wrote me she was trying to sell my work to a rich captain about to start an international magazine. It was an uneasiness in me I was praying to quiet, an inveterate misgiving,

¹⁵ A term used by various organizations. In this case it was a Bulgarian publication. The term itself means "the people's will".

¹⁶ From "aubauen," "to build" This is the name of a journal read by German-speaking Jews.

¹⁷ A Pro-Resistance journal founded by Claude Levi-Strauss.

one that had been with me since at two years old I forced myself down the dark cellar stairs into the rubbish-filled basement in Second Place in search of something I would not know till I found it. That misgiving I now understand was grace. It prevented me from entirely mistaking what I conjectured I was from what I truly was. As Thomas Merton writes, "underlying all life is the ground of doubt and self-questioning which sooner or later must bring us face to face with the ultimate meaning of our life. This self-questioning can never be without a certain existential 'dread' a sense of insecurity, of 'lostness,' of exile, of sin. A sense one has somehow been untrue not so much to moral or social norms but to one's own inmost truth. 'Dread' in this sense is not simply a childish fear of retribution, or a naive guilt, a fear of violating taboos. It is the profound awareness that one is capable of ultimate bad faith with himself and others; that one is living a lie."¹⁸ The day's duties and hopes over, the weight of my body bearing down on the thin canvas between it and the solid earth, I prayed that I could erase that apprehension, unconscious that I was praying against the very source of my growth.

Though the death of Roosevelt shook me like a stroke, and the setback at Bastogne, where Philip Drapkin had been wounded in the knee, just as much, the demands of clerical routine left me no time for worry. Our work at Hollandia done, they sent us to Manila. The only thing I remember of the trip to Manila was the smugness that I felt at smuggling my library into the company safe for transport, and under the thousands of southern stars above, looking down the keel at its wash of phosphorus I morbidly called "dead men's eyes".

They put us into a line of eighteen-men sidewallers looking across the Bay of Manila to Corregidor, cheek by jowl with the bamboo-floored houses on stilts of the Filipinos. Every mealtime their children crowded around the garbage cans at the end of the mess line and asked us to dump everything left over, solid food and liquids together, into the number cans they carried strung from wire over their shrunken forearms. An army regulation forbidding us to do so was laughed to scorn from the moment it was posted. We got to know the children well and made arrangements with their various families to have our laundry done. One tent hired a very little boy as its barracks orderly. Undernourished and hungry though the children were from the last days of the Japanese occupation and the post victory shortages, there was no servility in them. The family tenderness we could not show each other we showered on them and they returned it in gifts of mangos, avocados, and large shrimp bought by their mothers at sacrifice. My laundryman, Rudolpho, once showed up with a brass belt buckle engraved with the Company insignia and a brand new T-shirt his mother had marked my initial on in the ravishing embroidery the city is famous for. To make him some return, in a

¹⁸ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 1969, p.26.

second-hand bookshop I found him some Doctor Doolittles, which had been gravely reviewed and passed by the Japanese censor. I climbed his rickety stairs in my socking feet and crossed the drafty bamboo floor to a bed in which he lay shaking with [the] malaria, which he took for granted as his yearly bout of fever.

A few yards beyond the Tagalog houses was a western one story bungalow in which a fine looking well-dressed woman lived, whose bandaged head made us think her a guerilla like the knockout in charge of our files who was called the “Dragon Lady” because her ferocious guerilla raids on the Japanese led them to set a very high price on her head. It was only the day after we took her to a concert by Herbert Zipper and the Manila Symphony that we learned she was a notorious collaborator, whose head had been shaved by her neighbors. The occupation was near enough to have left even harsher traces. Men remembered having their faces slapped hard for not bowing to the guards on the bridge across the Pasig. One man remembers having a cigarette he was economically cupping in his hand to finish on the other side of the bridge ground out across his forehead. And worst of all, our chief Clerk bayoneted in the wild riots and rapes the Japanese Naval Forces [committed] as we bore down on the city woke to find his wife beside him bayoneted to death. Since it is considered ill-mannered to show one's grief there, he told me about it with his eyes flooding but his lips trembling in an attempted smile. The memory of such savagery had, of course, built up so furious a resentment of Japanese soldiers people screamed “*Raca*” (what it meant no one would tell me¹⁹) at them when, as POWs, they appeared in work squads and often [people] had to be kept by US Army guards from pelting them with rocks. Once when I stopped by the latrine “to spend a penny,” I came on a squad of them squatting over three of our eight holes. They took one look at my insignificant Tec-4 stripes, shot up to attention, their shorts around their ankles, and with a smart salute yelled “Gude Morning, Sore.” I returned the salute like a West Point cadet and got out of there like shot off of a shovel.

Our Headquarters was the windowless remains of first floor of a big bomb gouged stucco house which made me think the street that fronted our depot must have been the Manila equivalent of Fort Hamilton Parkway in Brooklyn. Its mahogany floor was intact; and every day a fourteen-year-old boy, with four pinkies, so thin he looked six, polished every inch of it with a halfed coconut clutched under his right instep. At the small switchboard sat Soledad Aranzamendez who could not be broken of the habit of

¹⁹ The word was probably “baka,” a shortened version of “eigo baka” (“英語馬鹿 Eigo baka”). It means “idiot” in Japanese. Evidently the Japanese used this word frequently to insult Filipinos during the Japanese occupation of the islands. The Filipinos evidently enjoyed turning the tables on their enemies once the islands had been liberated. It is also possible that the Filipinos knew the word was pejorative but did not know exactly what it meant. That would explain their inability to translate it for William Alfred.

answering the phone “Yellow House” rather than “Quartermaster Depot Number Three”. She used to key in on calls by soldiers to the girls that worked for us and warn them, from time to time, “He's got you snowed completely.” The war came back to us whenever the land wind blew off the uncleared city lots behind us. I gruesomely thought it blew rankly sweet because of the buried animals, maybe even people, the unprobed rubble of its shattered houses entombed. What served to confirm that conviction were the tribes of rats that brazenly gleaned our tents night after night. At first their trapeze leaps from one mosquito bar to another kept us lying white faced and stiff legged after lights out, but natural exhaustion and our testy passivity as enlisted men blacked out our apprehension. After a week we ignored the clawing of the mesh of our nets as we would the rustle of squirrels in the leaves of a park.

I had two sets of special friends in the 4164, one older, the other my age. The first was Hyde Buller, a sardonic Harvard lawyer of the generation, still shamefully uncelebrated, which brilliantly helped see the Roosevelt New Deal through into fruitful law, Isaac Gnesin, without a single filling in his middle-aged head, as indestructible of heart as he was of body, and Sidney Weiss, my age in years, but in knowingness far closer to Hyde and Isaac. Bill Slout was the center of the second set. His resemblance to Talbot drew me to him so strongly that, in one of my fits of delusions of renaissance grandeur I wrote him a sonnet sequence spurring him on to use all of himself gloriously (as in most deep friendship I was talking to the part of myself I saw in him). Stanley King, his tent mate, was, like Hyde, an ASTP veteran, and Tommy Thomson was the man I ate breakfast with daily at the grouches' table because I didn't like to talk till my dreams had settled. One morning an “earbanger” joined us at our table facing the bay till Tommy shut him up by gaping at him with a mouth full of scrambled eggs and bacon.

Most of the time we stayed in camp and shot the breeze on the beach before the sun went down, when with luck we'd see a watchable movie, our Filipino neighbors sitting among us. But from time to time after work we hitched downtown, and headed for the lanes on the other side of the Pasig that were to Manila what laugh wrinkles are to a well-lived-in face. In one of them I bought an early nineteenth-century incense burner, a bronze Amida Buddha [sitting] side saddle on a prancing deer so light of line it seemed to move of itself. A Chinese fellow from our mess hall staff who coached us in Jiu Jitsu (“The secret is to scream as loud as you can and kick them in the nuts”) bargained for me in Chinese and cut the price in half, then did us the favor of bringing us to the only truly Chinese restaurant I ever ate in, and ordering a meal for us (hors d'oeuvres as exotic as they were delicious, duck smoked in tea, and for a final course, a shark's fin soup that was like hot liqueur). The meal took hours in a room like a hiring hall with a massive punkah creaking over half of it, worked by a living skeleton in his seventies by dangling its rope loop from his buggy-whip handle of a leg like a chorus girl dangling [a]

pump off her shapely ankle. In that crows-foot of lanes off the Pasig were open stalls in which Hindus fingered bowls of emeralds, amethysts, and rubies as if they were mere buttons at a notions counter their clear-cut Aryan profiles etched against the gathering dusk like the first Adamic pattern of our race. Beside their stalls were shops in which side by side with bolts of heavy silk damask, Kuna-yens²⁰ shaped of elephant tusks as long as a man's arm, tinted in the colors of first light and bent by the bias of the ivory like the baroque saints over St. Peter's Square, shouldering the breeze as if to hear the whispered prayers of the world. It was an orient I conjured up from books in Flatbush but never dreamed I'd see. I even got a glimpse of its private world once when walking past the closed gardens of the Chinese quarter, I saw two strapping men in black silk caps and long gowns emerge from a gate, helping a frail, imperious old lady to maneuver the cobbles in rose silk slippers the size of a baby's hands. Our nightly jaunts ran from five to eleven, from the unloading of crews of sailors in spotless whites as if in dress formation for an Admiral of the Fleet, to their reloading, bellowing, rubber legged, capless, scarfless, blouses torn, and bell-bottoms brown with dirt at knees and dragged hems.

I rarely took the occasional day off allowed us. When I did it was because I was boy enough still to get fed up and want to be entirely on my own. I generally hitched down to the library and read all day or worked on the poems that gave me an identity that was not khaki. Mr. Meagher had entered all of my poems that had appeared in *The American Poet* in the Houghton Mifflin poetry contest, and so great was my vanity and so small my judgment, I was certain I would win. I grew so restless once that after mail call I took the afternoon off and struck out for the Intramuros, the old walled city that had won Manila the title of The Pearl of the Pacific. Even the lopsided shell of the Legislative Building and the other wreckage downtown could not compare with it in its effect. Past its battered walls, almost all of it was razed to the ground. Black and blue in the overcast light that seemed to frown with reproach, block followed block of swept floors that had once been buildings, like plots on a city map. My footsteps rang. There was no one there in the dust-hazed rubble. Astonished with a guilt I could not cope with, I felt ashamed I had been an accomplice to such loss. I shot out of there for the nearest USO to feed my face, my usual cure for the blues. But that did not help. Even now I cringe remembering that moment faced with irretrievable desolation. The dusk fell upon me like unanswerable reproach.

A month or so later when the Axis surrendered, and the newsreels of the concentration camps hit our weekly movie, the same devastation drained me even more deeply; and I was startled by the bursts of laughter from our Filipino neighbors looking at an entire

²⁰ Female figure usually representing compassion.

generation turning or turned to corpses, until I came to see they recognized the stunned look of unimaginable suffering on the survivors as their own, when only last January they had to try to hide as best they could from the rampaging occupation forces in their wild defeat. At least four thousand citizens of Manila died at the hands of often drunken, rioting Japanese, some bayoneted to death, like our chief clerk's wife, some beheaded openly in the gutters, some burned alive in their match-wood houses. Some like Soledad's cousin died of slow starvation. They buried her in the last dress she had made, which after her funeral Soledad recognized for sale in some grave robber's stall in the open market in front of the cathedral.

From the time I went back to the Church in the Camp Bowie chapel, besides my hidden nightly rosaries, I yearly practiced a private devotion on the day before August 11, the feast of St. Philomena, the heroine of my last ode in *The American Poet* in 1943 and patron of impossible causes now razed from the calendar. I fasted every year the whole day before her feast for the intention of a speedy end the war. The first part of July 1945, I began laying plans to keep the fast secret by taking the days off and walking the city alone. On the last Monday of July, in the wee hours, I was dragged out of sleep by an even colder paroxysm of dereliction than came over me in the Manila Intramuros. At two in the morning, in the soiled half-day cast by the depot lights above the stacks alongside my cot I was seized by an explicable panic that stiffened my arms and legs to the point of cramp. Something inhuman, voiceless as hunger, relentlessly plied me to say yes to an oncoming disaster or suffer consequences all the more horrible for being undescribed. It was like that "perfect insane and abject terror, without ostensible cause" that reduced the father of Henry and William James, seated before his fire one May afternoon in Windsor Great Park, to want to run for refuge or cry out for help. When, years later, I described the seizure to Louis MacNeice, he told me that Dylan Thomas had experienced the same faint of the soul in the last reading tour before the one that killed him. He was shaken awake in the Hotel Chelsea by a sure and certain dread that the moon was hurtling toward earth in an icy blaze to reduce it to scorched dust. He threw some clothes on and went down to warn the drowsing night clerk but the cold on his bare feet and the ordinariness of the dim lobby shook him to dismiss it as a fit of DTs. In the same way, part of me resisted making my panic known. Instead of calling out to the seventeen men in the cots around me, I reverted to what I must have done in my dereliction as a child at St. Anne's in the dormitory above the traffic sounds—I groped for the rosary I had fallen asleep clutching; and saying no to whatever it was that was prompting me to say yes, I blessed myself again and again with its cross until my legs and arms loosened and the terror waned. The two atomic bombs were dropped on the 6th and 9th of August, and the Japanese surrendered on the 15th. Mad as it sounds, to this day I cannot divorce that sense of vastation I felt with the catastrophic victory of evil that brought about the end of the war within the octave of the feast of Philomena.

We were dead asleep when the men in the anti-aircraft battery alongside our camp informed us of the end of the war by firing several volleys of tracer bullets from their fifty calibre machine gun the length of the company street and nearly setting fire to one of the tents. As I remember, we did not have V-J day off. We were chained to our desks typing the mountains of requisitions fitting the flotillas of ships for Olympia, the dreaded invasion of Japan. The only celebration I remember was during my lunch-break when a line of tired stragglers from downtown, children among them carrying blown-up condoms or balloons on cattails, making Vs with their fingers and yelling "Victory, Joe!" at us from Dewey Boulevard. The water was so paved with keel that even months later when General Yamashita was being flown in from Baguio for his war crimes trial, he shook his head and said, "We didn't have a chance".

As the materiel built up in the depot, the pilfering kept pace with it. The CID came to me with stateside printed requisitions (we'd been using mimeographed ones for almost a year) and asked me to help them set a trap for the pilferers by typing two massive requisitions for suntan shirts and pants without alerting my Company Commander I was doing it. I alerted him because I didn't like the look of the CID man and thought he might be playing me for a patsy. I am glad I did. When the trap was sprung two trucks tried to bullet through the guards at the gate with one of our officers on the running board of the first. All hell broke loose. He was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison. They never recovered the fortune he had made from pilfered supplies till then.

Late October 1945 I took the day off to attend the indictment of General Toruoyuki Yamashita. The crowd in front of the former High Commissioner's Palace on Dewey Boulevard was silent to the point of menace. I got a good seat because of that. All sitting in the courtroom were searched, and the Provost Marshal led us soldiers up front to buffer General Yamashita from any demonstrations from people who had lived through the ordeal of the last days of the Japanese Occupation might make. The court was a former reception room two stories high with a large bay of square windows fronted by a table on low dais at which sat the five generals of the Military Tribunal. The General sat at a low table to their right with his defence lawyers and interpreter beside him. When he rose to hear the indictment read in Japanese and English, it was evident he had lost weight. His face looked as crumpled as the simple open collar uniform which hung loosely from his short frame. At the end of the reading, looking at a loss, he consulted with his interpreter and attorney, who petitioned the court that since the General had not seen the indictment before that moment, he might have a delay to go over its staggering particulars with his staff. He was answered, "The time is past when General Yamashita had a staff." Asked then how he would plead, he straightened his shoulders and looking straight at the generals of the tribunal answered, half in

Japanese, half in English, “Watanaksiwa” (not guilty). He was led out of the room, and we soon followed. On the way out I heard one Filipino say to another ‘I wish they would turn him over to us.’ On 7 December he was found guilty; and on 23 February 1946, he was hanged. Since he had been in Baguio during the taking of Manila and had no jurisdiction whatever over the Japanese troops there at that time, he was innocent of the atrocities for which he was executed.²¹

Now the worry about having to go in on Olympia, the Japanese invasion was over, we began to worry we might be sent to [serve as] Japan occupation troops. Rumors flew thick and fast until a lot of us spontaneously took a day off and went down to Headquarters to pin things down. That seems to have been the day the law of averages broke down: every outfit in the city went down there with us. *Time Magazine* promptly labeled that disorderly quest for definite fact as a “communist-inspired demonstration”. Luckily, the base commander knew better; and gave us the information he knew we wanted. We were to be demobilized in order of the points we earned in service. I had forty-seven.

On the way finally to the boat home from the embarkation, I was as bewildered with joy as I was as a child returning from St. Anne’s Camp. People along the way called out “Victory, Joe!” with radiant smiles and flashed the V sign at us. The last stretch all through rice paddies either side of the road in which people were tightly contorted over their work I thought of the song my friends in the office had taught me

Magtanim indibiro.

Magtanim hakayako.

Planting rice is never fun.

Get no rest till the setting sun.

Cannot stand and cannot sit,

Cannot rest for a little bit.

One man and woman in their fifties straightened up and hastened to the road. With sun-flushed faces they raised the V sign at us like a blessing. The boob of a sergeant in

²¹ The general’s case had been appealed to The United States Supreme Court, which upheld the court’s decision. (President Truman declined to rule on an appeal delivered to him as Commander-in-Chief.) Two Justices dissented. One, Justice Frank Murphy, claimed that General Yamashita, had been denied due process while Justice W.B. Rutledge, noted, consonant with William Alfred’s description, that “It is outside our basic scheme to condemn men without giving reasonable opportunity for preparing defense.” *In re Yamashita*, 327 U.S. 1 (1946). Video Recordings of the General’s trial are available (e. g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwbeW_4RZM8)

front of me made the Italian fungoo sign at them with his fist on his right bicep, and yelled "Up your bunny with a meat hook." The wind wiped his words away, but not his gesture. At last, we shouldered our duffel bags and descended into the deep holds of the ship with their aisles of bunks six berths high. I got atop one near a ventilator. We had to make a layover in Honolulu because a member of the crew had fallen to [the] deck and broken almost every bone in his body. The hackneyed sway of the music from the Aloha tower seemed celestial because the cloud-race shadowing the lovely maternal shapes of the green low mountains seemed to keep time with it. Working on the ship's paper helped me to deal with the frenzies of impatience to be home that stiffened my muscles over and over again. In one of the ferocious marathon poker games, a sergeant from my company won enough to pay off the mortgage on his house, and I read through the armed services edition of Alfred Kazin's brilliant assessment of American literature, *On Native Grounds*.

Finally, they told us to get ready to disembark. We milled up on deck in our hundreds and stood jam packed as in a rush hour subway looking down on a ferry with huge plumes of water spouting out of it on either side of three slim girls dancing bare legged to *Sentimental Journey* in the bitter cross-bay wind. There was loud applause and some hoots and whistles; then all at once everyone fell silent and looked up at the bridge. Someone, whether man, woman or child could not be told from this far below, had illegally got out of a car and was waving a handkerchief at us. We stared at the white flutter not daring to utter a word. On the wharf the heartiness of the tall, fine looking Red Cross women who gave us coffee seemed Brobdingnagian after the dainty formal reserve of our Filipino dates in their high gauze sleeve and outer skirts over tight silk black sheaths, fanning us time to time at the Manila Symphony with their fretted fans of fragrant sandalwood.

Although it was nine o'clock at night in Oakland, they fed us steak dinners at Camp Stoneman. The mess hall stairs were slick and I fell, driving the lip of a step into my kidneys with such force that I nearly passed out. A German POW sitting on a railing looked at me deadpan and turned away. Hobbling back to the barracks I was petrified I might have hurt myself enough to delay my getting home. We were all afraid of some accident that might keep us in the Army. After our last physical, the inevitable short-arm included giving a urine specimen to make assurance doubly sure. The man in front of me couldn't manage to pass water to save his life, and asked me to give him half of mine. I did; and he rejoined the line but only after doubling back to ask, wide-eyed, "You ain't got anything, do you?" When I shook my head, he returned to his place with a grin that would have lit up a movie set.

It was the usual three men in two bunks on the train back home, with each man getting his chance one night of sleeping alone. That segregation was still a fighting word in the Army, I knew from my experience with a brilliant black master-sergeant who worked with us in Hollandia. He shared our lunch with us in the casual mess hall, but we could not have dinner in his mess hall nor he in ours. Though we never brought the matter up, it rankled. It came up to haunt us on the train back East. There was a black corporal in our car whom no one wanted in their threesome. I was damned if I was going to have his way home spoiled by such nonsense, and doubled the whole trip. The corporal made things harder by apologizing every time he had to turn around in the bunk. But at least he didn't chew bubble gum all night like my other two white bunk mates.

During the trip back across the country, I was looking for a home. The papers then were full of the housing shortage in New York. Longing for some place surely my own, urban sparrow though I was, I even found myself envying occasional figures, warped by the wind, that flew by in the marooning solitude outside. I thought back on our moves in the thirties towards a home that [had] some worthy semblance of normality, the home we imagined out of decorating ideas in *Woman's Day*, the nine cent magazine from the A & P ("Why not make that golden oak monstrosity in the dining room a coffee table?"), the sets in the Friday night movies, and the Corner Shop Antiques in Macy's windows on our Thursday night jaunts there. For both of us the center of that daydream was always a fireplace like the one I only once experienced as an eight-year-old, when my mother brought me to a friend's in Pelham Bay one Christmas, and they let me tend the fire. Like my mother, I also preferred old furniture to new; things out of the past we could buy cheap and repair, as if renovating battered furniture like that in Second Place would give us the makings of our daydream home. The six-room house we shared with my mother's uncle near Avenue J, jammed between its neighbors like books upon a shelf, was near that. We always felt smothered despite the brick terrace my father laid in its backyard largely because of Miggsy and the memories he brought with him. And it is not only where you moved that mattered, but what it looked like: the "better entrance" my mother aspired to when we rented the top-floor three rooms in the elevator building on East Eighteenth Street. Albert Geiger and his kin were born to such social equilibrium in their manorial Dutch colonials; and those in the canopied apartments ran them a close second with their doormen like Head Ushers at Radio City or the Roxy. You entered Bacebridge Hall, the Flatbush Dakota, through a marble vestibule as impressive as the ground floor of a bank, and its noble peers down Ocean Avenue, some with porte-cocheres, kept an equal state. Tattered though the awning may have been, I had left my mother in an elevator apartment with a canopy when I went into the service. What was she doing in a sublet dentist's office on Eighteenth Street over a United Cigar Store and the clang of Church Avenue Car, by Flatbush standards only one step up from a dollar-and-quarter-a-night room in a Mills Hotel?

At Dix, afraid of missing breakfast, I asked the man in the lower bunk to wake me, which he did every morning by shaking my foot, and with his merry smirk murmuring "What a prick you are!" We knew each other at the most a week, yet to this day I miss the fellowship behind his ribald joshing. When I finally got through to the apartment over the United Cigar store, my mother was no longer there. She had moved to Rhode Island. I calmed myself down by taking a Grand Central shower, got my mother in Rhode Island and boarded the train for Kingston. A Hundred and twenty-fifth Street flashed on me like a lost friend's face come back in a dream; and the Christmas decorations up on the main drag of Stanford, still up as they had been when I went to Camp Dix, thawed the past three years away like a film of ice on a puddle. My heart leapt when the car door slammed and my parents hurried into the tall ceilinged Victorian waiting room of the Kingston [R.I.] station. Topsy had died very old and been replaced with Blackie and Beauty a pair of part Labradors, a male and female from the same litter, which my mother had tamed and enticed out of the woods into the house. Their first master went to jail on some tax charge and had to abandon them. How long they had lived wild I do not know, long enough to be leery of me. Beauty on my mother's lap, Blackie beside her, with his head on my father's leg. We never stopped talking all the way home.

My father had become partners with John Dunnigan in The Copper Kettle, a bar and grill in the cellar of a Sears Roebuck house they had rented on the South County Trail between Wickford and East Greenwich. He was made a partner in return for keeping the sailors and marines in tow over the weekends and for the masonry repairs he had made over the months. He was allowed the seven-room apartment above the bar which gave on the parking lot and a shaggy field with a lopsided hen-house in it. Across the Trail on a rise above its woods rose Beria Manor, a large early eighteenth-century house with slave cabins. Parallel to it was a lane along a gulley with a farm at one end and an unused Baptist Church at the other. My mother and I had always been great walkers. In Flatbush almost every night we used to walk the whole four-mile circumference of Prospect Park with Topsy prancing unleashed beside us. We covered the same distance every afternoon in Rhode Island. We walked the length of the lane behind to the Baptist Church, then crossed the Trail and climbed to the farm above it, patrolled on one side by a ferocious German Shepherd and on the other by a lonesome heifer that used to scamper across its meadow to lick our hands. Once a week, Mondays, the slow day, my father would drive us to Providence to window shop in the stores after lunch in the Hotel Narragansett and take in an occasional movie. Restlessly urban as I was, my mother was even more so. We felt like invalids taken out for an airing. Anthony West who lived for a while on a farm near Westerly used to say that Rhode Island was the undershirt of New England, and Providence was its tail.

But whatever its disadvantages the house did have a fireplace a big fieldstone one that could take half a young tree. There my mother and I would sit after what we called her “seven-passenger” dinners catching up on what had happened to us both in the three years past, not the facts alone but also the feelings. My father first went to Rhode Island to ride herd on the Civilian Construction Battalions that moved back and forth from the Quonset Point Naval Station and Halifax, Nova Scotia. For the convenience of the civilian contractors, he lived in the barracks as a Sergeant Major in the Marines till everyone on or off the base called him “Sarge” or the “Bald Eagle” and genuinely thought the world of him. It was one of the happiest periods of his life. Of course, he wanted my mother with him, and finally she retired from Hemphill, Noyes and moved from Flatbush into Quonset Navy housing. I had my two furloughs in that house and was delighted to see how happily my mother had settled there, the collection of ten clocks that had been my pride and joy since high school, the Federal primitive she set such store by. Then all of a sudden, through some administrative rearrangement, my father was humiliatingly stripped of his uniform and he and my mother were hustled off the base in forty-eight hours. The shame of it shook my mother so badly, she went down to Brooklyn to stay with friends and got a job on the Harris Upham switchboard back on Wall Street. It was a little later that she sublet the dentist 's office that gave me the willies. It was in Rhode Island that I met my half-brothers, the first time in my life. Richard, the eldest, was brilliant with his hands; and, my father got him a good war-time job on the base. He was married to a German-American girl, who saw him through his transformation from the twenties' good-time Charley he had been, in and out of TB sanitariums and living hand to mouth off fill-in gigs with bands, into a paid up member of the Carpenters' Union in his own house with a fine son and daughter. Since he had my father 's irresistible bonhomie, we hit it off from the start. A month or so later, I was to meet my second older brother, my father's favorite and the family star. Vincent was as reserved as a regular army officer with a buck private, and, given what he later told me about his upbringing, understandably wary (it had been his job each Friday at four to wait like a loan shark till the men were milling off the wall and put the bee on my father for his mother's cut of the pay, and on the rare occasions when [he] postponed his homework, his mother would tell him “she'd call Hemphill, Noyes and sic that bitch from Seventy-sixth Street on him”). He was becoming what, thank God, he is now, one of the seminal scientists of the nation at Rockefeller²². We were stiff with each other, so to take the ice off quickly I took him over the route of my daily walk with my mother to and from Beria Manor. He ignored the wolf 's rush of the German Shepherd and fell in love at first sight with the heifer with Ann Sheridan eyes who licked his hand as lovingly as mine. On the way back, in the gulley back of the house, he stopped dead and twitched

²² Vincent Allfrey was born in 1921, just a year or so before Alfred was pioneered in the study of DNA. V. http://www.nature.com/nrm/journal/v16/n4/fig_tab/nrm3931_F2.html

me by the sleeve. There was a smell of over ripe fruit in the air. "A fox," he said, "you can tell it by the smell". I was as intrigued as I was impressed.

A few weeks later Albert Geiger came for the weekend. About year before I was drafted, he fell ill with tuberculosis and had to go to the Nassau County Sanatorium in Farmingdale. The Saturday afternoon he came to take his leave, I remember being grateful that *Tristan and Isolde*, his favorite Wagner opera, was playing on WNYC, as if to solace him for what lay ahead, months chained to bed in pursuit of a cure that might never be achieved. Over coffee and Ebinger coffee cake at the kitchen table, looking out across blocks upon blocks of low buildings to the Williamsburg Bank Tower, I knew how much I'd miss him. Conditioned as I had been to whole law and the prophets of street-kids pass on the gutterside; don't look now but look and see if they're looking; and if they're looking, don't look—he had taught me to have the courage of my curiosity. One summer as a sixteen-year-old twelve-fifty-a-week Wall Street runner, I even dared peer into the back seat of a Carrara white Rolls Royce in front of the House of Morgan and been rewarded by a Fairy Godmother smile from the red-haired lady with the beautiful complexion erect on its zebra-skin upholstery, Magda Lupescu, who, my mother later found out from the Morgan switchboard, was waiting for King Carol of Romania to finish conferring with his American broker. Who would guide me now through the weekend treasure-house of New York?

I need not have worried. Every week letter on letter came, rich with suggestions from his reading in books, journals, and newspapers as to what I should see and do. And all through the army they served me as imaginary jaunts in and out the galleries and stores from Thirty-fourth to Fifty-ninth, from Fifth to Third Avenue. When he wrote of his ample house under the heavy maples off Dorchester Road ("I thought of 451 East 16th Street and closed my eyes. I could see each nook and corner my beloved room with its wonderful alcove; the huge living room with the lovely natural Japanese straw wall-paper, the dining room with the fireplace that never worked, the enormous draftiness of the dear old kitchen; the life saving backstair and, of course happy gay Flatbush Avenue. I love Flatbush, all of it!"), I felt the same pang of homesickness for a world he would never see again.

After years in and out of the hospital like a nesting bird, he was lean and hardy as a marathon runner. I kept the fire stoked as he caught me up where he was. As a boy he got assigned by the Oceanside High School paper as a reporter and he took me along to the Waldorf Towers to interview Mainbocher, the man who made the Duchess of Windsor's wedding dress and designed the Waves' uniform and one of the very first Americans back after the fall of France. Because we got to him before the *Times* and

the other papers, he looked on us as lucky and made us his mascots from then on. After the sanatorium, Albert had learned to draw at Central Needle and the Art Students League; and Mainbocher offered him a kind of apprenticeship at his atelier on Fifty-seventh and Fifth and found some of his fabric-designs so good that he had them made up for the next collection. That and his love for his high-school girl, Lorraine, a long-stemmed American Beauty with the wry dash of Rosalind Russell, convinced him that his vocation was designing rather than the priesthood, when after he told her he thought himself well enough to get into the seminary, she looked him in the eye and said, "You can't do that! Don't you know I love you?" They have been together since, God keep them, and have four children.

Shirley and Stanley were the next to come up. She had lost none of her dazzle in presence and talk, and the years we had been apart melted like window frost in the warmth of it. Stanley's voice had grown as robustly beautiful as Jan Peerce's, and he was busy singing his way up at the City Opera. Mr. Meagher had entered a collection of Shirley's poems as well as mine in the Houghton Mifflin poetry contest the year [in which] Elizabeth Bishop's *North and South* won the prize. Thinking of what of mine was sent in, I winced embarrassment; but I still cannot understand why Shirley's collection did not win her even an offer of publication. Mr. Meagher had moved in with his mother, his sister, and her children on the other side of Flatbush Avenue, from which the last issues of *The American Poet* were issued in 1944. It was a house on a corner lot on Farragut Road in a yard ablaze with scarlet azaleas two doors up from a neighbor where Mae West used to dish the dirt over mugs of tea. Blinded like our house in Avenue J by a sunporch, its heart was a square dining-room table under [a] hanging lamp, the walls around it paneled with bookcases over which hung a copy of a Landseer Newfoundland, its crazing varnish brown as the juice off baked beans. His Dresden Shepherdess of a sister, lamed by polio, had a son and daughter as handsome as she was. His mother, the widow of Judge Meagher, petite and trim, was a model convent-bred Aidyn of the past century, whose kindness was as spontaneous as the laughter with which she tactfully answered any gaffes we made. She carried one shoulder high, so unbroken was the pain of the cancer that eventually killed her. When the end came, Mr. Meagher emptied an entire flask of the Worth Perfume, which he had bought her last Christmas, over the bed her four children had been born on and where she now lay dead. After that he moved to an apartment nearby, drank more and ate less. Private lives in those days were still possible. Although in his cups he would sometimes joke about his being "hemi-demi-semi-sesquicentio-sexual." *In loco parentis* as he was, he would no more talk of such things to us [than] he would to his niece and nephew. Later I realized what he must have been up against when he had to borrow two hundred dollars to pay off a young detective who had given him the glad eye in the men's room of a Flatbush bar, and when he responded walked him handcuffed to the police station, where he was searched, together with his briefcase, and

the copy of Gayley' s myths he had been teaching from passed from hand to as pornography because of the Greek and Roman statues on its pages. That a man of Meagher's cultural force and invincible kindness should have been subjected to entrapment and blackmail with impunity was a national disgrace and like most prejudices parading as integrity remains so to this day.

The third month after my return, my mother and I took the odd weekend in New York to look for an apartment to live in while I finished my degree at Brooklyn College. Luckily there were cheap hotels like the Granada near the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Kenmore on Twenty-third and Lexington that made the scouting trips possible. Carl Malouf, my fellow cadet in the Bulgarian platoon, now a New York commercial artist, had found three rooms on Fifty-sixth Street near Third for eighteen dollars a month, what in the years before shortage would have been dismissed as "a tenement in a tenement-house the wrong side of the El," not a step but a whole staircase down from my mother's sublet above the Flatbush United Cigar Store. These tenements, four sets of three rooms to a floor, were called dumb-bell or cold-water flats, "dumb-bell" not a politically incorrect reference to the brainlessness of their tenants but specific allusion to their layout around an open air shaft, and "cold-water" by anachronism since city statutes now required hot. At first we were too grand even to contemplate such housing. Decent people did not live in flats but apartments. We reconnoitered Park Slope and Boerum Hill for something that was not dank as a cave. As for Manhattan, died in the wool Easterners as we were, we looked down our noses on the whole other side of the Park. Except for the palatial Dakota and the spacious layouts in the Stanford White and Art Deco buildings on central Park South and West we couldn't take it seriously as a place to live. To our mind the side street townhouses were now warrens of furnished rooms for Broadway gypsies living out of delicatessens and chop suey joints and West End Avenue (also beyond our means) retained its raffish thirties' reputation of being "the second best Kept-Women's Park Avenue." As it drew on to the opening of the fall term at Brooklyn College, we grew desperate. Zigzagging from Third to First Avenue from Twenty-third uptown, we fine-combed the streets for "For Rent" signs and all at once found one off Second in front of 308 East Twenty-eighth Street, three rooms in the third floor back. The oilcloth was gritty under foot and the corridors rank and dim as a cellar with their thirty-watt bulbs and the toilet to be shared with a seventy-year-old Armenian next door (his only furniture we later found out was a cot, a round framed reproduction of the head of a Rosa Bonheur horse, a rickety table and a chair) had no electric light fixture in it. You entered the kitchen with its small white apron-shaped sink alongside a slate double laundry tub, its partition sawed out to turn it into a bathtub. To the right of that was a doorway from which the door had been [removed] and the other side of that a large square opening where a window had been torn out. The ceilings were twelve feet high. There were mantelpieces in the kitchen and the room beyond it, which ended in two big windows, their dingy panes blurring the long twilight of a closed court. The

blistered paint on the walls was a dirty white; the peeling softwood floors rang with emptiness at every step. Mrs. Helen Wells, the janitor, seeing our blanched faces, apologized for the torn-out door and window: someone had chopped them up to feed a stove, but we were not to worry, they were tearing down whole blocks to build the Metropolitan Housing, and now you could get as much free wood as you would want. If we noticed, the windows faced uptown, which gave us northern exposure. She turned the sink tap on and the water steamed. There was a little room off the kitchen on the airshaft dark as a tomb. There was just one hitch, she said, she had to ask [for] a bonus for the rental, a month's rent. And what was that? Thirteen dollars, Mrs. Wells said regretfully, the afternoon light tinseling her grey hair. My mother looked at me holding back her tears. I nodded. "We'll take it," she said, fishing twenty-six dollars from her handbag. Mrs. Wells lived diagonally opposite with a dwarf mongrel Airedale who would gnaw your knees if you looked at her too close. His name, she told us was Happy, short for Happy New Years, because she had got him New Years, the week she lost her husband. She used to say her husband's soul passed to him, and I'm glad she thought so; it made her less alone. She insisted we have coffee to celebrate our bargain. It was real New York Coffee, as strong as it was dark, with a black tang you could smell from the sixth floor to the street. The kitchen was immaculate. For the moment we were like flagging swimmers, feeling ground underfoot with puzzled happiness. We felt welcomed home.

Our happiness was puzzled because we had broken the two inviolable taboos of the poor: never divide the family; never move down. All we had collected and set store in over the years was in another state in which the son of my father's legal wife had settled, [and] hence could be claimed and confiscated overnight. But unsatisfactory as that apartment above the barroom in Rhode Island was, at least it was the second floor of a respectable house, and not a three-room unheated flat half a block from Bellevue. We stilled our apprehensions in the American way; we went shopping. For seventy-five dollars we bought three secondhand gas stoves from the plumber across the street and arranged to have them installed for another twenty-five, two under the mantels for heat, and one, for cooking, with an oven, in the kitchen under the airshaft window. The landlord paid to give the place a slapdash paint job, and we had the living room floor painted with cream deck enamel because it lit up the room like morning underfoot and did not show dust prints off the street as black does. Stunned by our own daring, we "slammed gate," [and] treated ourselves to creamed herring, Sauerbraten and German beer in Klube's near the foot of the El station on Twenty-third street.

Back in Rhode Island, we pillaged the seven rooms for our furnishings; for underfoot, a worn but beautiful dark blue and gold antique Chinese Oriental bought for a song from a Hemphill Noyes' customers'-room for the Flatbush dentist's flat over the Trolley on

Church Avenue, then the Stromberg-Carlson radio Victrola console we saved years for, an eighteen-sixties walnut chest of drawers, two couches to use as sofas or beds, with a refinished library table cut down [to place] in front of them to serve the buffet suppers my mother was famous for. For one side of the living room mantel, a four-by-five-foot bookcase to balance the built-in wardrobe on its other; and for over the mantel, as a kind of Quaker Patron Saint of our venture, the Federal painting of the indomitable Pennsylvania lady we had bought on time for eight dollars to see us through the Depression. To this we added an enamel-topped kitchen table and four Hitchcock kitchen chairs, and the tall maple bureau and bed bought for me on my ninth birthday when I got back for the last time, thank Heaven, to Seventy-sixth Street, scalped though I was from St. Anne's Camp. For something to set books and a lamp on in the airshaft room we found a table split in two in the street rubbish which I carried upstairs piecemeal and jammed erect by the bed. To cover the gouges in the plaster no paint could make up for Albert Geiger gave us three red and white dish towels to hang off a curtain rod above the kitchen mantel.

Like lightning we had moved in and were settling. When I got back from buying new shades, I not only found the fire escape window washed outside and in, but Paulie, a returned vet like me still in army pants, clambering down the clothesline pole after having connected the yard pulley with the one out our living room window. That he would not take the dollar my mother offered him made him the second neighbor we had made our own. Dominick, coming in the door to put a twenty-five cent cake of ice in the icebox, was our third, even though he came in every morning on the subway all the way from Queens. These concessions to inconvenience made the flat a kind of city Walden. The small hardships made us less demanding. The party line we had applied for would not be ours for week, so we telephoned my father we were settled from the little stationery and papers store above the iceman's cellar and made [met?] our fourth neighbor, a gentle Italian man in his sixties with a smile like dusk on a wall. The neighborhood was a house of all nations, but predominantly Italian. When went upstairs for a last look at the first sure home since the war, we lit the lamps, sat down, and enjoyed the moment. There was a knock at the door. It was Helen who returned to her flat and brought us back two helpings of Sauerbraten with potato dumplings light as clouds in summer. It was good my mother got the recipe, "Ginger snaps in the gravy. That's the secret!"

After supper with deepening pleasure, we beat the bounds of the neighborhood²³
Across the street near the corner of First Avenue was the Carmelite Church, plain, wide

²³ "To beat the bounds" was an ancient Irish ceremony in which groups walked around the boundaries of the village, beating markers with boughs.

and high-ceilinged as an immigration shed, allowing me the solace of daily mass for the first time since my days in the ASTP School in Denver. Across Second was a Jewish dairy where they cut the butter in old-fashioned half-pound slabs from the tub as in Flatbush. Down Second from there was an Italian bakery where for nine cents, from eight in the morning until seven at night Mrs. Genovese, looking like an exquisitely drafted Renaissance sketch of Saint Anne, would hand you a long superbly crusted loaf of bread still warm from the oven three times a day. Next to her running up Twenty-seventh half way up the long block was a cut-rate fruit and vegetable market where you could get everything from cheap Idahos to artichokes. Across from that you could get Italian wine with knuckles on it for eighty cents a bottle. When you looked uptown from the corner, your heart soared with the Empire State, New York' Acropolis and Parthenon in one, and beyond that the platinum glitter of the Chrysler Building. We could not believe our luck. Almost every night we would walk Third uptown, passing one saloon after another, The Health Farm Bar, among them, the Rose Hill and the Shannon to Thirty-fourth where the antique shops took over till Forty-second then up to Lexington and back home down Twenty- eighth past St Stephen's, the Cathedral before St. Patrick's, as the city moved uptown from the tattering park at Union Square to the ravine that thrust down from Fifth Avenue to the East River. On fair nights we would walk to Fifty-seventh and Lexington. Once we saw Nelson Eddy looking bleak and unrecognized into an unfinished cup of tan coffee at the Mayflower Doughnut Shop. My mother flashed me a signal. We walked away then rushed back and flashed looks of recognition between us like kleigs²⁴ at a premiere. He straightened his back and gave us his best Naughty Marietta smile. Once on my own in front of the dull curio shop at Fifty-seventh and Madison, I saw Greta Garbo, without hat or glasses, reading the window with a burly man behind her in a black, belted overcoat and Homburg. I froze as if I had come on a unicorn in Central Park, then rapidly looked away. When I glanced back, she smiled to herself and moved slowly on toward Park in the spring light, her escort at her heel.

²⁴ Bright lamps used on movie sets.

It was at this time that William F. Lynch¹, an engagingly brilliant New York Jesuit, came into my life through Albert Geiger. Albert had read about a stunning production of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus in Greek, which Father Lynch had helped stage in 1942, for which Martha Graham designed the choruses and even lent a hand in sewing the costumes. When there was talk of repeating the production in a new English translation, Albert sent some arrestingly stark drawings of stage sets to Father Lynch, and a long fruitful correspondence ensued, in which Albert made me a partner. Such were the vagaries of the Order's needs at that time that in addition to his teaching load Father Lynch had been made the editor of *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, the Catholic grandmothers' gazette and house-organ of the regulars at the six o'clock Mass. With ambition almost as big as my arrogance, I decided I would help him to transform the monthly into a Catholic *Revue de deux Mondes* and sent him a poem on St. Simon Stylites, which he accepted but with wise tact never printed. I felt bewildered which way my writing should take. In the last months in the Pacific the Miltonic Dream had asserted itself like Undulant Fever. I could not get five lines out my head, the Virgin speaking just before the death of Jesus:

Then the small woman with the crumpled hands
Between the two upon the reddish stone,
He was not ever sick, and dropped her head.
Below them lay the Pesach-silenced city
By soundless lightning now and then exposed.

¹ (1909–1987) Author, teacher, and editor.

Fuller of myself than I should have been with relief at her coming through the war unscathed, I wrote Gertrude Stein my plans for “my Epic.” It was to be in fourteen books, symbolic of the three cycles of generation from Abraham to Christ, each book (in the manner of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*) from the viewpoint of its narrator, a book a piece for each of the apostles including Judas, preceded by one for the Virgin Mary and concluding with one for Mary Magdalen. Miss Stein wrote back that I seemed to like pointed numbers whereas she liked round ones. Nothing daunted, I lay on the corduroy couch in Twenty-eighth Street, pondering how the beat of it should go. I felt myself in the same plight as the “Now-singers,” men trickling up Third from the Bowery for nickels wadded up in the Sunday paper flung down into the court from the grimy sills as the walls across brindled with the dark. Ears cupped tight in their left hands their ringing voices more or less on pitch, they substituted “now” for whatever words they'd forgotten:

East Side, West Side,
Now around the town,
The tots play Ring around Rosie
London now is falling down.

The more uncertain I was about the cadence, the more architectonic I grew about the uses in which I would wield it. The alternate dream to “the Epic” was *The ass on the Feast of the Annunciation*, the 25 March, not only the day on which Christ was incarnated, but the mediaeval anniversary of both the earth's creation and Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise. It was to be in memory of Edward Talbot, my best friend from St. Francis, and was to be strung on a rosary said by a mother, whose son, like Ed, was killed in the war. Seven members of the congregation would be struggling, each with a deadly sin with the intercession of seven souls in Purgatory atoning each for theirs and seven saints rejoicing [that] they had come through their struggles triumphant. I could not literally get it off the ground, which was the asphalt of New York,

my Holy Land then and now:

Let it begin in rain, for personally, I have always felt the holy strength of the rain. Hating the heat as I do, the rain has always meant for me the beginning of comfort. Let the comfort which it begins be tentative just as the comfort of the real rain is tentative: one doubts whether the heat will be increased or lessened. Let the winds that bring or thwart the rain be the New York winds, the symbol of the Cross, the North to South Wind, which carries in it a blinding dust, as the Father and the Son are comforts we cannot at first attain because of the blinding dust of our daily lives. The comfort is there but the elements of discomfort, fear and rage are also there. It is a wind that stings with unrest and sends us out to be blinded. But then the River Wind blows, the wind off the rivers of living water the City lies between, the wind of the Holy Ghost, the acceptance the Holy Ghost brings, the second element of the Cross the winds make in air, the cross-piece by which the cross is to be carried. The Father, the Son, the Head and the Heart, justice counteracting false pity, Love counteracting urgent desire, the Holy Ghost, the shoulders, what assents and endures.

Muddled as that extract from my journal is, it embodies a central belief of my life, that every act of body is an act of soul, that every passing sight or sound may be a lesson in the language we must learn before we die.

Tatters of "the Epic" still exist; and the grieving mother's meditation [is] preserved in

*The Annunciation Rosary*³, printed by the kindness of friends in fonts inherited from Eric Gill by Tom Barry, a master-printer working out of a Benedictine Monastery in Matawan, New Jersey. Father Lynch discerned that my mind was moving from lyric to dramatic poetry, and suggested that I translate the *Medea* of Euripides as an exercise, which was a little like recommending to a ninety-pound weakling that he begin working out for the Olympics on two-hundred-pound barbells. I made it through the first few lines,

I wish to god his narrow-
breasted tern Had never
made it past Poseidon's jaws
to Colchis.

then thought better of it. From the first production of *The Little Foxes* on, women had become instant sources of villainy on the New York stage; and I had no intention of writing another vehicle for Bette Davis. I asked Father Lynch should I try the *Agamemnon* where the homicide committed was at least justifiable. He said yes; and launched me as playwright.

My last year in the Army I wrote my father a letter it took weeks to write, apologizing for the times I had taken my mother's side in the battles that horribly punctuated my upbringing, and coming to terms that she was his not mine, and that he must treat her more tenderly than before. My mother said he was moved to tears by it; and after he died I found it in a locked tin box he had hidden away his Navy medals in, and baby pictures of my brothers in his first wife's arms.

I dreaded living over a bar because it was liquor that had always brought the worst fights on, that and questions of money, who should have precedence, my mother or his first wife, when the money grew scarce. Blessedly, those first months back home were flush enough for us to settle into the New York flat without hardship and even to add

³ Published by N.J. Sower Press (1948).

the entire fourteen volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary to my library in Rhode Island.

New York right after the war was what Paris had been to Hemingway, dashing, open-armed, and gloriously cheap. On the way back across the country, our hearts soared as people called out from the platforms we pulled into, "Welcome home, well done!" That welcome did not have to be spoken in New York; it shone on people's faces. Any man in his twenties knew from the sidelong grins of passersby that he had been given the Freedom of the City. The long worry of the war over, I made the City my own again in all its tough unshaken beauty block by block, from the hot, humming, crowded stoops of Twenty-eighth Street to the sanctuary stillness of those before the townhouses in the Sixties closed for the summer. I had always wanted to see what those houses were like inside; and once I got the chance when Mainbocher⁴ asked me to pick him up for lunch in his apartment off Fifth near the Frick. The living room, the whole length of the house, had a rear wall of mirrors fronted by a Steinway concert grand. Halfway down it stood two rococo chairs of silver-gilt upholstered still in their original silver damask, with wide enough seats to accommodate the paniers women of the ladies of Maria Theresa's court. When I admired them, he smiled with pride and told me they were from the Prince-Archbishop's Palace in Salzburg; and there was a good chance Mozart might have sat on them. Those first months back in the City his kindness to me deepened because, I think, my asking about Gertrude Stein gave him a chance to reminisce about Paris before the First World War when he was studying to be a singer and suppered often at the Paris Opera. He remembered leading Mary Garden⁵ through her thunderous curtain calls so blinded by tears she could not see her way. Like me, he kept a treasury of such brushes with glory. Once in the Buci market⁶, Miss Stein's sister-in-law, formidable in pre-Raphaelite folds of plum velvet, gimleted him with her gaze and in a voice that rang above the cries of the venders ("*Oh, mesdames, mesdames, les belles peches!*"⁷) told him, "Main, coordinate

⁴ Illustrator and fashion designer, 1890–1976.

⁵ Scottish operative soprano, 1874–1967

⁶ A market on the Rue Buci in Paris.

⁷ "Ladies, ladies, lovely peaches [for sale]."

your desire!”

A bit over five feet, he was broad-shouldered and muscular, with coarse, thick hair as white as fresh snow, his ruddy color deepened by that and the deep light blue of his handmade Egyptian cotton shirts whose neckties he had made to order to match them. Somebodies looked like somebody in those days. They were not dressed by decorators, as they are now, in a raggle-taggle simplicity, fake as a smile in an ad, that probably came in when Antoinette’s ladies commissioned Sevres milk pails for their toy farm at Versailles.

Raking the windows of Henri Bendel's on Fifty-seventh on the way back from lunch at the Pierre, he said he found it harder to tell them from the hardware displays at Hammacher-Schlemmer’s, down near the corner of Third. He knew the power of his own virtu. He often said that by the simple play of the fabric, he could costume the dirtiest play that ever smutted a page so that it could pass Watch and Ward, the Society censors, with flying colors; or design a production of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm that would be closed halfway before the first intermission. He could be driven to operatic rages when his standards of skill, amenity, or manners were violated. Janet Flanner says in her New Yorker profile that in Paris he fired a cordon bleu chef who refused to make and serve his mother's cranberry relish with the Thanksgiving turkey. At the Hotel Pierre grille, I myself saw him with twisted mouth lift high a bowl of creamed spinach the waiter had served cold and let it fall to the table with the sound of a muffled pistol. I knew for sure the dinners his butler served (he had a butler!) must have been as flawless as the guests who came to share them, Dame Myra Hess, Willa Cather and the Knopfs, for example, whose talk I conceived of as more distinguished even than that in Thornton Wilder's *The Cabala*, the novel I had daydreamed Europe out of in St. Francis. But for me it was not that he had conquered Europe that impressed me most about Main, but how American he continued in the process and what a good son to his mother he persisted throughout. When he told me he never could smell the scent of apples without thinking of her sending him down to the bays of the cellar of the big Chicago apartment he was raised in for a Mason jar of

preserves and passing an *Almanach de Gotha*⁸ of families of apples now extinct in their obsolete plenty—Vermont russets, Yorks, orange pippins, Sheep's Nose and Gravensteins—I not only sensed the nostalgia behind that catalogue but the ineradicable family love its recitation released.

That first summer we shuttled back and forth from the flat to Rhode Island, Blackie and Beauty not only would jump on our laps, but pay us the final compliment of leaping on the bed to keep us safe and warm against the cold dark of the night. That served the same purpose for my high-strung parents and me as the goat and wire-haired terrier had in the bridle-path stables in Prospect Park. Jumping on the bed was not an imposition on the dogs' part, but a compliment: Blackie was accepting us into his pack, which now included a farm dog subject to the staggers, who happily did not join us on our beds. Shep was a large, shambling mongrel setter whose job on a neighboring farm had been knocking down pigs so that they could be tied up and slaughtered. When his strength went, the farmer left him to fend for himself and my mother fed and housed him. He had passed through an ordeal of mange that thinned his coat so badly the grey skin showed through like soiled long johns through ragged clothes. Sometimes on chilly nights, he would groggily collapse before the hearth, sleep off his meal, then pull himself up on his legs, wobble over to the hearth and piss quarts into the hissing fire. When he was angrily expelled from the living room, Blackie and Beauty would follow him out to the yard and dance around him to take his mind off his disgrace. Old as he was he loved to play, and countered their cavorting with stately bounds into air on pogo-stick legs. That proved too much for him at times, and he would keel over flat on his back, his four paws in the air when it took my mother, my father and me to shovel him into the back of the car and drive him to the vet for a heart shot. Once we had to take him there twice in one evening. Beside Shep and us, there were the Bohoes, the cats, coming and going like birds in the boughs, that Blackie kept a stately eye on. The only insurrections took place when a cat littered the same time as Beauty; and [when] Beauty blundered too near her nursery. At such moments Blackie looked the other way until both parties had hissed and

⁸ Reference book for Europe's royalty and higher nobility.

growled themselves to a welcome armistice. But the cat I remember best was a male, Charley, an orange tortoise shell, with balls the size of Brazil nuts, who would thread his way into the kitchen through torrents of rain or cascades of snow, eat himself football-bellied, and sleep along the top of a club chair I read in after dinner. There was only an ear and a half on his punch-drunk-looking head; and his spine was like an ess from a lost bout with a car. He would wake up with a start, reach down and knead my shoulder with his claws, purring like an outboard, then drowse into silence once again. When the weather softened he would disappear. Finally, he disappeared for good.

But then out of the blue Blackie and Beauty disappeared, no amount of beating the bush could discover where. My mother prayed to St. Roch, the patron saint of animals, on whose feast (16 August) I was born, and after a week made an offering to the priest for a special intention. A week after that we were all so depressed at their loss, my father proposed a drive to Providence to get our minds off it. Twelve miles away from the house on the side of South County Trail Blackie and Beauty shot out of the undergrowth on to the macadam; my father swerved to a halt, my mother flung open the door and Beauty hurled herself down the highway at her and leapt moaning into her arms. Both dogs were half-starved and Blackie kept coughing up the hemp of the rope he must have gnawed through to escape. When my mother thanked the priest for his successful prayers, he scolded her for her frivolity and lost her regard. She always said if there were no animals in Heaven she did not want to go. One of the last things she did on her deathbed was lift herself on one elbow and in her best Chief Operator's voice call "Blackie." He had been dead five years.

I dwell on that reunion on the roadside not only because it moved me, but because our ties with those dogs ultimately led to decisions that changed my life. Looking back on our doings with animals, I now see more deeply into the mystery of my love for my mother and her love for me. I belonged to her as thoroughly as those dogs did; and she belonged to us as deeply as we belonged to her. Because of the brutal uncertainty of her childhood, she never could love what she could not control. She made that condition

explicit in a valentine she sent her Aunt Katharine as a child reading "Love me and I will love you in return." The disaster of Katharine's death made that condition even more exacting in years to come, love me alone and I will love you in return. My father's disappearance at the time of my birth turned that exaction into mania whenever the shadow of loss hovered. Her friends, admittedly prone to Flatbush Avenue hyperbole, told me that when I was in the service my mother carried on like a crazy woman. She later told me that when I was overseas the only image of me she could call up in dreams was with my back turned towards her, a sign of bad luck, or even death. When I asked her for a recent photograph the last year of the war, she sent me a set of snapshots in which she held pressed against her heart the first Army photograph I sent her from Camp Bowie, as a kind of charm against the death my turned back foretold. That made me edgy but I put it out of mind as I almost always do with things I do not choose to think about.

The first creature I loved besides my mother was a black kitten she had picked up stray when she moved next to St. Anne's so that I could live at home. I ran back at four o'clock when class let out so I could see and pet her. Like all female cats she had a gift for hide and seek. Small as the apartment was it sometimes took ten minutes to ferret her out from the laundry on the closet floor or behind my mother's hats on the closet shelf. One afternoon I could not find her to save my life. I looked down from the fire escape to the street, behind the piles of toys that blocked the stairs to the roof and, with my heart in my mouth, peered over the roofs edge thinking she might have got out and fallen to her death. I sat stunned until my mother got back from work. The cat had gone away, she told me, they often did. After a week or so I learned to live out the loss.

Cats came and went as substitute Easter Bunnies at Seventy-sixth Street in the same mysterious way until 1931 when my father presented me with Topsy who remained my canine sibling till well into the War. As you will remember, we went to Friday night movies as religiously as we went to Sunday-morning Mass. In the quiet darkness I always took their plots personally and interpreted their stories like the parables in scripture. 1931 was the year my sap began to rise. What I dared not notice in our two-

room flat, my mother dashing half-dressed from bath to bedroom, I was allowed to feast on in the uncensoring dark—bare legged chorus girls in gangster Garbo as Mata Hari dancing in what looked like “the altogether” behind a curtain of the thinnest silk, Marlene Dietrich straddling a chair in next to nothing but a high hat and high heels and winning Emil Jannings heart and soul for life. I so identified with Marlene Dietrich and her cat in Dishonored that when Miss Dietrich, in my mother's best coat with the fur collar, was shot as a spy at picture's end, I wondered who was going to take care of her cat and me.

I did not have to read Lawrence's Sons and Lovers to prove that ties between sons and mothers could be destructive. Anna Maria's golden-haired boy dying of untended cancer in a back tenement by the gashouse was living proof the ignorant reclusiveness my mother had escaped could still obtain and kill. Yet the need to get on with the rest of my life prevented my applying that truth to myself; I put the uneasiness I felt about setting up two rival households aside in my uneasiness whether I would be able to measure up on my return to Brooklyn College.

While I was still in Manila Miss Stein had written that she “hoped to hell I was not going back to school like the rest of them.” I was and I did with my vain heart in my mouth. Would I make the same splash on the campus I had in the days of the American poet? Registration was double the bedlam it had been before the war because of the influx of veterans from the GI Bill of Rights. But I did manage to get into Professor Slochower's Modern Continental Novel and into a Milton course by a Don Marion Wolfe, a man new to the faculty since the War. The first course made me believe I had it in me to teach; the second that perhaps I might make even a professor.

Compelling lecturer though Professor Slochower always was, he relinquished some of his time at the podium to his students to engage them more deeply in how the books were made. Each student had to lecture the class once a term on a fixed text. Mine was Thomas Mann's *Joseph* novel in its entirety. I was petrified. I had taught

only twice up to then—once for a week replacing Miss Dimchevska teaching Bulgarian while she had the flu, a lark, because it was mostly drill and the banter between my fellow soldiers and me was good dirty fun; and once, traumatically, in a half-hour talk in a speech course we had to take to de-Brooklynize our diction, I stood in the front of the room as before a firing-squad, holding forth in a quavering voice on the forms of the sonnet, climaxing, of course, with my innovation, the involute rhyme⁹, which after an eye-crossing morris dance through the rhyme schemes left a class splay-legged in their seats like a Brady photograph of the field after the Battle of Bull Run. Faced with having to explain why I could not put down *Joseph in Egypt*, the keystone of my talk, because of its parallels of Joseph's Egyptian land of the dead with Nazi Germany, I was stunned to have got through it without hearing a single cough or sigh from my captive audience.

Professor Wolfe's course in Milton was equally rooted in give and take with its members. Each student was to choose three out of ten topics distributed the first week of the term; and hand in essays upon them at the term's end. It was a way of cajoling us into research and it worked handsomely. I was drawn to Professor Wolfe, as I had been to Mr. Meagher, as someone whose life I could pattern my own upon. Sometimes I would take the EMT back to Twenty-eighth Street rather than the IRT so that I could walk him across Avenue H and the Athletic Field to the stop that would leave him off at the Long Island Railroad Depot for his train to Rockville Centre. It was not his talking about Milton that fascinated me so much as the wondering candor with which he spoke of how he got where he was. He came from a large family deserted by its father, founded in West Virginia by a Hessian who chose to remain in America when the British went home. In the egotism of suffering I had no idea that rural native-born Americans could ever have had to undergo such hardships as city immigrants like us had to live through. Professor Wolfe's mother had to put half the family in an orphanage and take in boarders to support the other half. His years in the orphanage agonized him as deeply as my stay in St. Anne's did me. His mother managed

⁹ Alfred wrote at least ten poems in "involute rhyme." Those that are available to me are numbers 9 and 10; both are sonnets in length, but the rhyme scheme is abcdefggfedcba. In other words, the first line rhymes with the last, the second with the penultimate, and so on.

heroically to bring the family once more under one roof and give them a bent for learning they could build on. He went to a Presbyterian college in Geneva, New York, and earned his way through his various degrees by holding the many jobs that led him to his tenure at Brooklyn College.

I got very sick with flu and had to miss a week of class. Professor Wolfe ferreted out where I was and called to say he was coming. He came when my mother was out buying a treat for him and sat down alongside the corduroy sofa on which I was making my uncharted voyage back into my life. He asked me what I meant to do when I took my Brooklyn College BA. I answered, woozy on anti-biotics, that I didn't know, but probably would try to get a journalism degree at Columbia and earn my living in some freelance way. He told me that like most of us New Yorkers we had the delusion savages began at the Westchester town line and that it would be wiser to reconsider and get a Harvard degree. I tried to drive home to him how bad my grades were and that they never would get me into Harvard. He told me to let him worry about that, and ate with relish a piece of pastry my mother brought in from *La Delice*, the neighborhood Rumpayer. Harvard now became my working dream; and though I had not yet even applied, my mother imagined me a graduate and a member of the Harvard Club of New York which had been her working fantasy for years.

The death of Miss Stein in the summer of 1946 floored me, and wrung two poems out of me.

Dereliction.

I'm all alone on the beach
Without rhyme or reason.
It's dusk. The day's out of reach.
It's the end of the season.

The clothes on my back are wet.
The sand underfoot smells rotten.
There's something I must not forget

I have forgotten.

There's nobody here I can call
To come and remind me.

Not a soul in the world at all
Ever could find me.

To love the world is not an evil,

I swear it to you, you who pass,
Though you see both God and devil
Locked on the broken grass.

I tell you this: here's a high place and a hilly
Some of you've been here before,
You who've seen the ancient heights burned silly
And the darkness not held back by any door.

I asked my question of two nations
Till I was out of heart and breath.
Who like me would not lose patience
And expatriate to death.

Within a week Miss Toklas acknowledged the poems with thanks in her Spenserian filigree hand tiny as the inscription in a wedding ring. We kept in touch from then on. Miss Stein's death attracted legend as a suit of mourning does lint. One that took precedence is that groggy on sedatives before her operation, Miss Stein looked over at Miss Toklas in her chair and asked "What's the answer?" "I don't know," said Miss Toklas. Then said Miss Stein, "What's the question?" If that is true (no one heard about the deathbed interchange till years later), it would explain the promptness of Miss Toklas's reply.

In presence, company and poetry, Shirley was as glorious as ever. What she wrote had the surprise of wit and flashing leap from picture that first came into American poetry with Emily Dickinson. But like anything questingly original it could be difficult. Dylan Thomas's seraphic readings had not yet tightened the attention of audiences. Once when

Professor Wolfe arranged to have Shirley read her poems at The New School of Social Research, the reaction was so aggressively resistant that as we left the room she hugged her manuscript to [her] breast like a hurt child. Like me, poetry was her *raison d'etre*, and though we both still had the loving aid and comfort of Mr. Meagher to support us, that support was private now that *The American Poet* was no more. We had lost the access to readers that had kept us writing toward the style we longed for, one that would be ours alone. It was not a question of a mere thirst for glory, although that played a part in it. It was as Shirley wrote me earlier a terrible longing for more concentrated effort, and the intention to follow through the life patterned by that longing to the point of ignoring outside turmoil as so much static. Like me, she must have at least once been turned inside out by a storm of transport like that which unselfed Rimbaud in *Matinee d'Ivresse* till he cried out with a fullness of being immeasurably larger than that the life he was born to, a being broad as the sky and as irresistible as a large changing wind, an appetite for the as yet unnamed.

A first breathtaking reading of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* comes nearest to capturing the raw incitements to poetry my daily beat roused in me as I made my hour-long way from the dusty light of the New York flat to the landscape sky above Flatbush. First crossing Third, its toy chalet of a station alive with morning sun, the red and deep blue of the glass at its windows' corners like sapphires and rubies, the shadows flung from its tracks softening the cobbles below as a black-lace veil does the cheeks of an old beauty, made me feel in control of what had sadly controlled me in childhood. Then hanging off the straps in the subway, I saw the same harking back to the dreams of last night that must have darkened my own eyes. I particularly remember one rush hour, all of us packed like shad roe, clumsily dropping my books and being softly ringed by four girls headed for Wall Street smelling of Sweetheart soap and talcum powder softly blocking the others till I could retrieve them, their laughter ringing like change on an Automat counter.

Before the War, distracted as I was with composing poems and helping edit the magazine, the only thing I cared about was passing with the least effort; but now,

eyes on Harvard, I slaved till I brought my grades up at least to low honors. My heart in my mouth, I filled out the forms seeking admission, lying in my teeth about my serious aspiration to be a scholar. There were three strikes against me to begin with: I came from what Harvard would have thought a mere degree mill, my grade average was not even middling, and I was interested more in writing poetry than studying it in depth. Vain as I am, the vehemence of praise in the letters of recommendation took my breath away. It was as if I were being nominated for a Nobel Prize. My belief in my chances grew. Night after night, I dreamed of racing down the worm's gullet of the first floor and finding the winning Sweepstakes ticket of acceptance in the battered letter box, and would run the six blocks from the subway home to see if it had come. Finally, it did. I was rejected hands down.

Professor Wolfe would not take no for an answer. With effort as great as his generosity, he marshalled a second dossier of letters strong if not stronger than the first, and had everyone with Harvard connections write friends in my behalf. Two weeks later, my mother shaking with tears handed me a second Harvard letter she had opened. Not only had I been accepted, but I was given the unheard of privilege of entering the University in the February term.

That winter the snow began to fall a week or so after Christmas so heavily the cars parked alongside streets were frozen in solid like fossils in a glacier and no snow plough could make it down one of them. Before I could scout for a room in Cambridge, I had to go to New York first to be a best man at the wedding for an old and very dear friend. Carl Malouf, my Army friend from the Bulgarian Platoon in Denver asked me for dinner the eve of the wedding, and drove home to me how out of the swim I was. My other guests were two glamorous couples, the wife of one of them in an ankle-length mink-coat, which she took off to reveal she was dressed only in a tight pair of red-flannel long johns. With her was a pet de-scented skunk with little deep blue pansies for eyes. While Carl served drinks, her husband read a graphically detailed account of surgery for hemorrhoids out of an 1870's textbook. At dinner they kept talking about

Truman, who, they said, was the only New Yorker office boy with a private office because the other office boys used to goose him. "President Truman!" I protested. "Of course not," they exclaimed. Truman Capote's *Other Voices. Other Rooms* had just been published.

The drifts were up to the first-floor sills of Massachusetts Hall; and the icy melt in the gutter in front of Nini's Corner rode [up] my mother shins over the flimsy, fake rubber galoshes she was wearing. Yet so radiant was the seraphic smile the realized dream of Harvard Square called forth you might have thought she was crossing a lush meadow in high summer. The room my eight dollars a week rented for me was not the handsome Victorian parlor I had conjured out of Santayana, but deadlines being deadlines it had to do even though it was on the top floor of a house twenty icy minutes from classes in the Yard, with a landlady bedridden with arthritis whose touchwood fox terrier could be driven to frenzy by the softest footfall on the stairs.

Registration next week fulfilled the dream of Boston elegance I was expecting. I entered a Victorian mansion on the escarped lawn on Quincy Street between the Fogg Art Museum and the Faculty Club. It must have been the stately sister of the house in which Henry and William James were raised which the Club had replaced. They ushered me into a seminar room, its parquet as glittering as that of a convent parlor, carpeted with a garnet Turkey rug out of a museum. It only took me minutes to enter my courses in that churchlike silence.

Where the courses were held was a different matter. My first—Mondays, Wednesdays, and (at the convenience of the instructor) Fridays at 9—was in a mildewed dungeon of a room next to a dripping toilet in the cellar (to have called it a basement would have been rank boosterism) of New Lecture Hall, called that, I was told, not from lack of seniority, but because its donor, President Lowell, was too modest to let it be named for him. The course was called *Backgrounds in Renaissance Thought* and it might as well have been in Tibetan as far as I was concerned. If Brooklyn College had dragged

me kicking and screaming into the twentieth century, that course did the same in reverse with the same effect. It ranged from Aristotle's *On the Soul* and Augustine through Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* with side-excursions into Aquinas, Calvin's Institutes and Luther. It was taught by a Professor who seemed to believe me as deeply learned as he and took it for granted that, philosophical moron that I was, not only did I know how to think, but even think in concepts with his conceptual grace. What geometrically confounded my confusion was his Texas accent, which was flatter than the Panhandle, so that when he spoke of "vatelism" since I never heard of vitalism¹⁰, I imagined the vates¹¹, Vergil, as a missionary from Parnassus with his singing robes about him.

Besides that, the postwar text shortage necessitated our reading the assignments in an open reserve room on the top floor of Widener Library in which our books were shelved cheek by jowl with far less difficult ones from other courses. I of course read them in preference to my own.

To complicate matters, distressingly the obligatory urinalysis had turned up something wrong with my kidneys. That terrified me because I felt I may have done them bad damage when I fell on the small of my back in front of the icicle-eyed German POW in Camp Stoneman in California. I was reduced to passing water hourly all night into specimen bottles lying flat in my bed, a perilously inconvenient procedure, and carrying the rattling and sloshing bottles through my morning classes until it was time to tum them into the Lab at noon. They kept me at that two weeks running, till I said to hell with it. They have never bothered me since in all the forty some odd years I have been at Harvard.

My other classes were in Sever, a Richardson building with less light coming through its high-silled windows than anyone had reason to suspect. Our desks, fronted by a raised platform with a lectern on it were narrow, thick slabs of wood fastened by struts to the

¹⁰ The idea that living things had some extra-physical or spiritual element in their composition.

¹¹ Latin: "bard" or "seer."

floor scored all over by generations of penknives, little, delicate indestructible chairs marking each place. The light had the look of dusty water; and my heart soaring as at a shrine, I made a bee-line for a place that had FDR deeply gouged into the oak. I later discovered carving that all over the place was a common practical joke of Harvard vandals.

The first hurdles in the Steeplechase to the doctorate were the reading examinations in Latin, German and French, which were to be taken the first months of residence. I passed the French, but was scared to hazard the others.

I felt so in awe of Harvard that I grew petrified to the point of popping down bromides and going to afternoon movies to calm myself. Because I entered in February, I missed out on the rocky alliances that serve to see people through such chancy transitions. I ate randomly alone around the Square, except for breakfast, which I mostly always ate in Schraffts, expensive though it was, because it was like the Schraffts on Flatbush Avenue. The well-heeled undergraduates in their scuffed white bucks and spotless sun-tan pants, homogeneously well-bred, spoke in voices as handsome as their looks with the soft, expensive-sounding accents of the office boys from Groton and Exeter learning the brokerage ropes I used to meet as a summer runner in Wall Street. I so missed the New York accent, “irs” flattened to “ayes” (“bayed” for “bird”), final “ers” raised to “iss” (“sinniss” for “sinners”), I would stand by cars with black and yolk colored New York license plates hoping their tourist parties would return.

Again Professor Wolfe came gloriously to my rescue. He had Page Smith, an old student from DC, call me and invite me to dinner. Sullen with funk, I took his cultivated Virginia accent as condescending and stammered out the best refusal I could muster. There was a pause; and with an irresistible chuckle, Page said, “Get over here at seven Wednesday, you crow.” I said I would and Page and his beautiful wife saw me through the awful ordeal of those first few months. Their daughter, Ellen, had just read E. B. White's *Stuart Little*, and Eloise coped with the occasional brazen mouse that would race from under the chair to under the couch by holding a paper bag at the couch's

corner while I gently passed a flatted broom beneath it. The mouse would scamper into the bag, and I would carry it downstairs and release it in the backyard.

My grades were dingy at the term's end; and I had yet to pass German and Latin. The Chairman called me in and told me that I would not be allowed to finish the doctorate unless I did better in September. I was badly demoralized. That summer I worked on *The Annunciation Rosary* glumly waiting for my self-confidence to return. At the advanced age of twenty-six my education had finally begun. Up to then I had breezed through on intuition and luck. I realized how much harder I must work if I were to master what I had to learn in the years ahead.

September of 1948 I returned to Harvard bent on proving that my teachers at Brooklyn College were justified in their opinion of me. To stop wasting my time missing New York and the tough pleasures of our life near the bone there, I took a seven dollar a week room on the first floor of a double triple-decker on Mount Auburn Street near De Wolfe three minutes from Harvard Yard. I chose it not only for convenience but because there was not one student among the roomers to make me feel ashamed of my New York patois or subject [me] to the epidemics of depression that sweeps through universities like the Spanish flu. During the term before a student in the law school had hanged himself in his room. The roomers, young and old, were mostly on relief. The bathroom on my side of the house doubled as a kitchen and laundry and was so disgustingly dirty I spent an hour and half shoveling out its trash, including discarded vegetables, and scouring every inch of it from the sink and toilet through to battered shower-stall which looked leprous with athlete's foot. Next morning when I went up to shower and shave it was almost as filthy as it had been the day before. When I complained of that to the lady next door to it, she told me it was not our business to keep it clean, but the landlord's. Behind me on the first floor lived a woman married to a man who was fired from his job playing the trumpet because he [had] lost his teeth. I could hear them through the thin door that stood between us when they were getting dressed in the morning. He was a great grouser; and that struck her funny. I never will forget the aggrieved voice in which he whined "I hate a tight sock!" and her laughing so loud it made their bedsprings creak.

On the very top floor, both in their eighties, lived Captain Noyes and Wilhelmina O'Looney, the daughter of a Catholic Royal Irish Constable in Belfast, whose cousin was the distinguished Celtic scholar, Curran. She told me that when she was a girl at school in Belfast, the Protestant girls would ask her to take her hat off so they could see her horns. She always wore a crumpled fudge-colored toque faded white around its ribbon. With that jammed down on her head, she would race down all the stairs to watch the Harvard band march by on Football Saturdays, her face sunny with pleasure. Captain Noyes, who lived in the room beside hers, had a trim white spade-beard and was a bit of a drinker. She always waited up for him and brewed him hot tea when he got back from the bar.

I went to Warren House to have the Chairman of the English Department approve my choice of courses for the term. The building is a late Greek Revival house diagonally in front of the Faculty Club named for its last private owner, a Sanskrit scholar. The English Faculty meetings took place in its double-length living room, whose two fireplaces have what look like William Morris tiles, and from whose partial gallery we were told, the badly arthritic Professor Warren¹² (he wrote his last book on his knees) liked to watch his dinner guests glassed in from drafts. The bathroom behind it is one of Harvard's wonders with its silver-plated Greek Orthodox crown of a shower above a high walnut-cased copper bathtub from which the silver plating is wearing off. The house had been a station on the Underground Railway, hence had in its cellar a room in which five huddled people could hide. When I told Samuel Eliot Morison about it, he said that his father remembered a Southern classmate before the Civil War accompanying his father to the theatre in Boston and making a citizen arrest of a fugitive slave on the horse-car.

The Departmental Secretary, Helen Jones, led me to the Chairman's Office. A frail woman with a slight limp, she bore on her shoulders the entire Byzantine logistics of both the undergraduate and graduate programs, without ever once being flustered or rude to anyone she dealt with. Orals Committees knew she would want a note sent down in

¹² Henry Clarke Warren 1854–1899

the middle of the doctoral ordeal telling her how the candidate was doing. Later a rich grateful graduate student endowed her with enough money to retire and travel.

B. J. Whiting, the Chairman, a distinguished Chaucerian, was a prodigy from Northport, Maine, whom George Lyman Kittredge, the famous Shakespearean and universal scholar, took under his wing. It was said that Kittredge did not have a Ph.D. because no committee could have been mustered learned enough to give him orals. He had studied under Strathman at Klefeld¹⁵, the first Professor of English in the world. That is the reason that the Warren House photograph of Whiting and other pupils of Kittredge standing with the current generation of medievalists is called “the Academic Succession.” Professor Whiting had a cast in one eye which gave him a Rhadamanthine look of detachment and confirmed my awe of him as the heir to Kittredge's stem tradition of scholarship¹⁶, which at least three quarters of the department then shared with him.

President Pusey told me that as a boy making a last check of his classwork on the steps of Harvard Hall as the Yard bell was tolling he had his hat knocked off by Kittredge's cane, because he hadn't risen and got out of the way as Kittredge was entering the building. I need not say that having been told last spring that I had to bring my grades up or get out that meeting was as subdued as it was brief.

The meeting was subdued I realize now because I was very angry. Freud is right: rage and grief are kissing cousins. I knew from my parents that deep anger is as salutary as it is dangerous. As terrible as their cataclysmic fights were, they came out of them realizing anew the sin of judgement which had led to their infuriating grief. “Irascimini” says Saint Paul in Ephesians, “et nolite peccare” (“let us get angry; and make no

¹⁵ ¹⁵ I have found a scholar named “Strathman,” but he was much younger than Kittredge, so this remains a mystery to me. [PG]

¹⁶ G.L. Kittredge's approach to philology is well documented. I have not, however, found any reference to the term “stem,” although it might well refer to Kittredge's insistence that graduate students in literature learn languages of which English is a descendant.

mistakes"). Such anger rises when we feel life has failed us or we have failed ourselves. In its grip, though we do not see it at first, we clear the ground [of] false notions and cheap hopes. That is what I think prompted the insight of the Harvard moral philosopher, Rafael Demos, that failure is to the ordinary man what tragedy is to the hero, but that, American mores being what they are, no one dares admit it. In Professor Whiting's office I took the first step toward taking life seriously: I learned to come to terms with a failure that was my own doing. I often wonder whether the conviction that the classroom is the last stand of the noble savage does not underlie the resistance of the poor of this generation to learning. It certainly was in my case.

Harvard allows its graduates and undergraduates ten days of shopping before committing to the courses initialed on their study cards by chairmen or tutors. Professor Slochower briefed me on the glory and pitfall of the Harvard English faculty: Any course by Harry Levin, he said, would be superb: when Levin, who like Kittredge never took a Ph.D., was in his twenties, he wrote a book on James Joyce which Joyce himself thought as infallible as it was sensitive; and Thomas Mann thought his commentaries on Mann's work the best in the world. He expressly warned me against taking any course by Professor Francis Peabody Magoun because he was said to have been a Nazi-sympathizer during the war. I bought myself a marbled hard-covered notebook, calendarized it, and scheduled readings in my courses for every hour of the day that I was not at classes, at meals or in bed asleep. The schedule ran from one in the afternoon after daily Mass and morning classes till one in the morning of the following day. I seldom dozed in my installment-period armchair although I ate like a boa constrictor four times a day.

The daily walk from the solitude of my poorhouse room to the bustle and autumnal glamor of the Yard transfused new gusto in me. Returning veterans (like me on the GI Bill of Rights, assuring us full tuition and sixty dollars a term for books) tired with years of doing what they had to rather than wanted to do, invigorated the entire University with infectious fervor. In cigarette breaks before Sever, in long kaffeeklatsches at Hazen's on Mass. Ave, and in more and more extended lunches in the Graduate

Dining Hall, an indestructible “temporary” hulk abandoned by the military, my graduate classmates and I grew intrigued with one another. Not only had we served all over the country and the world during the War, we had won honors degrees in some of the best colleges in the land. The first to strike me were Hillis Miller and Robert Cree; Miller, beautifully trained in Aristotelian rhetoric by Buongiorno of Oberlin, Creed in English and German verse by W. H. Auden at Swarthmore.

By then Page Smith¹⁷, always a maker and mover, had gathered a few of us into an ardent group which shared the hope of somehow breaking down the barriers between the disciplines. The last weekend of October, he and Samuel Eliot Morrison drove us to Plymouth to dramatize what it must have been like when the Puritans landed and settled there. Plans were underfoot even then to make a kind of small Massachusetts Williamsburg there. After the hours of diesel reek from the old oil burner in my rooming house my heart pounded when I stepped out of the car into the tart, chill air. Through the astringent light, Mr. Morrison and Page walked us to the spot where the first hundred to touch shore managed to throw up a common house to shelter themselves and their goods against the wicked, mid-December cold, short rations, scurvy, and a kind of cabin fever like typhus which killed half that landing party and laid all but six or seven flat on their backs. That half-dozen, Page told us, fed the fires that kept the others warm, cooked for and fed them, emptied their slops, washed their foul clothes in melted snow and saw them through at last to a shaky recovery. We then climbed up to the graveyard that gave on the harbor to see where nurses and nursed now lay. Turning to Mr. Morrison, Page told him that the poet Josephine Jacobsen had once seen a stone in New Hampshire that had a single woman's name cut on it, and under that name a single sentence: “It is a fearful thing to love what death can touch.” Mr. Morrison, who had recently lost his wife, looked Page deep in the eyes. “What else in the name of Heaven is there to love!” he said.

That interchange so moved me that I incorporated the line in a speech of Cassandra in my version of *Agamemnon*:

¹⁷ 1915–1995, American historian.

When I was a girl, my father took me to the mountains;
And there was a field in that place that was hard to get to,
Very high up, you know. And in that field
That seemed the bed of the sky, there was a stone, –
You must have seen such stones as this in Thrace,
– A sentence or two addressed to the cleansing air.
It read-- and I can see now before me,
As if I stood caught up to the clouds' breasts
As I so often was – read: Traveler,
It is a fearful thing to love what God can touch.

That moment in Plymouth comes back to me now with choking force this dazzling autumn afternoon forty-five years later; for Page Smith and his beautiful wife Eloise died a week ago of cancer within a day of each other, he refusing to die until she did, so as not to leave her alone. Though I know they are with each other in the fullness of God, and that they raised four children who are confirmed heirs to their heroic human ardor, I cannot keep my grief at their loss at bay. They were the only entirely whole people I have ever known: They loved and thought and did lasting work with all of themselves, and stood up for right no matter what it cost. Yet there was nothing solemn about their company: it was inclusively merry like a superb party.

Page's genius for fellowship wove the unlikeliest group of graduate students, concentrators in fine arts, literature, and science, into a captious dining club that met every six weeks or so to listen and argue with such distinguished members of the faculty as John Finley, I. A. Richards and Percy Bridgeman. After long tennis-matches of debate, we finally settled upon a constitution after a hot and heavy set-to over precisely what the grounds of expulsion were to be. Puzzled what to call ourselves, we accepted Mr. Morison's suggestion that we revive a favorite club of Santayana's and call ourselves the OK Society. That done, Santayana rejoined us at Page's request,

and Thomas Mann became an honorary member at mine. When the Nobel laureate Bridgeman delivered a disheartening sermon on the total impossibility of precision of measurement, hence upon the impossibility of belief in anything, I took it as a head-on attack on the grounds of Christianity and wrote Page that very night. The dreadful thing was that the meeting came after another severe attack of revulsion against Harvard: it was the nightmare of being mocked by all one shrinks from. The comptometer mind clacked away; he very nearly succeeded in his attempt, nobly Harvardian, to tolerate us out of existence, to equate us with some muddled idea in his own terms of what we stood for and so dismiss us. If his view of life ever required a madonna, it would have to be Duchamp's "Nude Descending A Staircase." Page calmed me down, driving home to me that Bridgeman's invincible ignorance of Christianity was only matched by my invincible ignorance of science.

Meeting by meeting our slapdash version of All Souls at Oxford opened my heart to Harvard and gave me confidence I could stand up to it. I edged my way into the three remaining terms of courses I needed to qualify for the orals which would win me candidacy for the Ph.D., the American license to teach in college. Not only were Hillis Miller and Robert Creed in those courses but also Robert O'Clair, David Ferry and Benjamin DeMott. David Ferry¹⁹ was the bright star of our graduate generation. With his amazing insight, sharpened by Barber and Craig who had won the battle for the New Criticism at Amherst, he combined a zany playful pyrotechnical sense of humor that made him irresistible company. De Mott²⁰, with his testily punctilious integrity, ran him a neck and neck race. But O'Clair²¹, unpretentiously brilliant in every thing he set his mind to, with his good-natured, dead-on asides and his indrawn gasp of a chuckle, was the world and all to me then and to the day he died.

¹⁹ Poet and teacher, winner of The National Book Award in 2012.

²⁰ June 2, 1924–September 29, 2005. Writer, scholar and critic who taught at Amherst College for over 40 years.

²¹ 1923–1989. Editor and teacher. He edited the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* and taught at Manhattanville College.

Because I had always wanted to study Old English I ignored the Brooklyn College political caveats against Francis Peabody Magoun, the Fotheringham Professor of Comparative Philology, and took the introductory course in the language, which he administered. Mr. Magoun's course, small though it was, was in two sections, with Jess L. Bessinger, his co-teacher, alternating with him week by week. I called him Mr. Magoun because by then I had learned that every member of the faculty from Teaching Fellow to University Professor was to be addressed as mister regardless of rank by some obscure democratic convention I supposed to be a heritage from the time of Jefferson. We learned the language as children do, from sounds to words to cadences to meanings, a method adapted by Magoun from the Army Language School technique by which I learned Bulgarian. A shortish chesty man, he spoke with what I learned to recognize as the old-fashioned well-born Yankee drawl crudely travestied by the cartoon character, Mr. Magoo, by a cartoonist who had never heard him speak or laid eyes on him. He taught us the sounds, gave us a trot to follow him by, then lifted the dull textbook up and read us the end of King Alfred's translation of Boethius's account of the loss of Eurydice:

But you cannot very easily lay bans on love,
or never at all. My Oh My! Look: Orpheus then kept leading
his wife along with him until he came to the border of light
and darkness, and she kept walking after him. When
he came out into the light, he looked behind his back at
the woman; then all of a sudden she was lost to him.

There was not one sound in the room after he finished. He had a voice like a matchlessly made oboe, hoarse, sweet and deep at the same time, in which myth and heartbreak were seamlessly fused. My old teacher Helen Roach, who chose the records of spoken verse for the White House, says his Harvard Vocabarium reading of Old English verse was one of the finest readings of poetry ever made. To have sat in the same room and heard it live for the first time was uniquely moving. From then on I registered in every

Old English course he taught. Though I never learned Old English grammar systematically, because Mr. Magoun never taught that, by reading the poems aloud and parsing them I learned to recognize the play of presence and motion that is the musculature of all good English verse.

For all their urbane airs and graces, universities are high-toned villages with heroes and hobbledehos, characters and clods. As far off as Brooklyn, Mr. Magoun was known as the Harvard Nazi. How false that reputation was, I found out the first two terms I knew him. He had been a Canadian Ace in the first World War, and traveled to Germany when the war was over to assure the families of those he may have shot down that they had died fast. It is doubtful that he ever had believed the accounts of violated convents and skewered babies that were the hysterical rage then. The Germany he visited strengthened his conviction that the atrocity stories about Hitler's Germany must be as false as those about Kaiser Wilhelm's. He was politically blind enough to ask me years later how a man like Josef Goebbels who had written a lovely doctoral thesis about the poetry of Schiller could have got mixed up with a gang like that. Even when the Wehrmacht took over Paris he kept defending the cultural literacy of Germany against the plain evidence of the devastation of Warsaw. That won him a punch in the jaw on the steps of Widener Library and the filthy epithet, the Harvard fascist. When, however, the newsreels of the liberation of the concentration camps drove home to him how monstrously wrong he had been about the Third Reich, he suffered a fit of depression that verged on nervous breakdown, and finally came to terms with the horror of his mistake. When I understood that, I hoped to eradicate his bad repute by having our class hold a dinner at the end of the year thanking and honoring him for the gift of his subject. That did help a bit but not as much as it should have.

My weekends home to Rhode Island were distressing. My father's partner, John Dunnigan, died and my father had to borrow the money to buy his share of the business. That entailed cutting back on staff to economize, which meant that my mother had to clean and mop down the bar every morning, and tend it in the afternoons. In addition, my father had to get a bricklaying job in the day and tend bar at

night. That wore both of them down and made them so edgy that their bouts of recrimination grew more furious as they grew more frequent. One that lasted from closing time at one AM till six the following morning with me intervening to forestall violence or even bloody murder I later tried to reproduce in Act 2, scene I of the version of Agamemnon that was evolving into a play of my own from a wretchedly bad translation. Clytemnestra's line in II. I,

A miserable situation! A miserable situation!

is unmetrical because it is exactly what my mother screamed time and time again. "Miserable" was the key word of the battles that set them at each other's throats with such hatred it sent the dogs and cats in the house scrambling under the beds like a thunderstorm. Like a thunderstorm there was no stemming it until it ran its course. It appears in an unfinished letter my mother later wrote herself and thrust into a book, quoted verbatim, angry misspellings and all:

I'm miserably unhappy and I wonder in my fifty-first years if there is such a thing as the devil coming into your life at 21 = I have been married to this man, he bigamously 30 yrs - I wonder if I as an orphan had the misfortune to meet the devil. I've never had a real happy moment since I met him. Oh Ill admit he had a lot of charm and humility at the start. But a liar that all hell upheld. A sactimonious horrible monster. God, what have I done to deserve this. Anyone who has shown kindness to me - he has planted a seed of distrust in them for me. The man hates me. But why does this terrible state of living have to go on for over thirty years. Oh sure he gives me twenty-five dollars a week in order to make me submissive, and when he he has an audience goes almost [to] the point of insanity to humiliate me. And I've

descended to such a level that I stand bewildered at the insults & submissively try to turn them into a joke. The man hates me & everyone knows it through his disrespect for me. But why do I put up with it - Is it because he has such power over me that the devil is stronger than I am –

You can see that the marriage is the eye of the storm. Twenty-five dollars is the sum he sent his first wife as well as my mother weekly. The pity of it.

Academic anxiety seemed nothing to that. I always returned to my battered room on Mount Auburn Street with deep relief. That had its plays of violence too. Because there was no stoplight on De Wolfe Street, every six weeks or so there would be a crash like a bad pile up at the Indianapolis 500. And once my fellow roomers, unemployed and cranky, had a Donnybrook I enjoyed from behind my door. The landlord went to the second floor to collect some late rent because, he said, “My wife needs to pay a bill.” “What wife?” the tenant answered; “She's not your wife.” All hell broke loose; and everyone in the house except for Wilhelmina O'Looney, Captain Noyes and me joined in, thundering up and down the three flights of stairs, shoving and punching each other for a good half-hour. The twenty-year-old father who lived in the room above me complained to anyone who would listen: “That son of a bitch don't fight fair. He pulled me hair.” Then out of the blue, it suddenly all subsided. When I went out to get my after-study snack, they were all around the landlord's kitchen table having beers with him and “his wife”.

All in all, I was settling into Harvard. I passed the Latin and German departmental examinations and came out of spring term with a non-stipendary John Harvard Fellowship for the coming fall. That summer I worked part-time as a research assistant for Professor Wolfe on the first volume of the Yale University edition of the prose of John Milton, and on Agamemnon which had evolved by now, thanks to the advice of Father William F. Lynch, into my version of the play.

Verse-drama was all the rage in 1950; but that was no help to me. In each of the verse-plays I saw, the soul of the play was stifled by the play's production. Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* the first existentialist play on the British stage, was taken to the bosom of the West End because its staging of Fry's breathtaking duel to a draw with the nothingness of life was muted to unmenacing badinage. Jeffers' embittered indictment of passion as realpolitik in *Medea*, with Gielgud, the greatest actor of our age, Judith Anderson and Florence Reed, was transformed into a vaudeville turn in which a nightingale was drowned out by two steam-calliopes. And the production of Eliot's masterpiece, *The Cocktail Party*, a drama in which tragedy and comedy were seamlessly woven into a mystery celebrating the passage from sin to redemption, left its unregenerate audiences hotly debating what the play could possibly have been meant to amount to. I use Gertrude Stein's word, "amount", for what a play leaves us with, because it is the nearest I can come to the meaning of action in Aristotle's, for me, irrefutable dictum:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude.

Francis Fergusson classically articulates the full import of that word in his introduction to his edition of the *Poetics* when he writes (VI,9),

. . . life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action,' he is referring to the concept as explained in his writings on ethics. The word he uses there to cover any movement-of-spirit is *energeia*. In his studies of human conduct he speaks of three different forms of *energeia*, which he calls *praxis*, *poiesis*, and *theoria*. In *praxis* the motive is 'to do' something. In *poiesis* the motive is to make something; it is the action of artists when they are focused upon the play, or the song, or the poem, which they are trying to make. In *theoria* the motive is to understand and grasp some truth. It may be translated as 'contemplation,' if one remembers that, for Aristotle,

contemplation is intensely active. When he says (VI, 9) that the end of life is a mode of action, he means *theoria*. He thought that 'all men wish to know,' and that the human spirit lives most fully and intensely in the perception of truth.

Up to that time my only work completely in dialogue was *Rusticus*, a failed masque I wrote called forth by the suicide of Virginia Woolf. The first draft of my *Agamemnon* began like the original with the Watchman's speech then stalled dead. It was not until I began to hear voices that I began to understand where making a play began. The exposition, I came to learn, had to be so compelling that your audience did not understand where character left off and plot began. As you know, the exposition in *Agamemnon*, what Hollywood calls a back-story, is second in its complications only to the labyrinth of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungen*. Eliot somewhere says a playwright works best by making a transfusion of his own feelings into those of his character.²² Because of my role in the family romance, I became Aegisthus, who like me felt he was put on earth to keep the peace in a family prone to fury.

It was I killed Atreus.

Some eighteen years ago. I was eighteen.
King Atreus sent me on a sudden errand
To execute a man he had locked up
The way you'd send a boy to buy a basket
Or pick a letter up for you. He gave me
A sword he said had been his father's
sword.
I'd never killed so much as a lark before.

²² ²² "The creation of a work of art, we will say the creation of a character in a drama, consists in the process of transfusion of the personality, or, in a deeper sense, the life, of the author into the character." T. S. Eliot, "Ben Jonson," *The Sacred Wood*.

-- Remember Atreus? He'd a baby's face,
All smooth and white like skin around a
scab. He'd have struck me down had I
said no to him.

The rage I had to suppress in long hours of heartbreakingly difficult family diplomacy helped make this necessary bit of exposition sound real. I did not know that then—the life of it just burst forth. But now I know what I dared not even begin to think through when the play came more alive in my hands than it ever had been, that my play and I were indissolubly one.

In 1949 that flesh and blood icon of America, Winner-take-all, Archibald MacLeish, the new Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, brought the big world of politics and power into the Yard. He had gone through Yale, the First World War and Harvard Law School brilliantly, won a seat in a blue-ribbon Boston law firm, resigned it to write in France during the bumper-crop twenties, won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry with *Conquistador*, advised President Roosevelt, was appointed Librarian of Congress, became an Assistant Secretary of State, and wrote the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. A handsome, trim man, erect as a statue in the capitol he looked like the picture in my grade-school history of Madison among the trim grandees at the Constitutional Convention no taller than boys. His Conference Group, English 283, Conditions of Poetry, had as its core the literary scandal of the period, the Library of Congress's award of the Bollingen Prize for poetry to Ezra Pound. As distinguished as it was small, the class's most tellingly intelligent member was George Steiner, whose report on Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* epitomized medieval literary theory and dramatized the wonder of the birth of style. He and Laelia Kanavariotis later brilliantly brought home to me the troubled dusk of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and the even more troubled dusk of my own ignorance. More and more I was made to understand I would always be reading foreign poetry with an American mind and how much harder I must work if I were even to begin to come to terms with any poetry at all, no matter what language it

was in. After two weeks, Mr. MacLeish invoked the Harvard convention of calling us by our first names, which Mr. Magoun said was the American equivalent of tutoiement in France. That made an intellectual family of the course, with all the tensions as well as the ties such closeness entails. Since Pound was American, we threaded our way back through the Fascist minefield of the opening lines of *The Pisan Cantos* contrasting the possibly etymological pun hinting Manichaeian rebirth with the simpler deduction of the solace of eternal return from the variations of nature and the fateful tricks of chance of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd”:

The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent
shoulders, Manes! Manes was tanned and stuffed.

Thus Ben and Clara a Milano

by the heels at Milano

That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock.

DIGENOS, Διγονος, but the twice crucified

where in history will you find it?

yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper,

with a bang not with a whimper,

To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the color of stars.

The Europeans in the class preferred the Pound because they found the Whitman sentimental which reinstated the Civil War in that seminar room and drove home to us all the inveterate privacy of political conviction. The course was so compelling that over the years it grew large enough to fill Sanders Theater in Memorial Hall.

That year I had to move from my old shoe of a room, because they were tearing the triple-decker down to make room for Quincy House. I moved to the house on Linden

Street, owned by the Misses Mooney, where J. P. Marquand and James Bryant Conant had lived as undergraduates before the Harvard Houses were built in the 1930s at right angles to the "Gold Coast," the length of Mount Auburn Street from De Wolfe to Boylston. Harvard in kindness allowed the older roomers like Miss O'Looney and Captain Noyes the time to find themselves new lodgings. Unfortunately Captain Noyes was hit by a car and laid up a long time. It was beyond Miss O'Looney, then in her eighties, to find them new accommodations. That landed her in the Cambridge infirmary for the rest of her life. Old-age homes are bad now; they were wicked then.

Whatever few keepsakes she had, she had to pare down to what could fit in a breadbox.

Her first battle with the staff was about her hat which she would not remove till time for bed. The lore of women's hats my mother had learned on Annie Murphy's stoop as a girl still obtained. Girls could not get into trouble with house or divorce detectives if they kept their hats on visiting men in their rooms, hence the snappy catchphrase about a dog of an Easter bonnet, "You'll never go wrong in that hat." Older women kept their hats on paying calls. For Miss O'Looney, keeping her hat on in Mount Auburn Street and in the infirmary meant she was only there in passing. When the ward nurses tried to take it off and stash it in the breadbox, they were in for a battle. Miss O'Looney always won but often at the cost of being put in solitary, thrust into a four-person room with three mute catatonics tied to chairs for company. I tried to get to see her every two weeks in the hope of keeping the officials off her back. Once, in her first weeks in the long ward there, when she had gone to bed, one of the nurses opened the window behind her and threw cold water on her hair. I could not do anything because her accusations were always dismissed as senile paranoia. Her terrible solitude and that of everyone around her was fully brought home to me when she was serving yet another two-week sentence in a room with a woman tied with rags to a Windsor chair on wheels, who only looked before her with stunned eyes. Miss O'Looney said she had no visitors and never talked. She motioned towards her with the quarter box of Brigham chocolates I'd brought her. The woman looked French and on a hunch I said to her, "Madame, peut-on vous offrir des bon-bons." She straightened her head and looked

me in the eyes. “Merci, non, Monsieur,” she said. “Je ne mange pas des bon-bons.”

To this day I feel guilty I could not get to see her more often. When she died, I nagged the infirmary officials into waking her one night near Harvard Square and offering a Requiem for her at St. Paul's, which I attended with the other church mice from the eight o'clock Mass.

At Linden Street, I blessedly met Peter Joseph Seng, superbly educated by the Jesuits at Marquette, who gave me Tanquerey's *The Spiritual Life* and deepened me in the Catholic faith in a way for which I will eternally be grateful. Prayer for me till then had been Mass every morning, the Crown of St Francis required daily of me since I had been professed into the Third Order Secular of Saint Francis in my junior year of high school and the sacrament of confession every Saturday. The Crown comprises meditations on the Seven Joys of Mary.

1. The Annunciation.
2. The Visitation.
3. The Nativity.
4. The Adoration of the Magi.
5. The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple.
6. Mary Meets her Risen Son for the First Time since His Death.
7. Mary is Assumed up Living Into Heaven and Crowned by her Son.

That took the place of the decades of the Rosary I used to fist through on my cot in the Army. I had never been taught properly how to meditate, so my prayers seemed as rote as multiplication tables. Tanquerey and the works of St. Teresa of Avila made me see how insolently slack I was. At morning Mass, one-third of me was present, thanks to the Missal, but one-third was still home in bed and the other hotfooting it around the Yard from one class to another. To fight such self-indulgent distraction, I took

Monsignor Augustine Hickey, the pastor, a strictly conservative priest, as my confessor. When, in the dark basement booth of St. Paul's, I told him how worried I was about the slatternliness of my prayer, he thumbed towards Harvard through the shadows at his back and said, "Don't make the mistake many do there. Don't take the effects of loss of sleep for conviction of sin." He told me to persist in prayer no matter how without sweetness prayer might prove because we are called by God to pray unceasingly. Every night, therefore, I would close my door after studying, and, from nine to ten in my splaying leatherette morris chair in the long Spartan room on the top of Linden Street, I would read the virile translation of the New Testament by Ronald Knox, and say my Crown, often through clenched teeth. But Peter recommended I read Teresa on the Our Father, and one night, following St. Teresa's advice, I said it phrase by phrase, pondering every word. The room fell away. My prayer was interrupted by enrapturing peace; and for an immeasurable moment I felt a wave of solace that made me happier than I have ever been. What I could neither see nor hear hushed me and let me know me, a touch impatiently, I felt, that I was to stop the bother because the Lord was with me there and everywhere. When I told Monsignor Hickey next Saturday of the joy I was feeling since then, he warned me it might be a delusion but again said to persist in prayer and see whether I did not fall into dejection. When I did not, he told me that I may have had an experience of "sensible comfort," which was a great blessing but was not at all to be taken as a signal favor but a large arbitrary grace. Though that kind of rapture never has recurred, I have lived off its bounty since.

Monsignor Hickey was the vice officialis of the Archdiocese, second only to the Cardinal. He had been pastor of St. Paul's since 1925. Five foot two, he held himself as erect as a general on parade, which caused many to think him an immovable martinet. They were wrong. Once a friend of mine who had fallen so deeply in love with a married man she wanted to run off with him asked me to ask Monsignor what she should do, because she dared not ask him herself. He smiled gently and said, "Tell her not be distressed. She would not have told you to ask me if she meant to do that. Pray for her and tell her I am doing the same." She did not run off with the man. She lived on to love another man, marry him, and have a good life with him and their daughter.

From 1940 on directly opposite St. Paul's at the arc of Bow and Arrow Streets in a grotesquely overgrown stucco apartment house a series of empty shops had evolved into St. Benedict's Center, which over the forties with the help of Monsignor Hickey and the witty erudition of Leonard Feeney, S.J., had flowered into a kind of Catholic academy which attracted students to the degree that people thought of transferring its sessions to St. Paul's School Hall. By the late 40s when there were courses in Biblical exegesis so thorough that texts in Old Testament Hebrew appeared from time to time on its dusty blackboard, it had been accredited as a degree-yielding college by the GI Bill of Rights with Father Feeney as its motive force. Even in the afternoons, you could see Father Feeney deeply engrossed in theology with Harvard students on the back-breaking steel folding chairs. Students began to withdraw from Harvard and register in Catholic colleges. One wellborn student, a member of the Porcellian, a final club so exclusive members were only allowed one visitor a lifetime, became a catholic, and withdrew from Harvard in his senior year to matriculate in St. Benedict's Center. The matter came to a head when the Center's journal, *From the Housetops*, openly declared: "*extra ecclesiam null salus*" "outside the Church there is no salvation," its first blast of the trumpet against the ineradicable secularism of the post-War world. The campaign seemed to have two ends, to persuade as many undergraduates as possible to transfer to St. Benedict's and to persuade Rome into publishing as dogma that third-century dictum which even Pius Ninth²⁴ held back from declaring *ex cathedra*. Outwardly the Square continued tranquil. Memorial Hall's clock tolled the hours day and night; and St. Paul's answered this side of the Yard on the quarter hour, except when some chance student shot the bells out with his twenty-two. But sides were drawn more and more tightly. The Center wrote the Pope that the liberalism sanctioned at Harvard had invaded the faculty of Boston College. After having his priestly functions cancelled, Father Feeney was twice ordered to report to Holy Cross College for reassignment. He refused.

²⁴ Pope from 1846 to his death in 1878. Anti-liberal and the proponent of the dogma of Papal Infallibility, which was codified at the First Vatican Council (1870).

In 1948 Archbishop Cushing denied Catholics attending the Center the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion. In October Father Feeney was dismissed from the Society of Jesus. For the first time since the beginning of the trouble, the Porcellian member who had dropped out of Harvard as a senior telephoned his grandmother and asked her for money. She said she would give him the money for himself, but could not give him money for Father Feeney. He roundly abused her for five minutes. She did not hang up, she told a friend of mine, because she had not heard his voice for such a long time. Somehow the Center raised the funds to buy the bandbox of a house directly behind its first site, and Father Feeney, calling his adherents "Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary," moved into it after erecting a statue of the virgin in its side yard. Sundays he gathered with his people on the Boston Common to argue his doctrine with anyone who would engage him. His remarks were not only anti-protestant, but anti-Semitic. There were truculent confrontations in front of his Cambridge house with students from Adams House across the street. There was a comic side to that: there were letters in *The Harvard Crimson* vociferously advocating the Center's right to consign them to damnation. It was then that I wrote Father Feeney and told him he was causing scandal, and that he ought not to provoke incidents but imitate St. Teresa of Avila and leave the outcome in the hands of God. The confrontations stopped, thank Heaven, but not the harangues on the Common. He was excommunicated in 1953. Ultimately he and his adherents moved out of the houses they had bought down Putnam Avenue and settled near the Shaker village in Harvard, Massachusetts. It was not until the 1970s that through the good offices of Cardinal Medeiros and his emissary, Father Richard Schrnaruk, Father Feeney and most of his disciples were reconciled and received again into Catholic communion. My prayer is that the rest of them will be drawn home.

The English Department allowed me the privilege in the 1950s of enrolling in Archibald MacLeish's writing course, which was limited to twelve students. It met weekly for two hours, in the course of which each student would present his work in progress. What made the course work was the seriousness of the writers. Mr. MacLeish would make a few remarks about what we were to hear, the writer would read, pointing out what he

meant to do; and the class would make suggestions and comments. Lyons Phelps from the Poets' Theater was assembling a collection of poems; Charles Bracelen Flood²⁶ was writing his first novel, *Love is a Bridge*; I was hacking away at my version of the Agamemnon but the glory of the class was Ilona Karmel²⁸ who had taken lessons in English from Lazarus Aronson at City of London University while she was in the Swedish orthopedic hospital where she was recovering from the loss of one leg and the shattering of the other in a Nazi concentration camp. She was on a Window-shop Scholarship in her last two years and graduated with honors. In order to work on her novel, she wore tight hair curlers which dug into her skull and woke her very early. And as the book moved to completion, Gordon Cairnie, owner of the Grolier Book Shop, gave her a key to his front door, so she could work on the book from first light till time for classes in the monumental chaos of his back room. The Grolier like the Gotham Bookshop in New York was legendary. Gordon sat on a sofa with its back to the street, talking for the most part with his friends, occasionally leaving the shop in the charge of one of them when he went out for an ale. There was not a book of worthwhile poetry he did not stock; and his shelves were larded with rare first editions as well as advance copies of the newest collections of poets. He mostly ignored his customers and never would sell a book to someone he did not like the look of. To be given a key to his shop was like being given a key to Houghton, the rare book library at Harvard. Ilona engaged him heart and soul as she did everybody and continued to do so even after she had gratefully put his back room in perfect order and handed him a stack of uncashed checks that had been gathering dust back there for years. That Ilona should have written *Stephania* in a newly learned language in her junior and senior years in college staggered us all. Its study of three people in a Stockholm hospital dealing with the pain of their lives was a paradigm of the continuance of suffering in the post-war world, the heroine's hunchback standing for the damage she was born to aggravated by the Nazis, and a paralyzed girl and a compulsive eater in her forties whose broken leg keeps shattering because it cannot bear her weight. But when I write "standing for," the description is too coarse. Like Ilona herself her characters have full presence, they speak and perceive with all of their puzzled

²⁶ 1930–2014. Prolific novelist and historian.

²⁸ 1925–2000. Holocaust survivor, poet, and novelist. Appointed Senior Lecturer at M. I. T. in 1978

selves, and fascinate you with the plenty of their fullness of choice and feeling.

Each fact of life is a challenge that is bravely met until worry or fright deepens to wisdom. It is Walter Benjamin's noblest use of story, "news of humanity," an unforgettable work of art. When Ilona was graduated in the fifties, most women went on to secretarial work or, failing shorthand and [the] ability to type, acting as a receptionist. Perhaps because of her accent that kind of job was closed to her. She had to take a job packing candy at the Necco Factory in Central Square in order to pay for her room on Concord Avenue, with a public phone in the hall. One night she was called downstairs for a call from New York City, in which the suave cultivated voice informed her that Stephania had been chosen as the next choice of The Literary Guild. Thinking she was being kidded by some snip from the Harvard Advocate, she yelled "Bullshit" into the phone and hung up. As she started up the stairs, the phone rang again. She turned and answered it, only to be given the same message again imperturbably. She quit the Necco Factory and went back to her writing.

Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* was to the young of the American fifties what Werther was to the young of Goethe's German romantic era, a figure that enacted an age's longing. Sixteen, he sought a life of pure integrity. That quest for pure integrity is what makes good colleges work. Earlier, I feel, it underlay the resignations from Harvard of those students who like Lowell's Colonel Shaw, with "an angry wrenlike vigilance, a greyhound's gentle tautness" seemed "to wince at pleasure and suffocate for privacy," searching for some radically unshakeable truth. And it underlay the victory of the "new criticism," with its puritanical insistence of sticking to the text over the untidily expansive techniques it replaced in the literature classes. It later, I am convinced, was to underlie the resistance that exploded into the national rebellion of youth that brought the unjust war in Vietnam at last to a close.

In writing classes like MacLeish's it showed itself in the vision between those who entered as apprentices and those who entered as writers bent on breaking forward into fresh fields of vision and expression. It was MacLeish's genius as a teacher to cross-pollinate

both aspirations with each other. Besides Ilona Karmel's masterpiece (I use the word with full advisement), there was Charles Bracelen Flood's *Love is a Bridge*, which Alice B. Toklas would come to admire, and Blair Fuller's strikingly subtle novel contrasting the French stand to life with our own²⁹. In [his] second year, Lyon Phelps, who with his shag of thick blond hair looked the way a poet should, switched from the collection of difficult lyrics he had been working on to *The Gospel Witch*, a play about the Salem trials, which was later produced in the Common at the Boston Festival, but whose thunder had been stolen by the earlier production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. When my turn came to present my version of the *Agamemnon*, which without my knowing it was beginning to answer to Aristotle's threefold definition of action I spoke of earlier, Lyon suggested I offer it to his theater on its completion.

It was Richard Wilbur, I believe, who first said that the Poets' Theater was like socialism: everybody believed in it but nobody would admit it. Its first season was 1950 when it did two nights of four plays on a budget of forty-five dollars recovered in collections on the way out. Alison Lurie characterized it as going through "three stages or incarnations: bohemian, academic, and social." I remember two plays of that first program as a kaleidoscope of all three stages, players from the brilliant Brattle Repertory company in *Three Words in No Time*, a mandarin pastiche from Melville's *Moby Dick* woodenly toying with techniques of the "No"-play, and an entirely fresh play by Frank O'Hara *Try! Try!* which was to comedy as necessary as new slang is to the health of language. At any rate, I came in on the academic wave brought in by "the MacLeish" as V. R. Lang imperiously dismissed him. For the most part, the plays were solemnly daring and dutifully symbolic. Lyon Phelps's *Autumn* seemed to be about incest, but it was so bedizened by staging, and ponderous with metaphor, that no one could be quite sure. We were told by the director as the intermission began, "Don't go. It isn't over"; and all during the break, Thornton Wilder, who was that year's Charles Eliot Norton Lecturer, seemed to be explicating it brilliantly to a group of undergraduates. When I asked him on the way out to pass the explanation on to me

²⁹ Probably *A Far Place* (1957). Fuller (1927–2011), a writer, editor, and educator, was an early editor of *The Paris Review*, and taught at Barnard and Stanford

to pass on to my students, he said “How should I know what it was about? I was merely passing the time.”

I was of two minds about surrendering my cumulus cloud of a play to the theater's uncertain auspices until I met the irresistible muse of the whole venture, Mary Manning Howe³¹, the wife of Mark Antony De Wolfe Howe, who was the political conscience of the University until his early death. My forelock-tugging bones recognized her for what she was, an Ascendancy gentlewoman, an Anglo-Irish Lady with a wit that stung like a buggy whip, who'd spit in your eye as quick as look at you. As Mary Manning she had written for the Dublin stage and worked as a girl under W. B. Yeats. When she told me the motto of the theatre was “Here today, and queer tomorrow.” she wasn't being mischievous, merely descriptive. Its members fell in and out of love in febrile and ambiguous bursts, alternately glowing or glowering at each other; and, in the buttoned down fifties, got themselves up in self-expressing outfits as unique as hoboes dressed in stylish hand-me-downs. Edward Gorey³², whom Edmund Wilson accurately characterized as the Beardsley of our generation, wore his hair eyelash length as I had in the Arizona desert, and wore white tennis sneakers with what looked like his grandfather's fur-collared and lined black coat, with a beard that came and went like the Aurora Borealis, splendid, however infrequent. I first laid eyes on V. R. Lang³⁴ at one of the entertainments the Theater gave in gratitude to its supporters. A Junior League Undine, her beautiful back and shoulders marble in the light, she stood with her hands clasped while her accompanist scattered a tiny autumn across the keys, then, in a no-nonsense contralto, launched into a sad but mistaken lyric by Lyon Phelps,

I'm tying the leaves

Back on the trees,

and brought the house down. She was the youngest of seven sisters (so respectably born

³¹ 1905–1999. Irish playwright and actress

³² 1925–2000 writer and artist.

³⁴ 1924–1956, poet, playwright, and actress.

they were said to be related to the Archbishop of Canterbury), who lived in a drafty house on the Bay State road with a bad cook and a widower father and seemed to resent every minute there. Restless as Cambridge trees in April, she joined the Canadian Wacs the last year of the War, then hustled off from that to become a nurse of the Beats at *The Chicago Review*. She and Frank O'Hara wrote plays and poems as tough and irresistible as good jazz. But like me they were beginners.

Early scenes from my *Agamemnon* held the audience thanks to the expert direction of Professor Helen Roach when they were done at Brooklyn College and Hunter. Because that version stuck to the form of the original like a cast to its parent statue, my tendency to conceive plays as Bartletts of "Elegant Extracts" was unfortunately confirmed. My characters did not speak; they spouted. It was only the blue-penciling eye of Mr. MacLeish and the glazed look of Ilona and my other classmates in his course that taught me audiences are less interested in my opinions of a character than they are in the character itself. The typical Poets' Theater play, *Autumn*, for instance, despite the vaguely arresting references to incest, which came and went like a sick headache, was so taken up by an identified but blatantly choral gardener raking leaves, and his bravura descriptions of place and season, that no one could tell who was doing what to whom. Even the best of their productions, *Fire Exit, I Too Have Lived in Arcadia*, were lyrical recitations rather than the actions Ferguson had as we have seen so tellingly defined in his preface to Aristotle's *Poetics*, concerts not plays.

In the late forties, the going grew so rough in my father's business in Rhode Island that I thought of taking a year's leave of absence to work and at last bringing some money in to the family coffers. I asked around in Brooklyn College about possible work in the summer school. I also attended the MLA convention which was held in Boston after Christmas, and I went to it to see what might be opening. There I saw Dean Klein of St. John's, Annapolis, whom I had met when I read parts of my *Agamemnon* there. Professor Slochower was also attending, after having just been fired at Brooklyn in another attack of the anti-radical chills and fever that had been shaking the college since before the war when it earned the name "the big red schoolhouse." I introduced

Professor Slochower to Dean Klein in the hope he could find work in Annapolis. A higher-up at Brooklyn saw me do that, and had the gall to tell me there was no chance of a job for me there the coming summer or probably ever. I nearly spit in his eye. Those I admired, I admired, whatever their politics might be. I was not about to be cowed into being careful how I chose my heroes or my friends. And from the day I took issue with the Christian Fronters by defending the Spanish Republic against the pro-Francos in St. Francis Prep in the letter I nailed to the Sycamore at its gate, I was never cowed by the effect my opinion might have on others, nervous, perhaps but not cowed. That was, I think, because of the example of the subtle pragmatism of the poor my mother practiced, doing what she thought right yet keeping her own counsel about her own affairs, about the assumed name covering her marriage and every four years, about whom she was rooting for in the Presidential elections with everyone around her flashing anti-Roosevelt-Landon buttons. I felt invulnerable because she bore the brunt of economic worry for me. I realize now what a toll that took. She died at sixty-one after having transfused me with the indomitability which brought her through her brutal upbringing. I have framed a set of verses she wrote in her aunt's graduation album in 1911 and hung it on my study wall:

Stand by your conscience and honor your faith
Stand like a hero and battle till death.

It stands so much for what my mother means to me I made it a speech for Fran in my *Curse of an Aching Heart*. Alongside the verses she had pasted an unleached decalomania stamp of a little girl standing up to a rooster as tall as she, comically recognizing the preposterousness of the valor the verses aspired to, the “windy day” of life she shared with me from the day of my birth. To me it is the equivalent of Stephen Dedalus's dictum in *A Portrait of the Artist*:

I will try to express myself as freely as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning.

Freud tells us a strong and loving mother makes for heroic confidence in a son. In my case, it was not heroic confidence, but stark insensibility. I never needed to have a strong sense of the risks.

Like most working-class people raised under Roosevelt, the extent of my politics was to root for the Democrats and leave things to Providence. At St. Francis, I took my first political stand against the Christian Frontiers because I believed in that sovereignty of free discourse, that faith in “the purifying and preserving Word” so indelibly celebrated in Thomas Mann's letter to the Chancellor of Bonn University on the cancellation of his degree:

The mystery of the Word is great; the responsibility for it and its purity is of a symbolic and spiritual kind; it has not only an artistic but also a general ethical significance; it is responsibility itself, human responsibility quite simply, also the responsibility for one's own people, the duty of keeping pure its image in the sight of humanity. In the Word is involved the unity of humanity, the wholeness of the human problem, which permits nobody, and today less than ever, to separate the intellectual and artistic from the political and social and to isolate himself with the ivory tower of the 'cultural' alone. This true totality is equated with humanity itself, and anyone—whoever he may be—is making a criminal attack upon humanity when he undertakes to 'totalize' a segment of human life: I mean politics, I mean the State.

My role as family arbitrator from childhood reinforced by the *New Testament* dictum of my Franciscan education, “Judge not lest you be judged” has always kept me alert to moments when opinion hardens to faction. Such moments often arose in the debates about the trials of Alger Hiss which ended in his

imprisonment for perjury, as unjust as it was mistaken. When N. Elizabeth Monroe, one of my favorite Brooklyn professors—Wallace Stevens’s “High-Toned Old Christian Lady” as conservative as a nun’s shoes—asked me, “Where is the course in treason now being offered at Harvard, Government or Social Relations?” I realized that battle lines were being drawn but refused to admit it.

The hysterical elation at the War’s end had subsided into an uneasiness best anatomized in the closing lines of Robert Lowell’s “The Exile’s Return” in *Lord Weary’s Castle*, the Pulitzer-winning collection of poems in 1947:

You will not see
Strutting children or meet
The peg-leg and reproachful chancellor
With a forget-me-not in his button-hole
When the unseasoned liberators roll
Into the Market Square, ground arms before
The Rathaus; but already lily-stands
Burgeon the risen Rhineland, and a rough
Cathedral lifts its eye. Pleasant enough,
Voi ch'entrate,³⁶ and your life is in your hands.

Since Lowell had never been to Europe, his conquered Germany, rid of the goose-stepping Hitlerjugend and a proud survivor of the earlier war, is a Joseph Cornell collection of “found objects” out of Thomas Mann’s Tonio Kroger reflected in the eyes of “unseasoned liberators” completely unmindful of the “unalterable law” which for Lowell legislates the gleaming of the lilies as ineluctably as it does the crowding of shadows in Dante’s hell.

The Korean War gave that uneasiness a focus and provided us with the foe we were

³⁶ “*Lasciate ogni speranza/ Voi ch'entrate*” “Leave all hope behind, you who enter here.” Dante, *Inferno*, III 9.

missing like a drawn tooth whose socket the tongue returns to. The United Nations Debates on that subject combined with the political stratagems of Richard Nixon and Senator Joseph McCarthy managed to replace it with the red menace which had fused with the "Yellow Peril" of the twenties when Mao Tse Tung united China under Marxism.

By now you will certainly have grasped important facts about me. My faith is as central a force in my makeup as the circulation of my blood. Like St. Paul I believe "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction." But like Shelley I extend that maxim to the secular realm, convinced that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. Poets (and to me all good writers are poets) diagnose and prophesy the future. In the pagan canon I hold holiest are the three Theban plays of Sophocles, *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, written over the course of his lifetime. For me the use of the Oedipus Complex as an analytic catchphrase deflects the force of those plays from their "amount," the Aristotelian *theoria*, what Sophocles originally meant to make their audiences perceive and ponder, that politics, which was a recent Athenian discovery as exciting to them as the Freudian raids on the unconscious, is not the governing power of human life. Politics at its best is a matter of using one pressure group against another in a beneficial way. But when the opinion of a pressure group fixes into prejudice beyond compromise, the process is no longer beneficial but socially dangerous. That *The Crimson* occasionally printed letters from hyper-conservative alumni complaining about the opinions of various radical professors did not register with me because the Harvard administration seemed to ignore their complaints coldly. And I took accounts of such alumni infiltrating lectures and taking hostile notes as harmless however alarming silliness. How wrong I was I did not realize until years later when the takeover of University Hall precipitated a student strike that stampeded the faculty and drove a wedge of distrust between teachers and taught that has not even now been successfully bridged.

Because in 1948 I got a lackluster grade in Professor Whiting's course in medieval literature exclusive of Chaucer he hired me to grade 1949's examination on the theory that having to reread the syllabus would do me good. It was a little like being left back in

grammar school, but with its sixty students at three dollars a head, the windfall took the curse off it. Professor Whiting's sardonically disguised kindness made me a medievalist on the Department books and gave me a leg up to the first rung of the academic ladder, that of being a grader.

In 1950 I moved into a set of rooms that answered to the picture of Harvard digs, stately and ample, I had dreamed up out of Santayana's *Persons and Places*. For seven fifty a week I rented a small bedroom with a bath I shared with the man next door and a noble Victorian parlor ten feet high with a shapely scarlet sofa facing a white marble fireplace. To the right of the sofa was a bay window that gave out on Grant Street and the Charles River, a quarter block away. On a small ash sewing table that faced into the room, I took notes for my doctoral orals and felt my puzzled way ahead in my Agamemnon.

In that room I mounted the second rung of the department ladder, which worked then as it does now, "up or out". Professor Munn came to interview me for a job as section-man in English I, his required survey course for English Concentrators. It was his custom to make a bumblebee inspection of the candidate in his quarters before the academic day began at nine o'clock. I had just had time to put the electric percolator on after my return from Mass at 8:40, when there he was standing at my door with his big grey homburg dwarfing his small-featured face, the winter hat from which he changed each year on the 1 May exactly [for] a blindingly white panama which his father had bought in 1879. Downstairs his private taxi was waiting with the two schoolbags he generally carried to class in it. When I offered him coffee, he said he could not drink it but asked me to pour out a quarter cup for him to smell while we spoke. The layout of the course, he explained, in his small, soft voice was two lectures a week and two sections which I was to lead and grade the papers for. Twice a term as a kind of apprenticeship each of my fellow section-leaders and I had to lecture to the entire three hundred some-odd students in the course. These lectures were to fix the works discussed in their period and the biography of their writers with as much density as we could muster without stupefying the class. The goal was to acquaint its members with all of English

literature from its beginnings to the present, as in the catchphrase, “Beowulf to Virginia Woolf.” My salary was to be \$1066 a year, the catchphrase for that being, “\$1066 and that's all”. I got the job.

I now understand that I was part of the changing of the academic guard. James Buell Munn had come to Harvard from New York University where he had been Dean. The son of Jay Gould's³⁷ personal physician, he had been raised in a brownstone mansion replaced by Bergdorf Goodman. He was among the last of that well-heeled generation who had embraced college-teaching as an avocation rather than a means of livelihood. When Professor W. J. Bate, several times a Pulitzer laureate, was a graduate student, and had to work in an all-night cafeteria to keep his bills paid, he asked Professor Munn, then Chairman of the English Department, if there were not some fellowship or loan-fund he might apply for to lighten his workload; Professor Munn: “No; I'm sorry: you simply will have to dip into capital.” He gave us all a princely lunch at the Faculty Club every Friday, for which he ordered wine if he heard any coughing, which we usually orchestrated like a TB ward in Saranac Lake. He fancied himself for his medical knowledge and used to lace his lectures with bits of lore to drive home biographical points. Once, for example, praising Elizabeth Barrett Browning for her courage in bearing a child, he explained at length to a predominantly male class, white faced and with tightly locked knees, that labor pains were like those of a kidney-stone lodged so hard it would not pass. He and his wife lived in a beautiful house across from the Radcliffe Quadrangle at which he had us all to a gourmet lunch twice a year. His library was as well stocked as that of any college, including items like original issues of *The Spectator* which he circulated through the lecture hall as if they were mimeographed throwaways. Unforgettably generous, at the end of every year he bought us each sets of books of our own choosing we could not afford. I still cherish the three volume Werner Jaeger *Paidea*³⁸ which he inscribed to me.

The dissatisfaction with the steeplechase of courses Harvard put me through was

³⁷ (1836–1892) One of the richest of the “robber baron” tycoons.

³⁸ *Paedia, The Ideals of Greek Culture* (1945).

dispelled when I met my first section and realized the competency the cramming was aimed at. There, in classes that included such fine minds as Brenda Murphy³⁹, Catherine Rubino⁴² and Peter Judd⁴⁴, every session was an invigorating analytical volleyball game, insights and ideas taking color as they flew from mind to mind. There was still the ordeal of my first full lecture to the entire class in that long brown yawn of a room, Emerson 105. Luckily Professor Helen Roach had taught me the principle of dancing round the spine of meaning, cumulatively returning to my central point, without ever lecturing to my notes but to the eyes before me, zigzagging face to face from the last row to the first, on the alert for any signs of puzzlement or stupor. My topic was the early poems of John Milton. I combined what I had learned about dramatization from Archibald MacLeish with what I was learning from my fellow section-man David Ferry⁴⁵ about the fastidious attentiveness necessary for close reading. In twenty double-spaced pages I became an Oxford student in London for the Christmas vacation of 1674, buying the second edition of Milton's early poems, and subjecting them icily word by word to the merciless judgment of his nineteen-year-old gaze, then going for a walk up the Artillery Walk to clear his head, and seeing Milton "in a grey coarse cloth coat," beside his door in Bunhill Fields, the last rays of the sun on his fading red hair and his gout-gnarled hands. I grew so engrossed with my imagined student that the burst of applause that marked the end of my fifty minutes astonished me. I came to firmly in place on the second rung of the departmental ladder. Next year, when the survey course merged with sophomore tutorial, I imperceptibly mounted the third rung toward an instructorship. The profession I had drifted into I now embraced with deepening pleasure.

But addicted as I was to theater as a drunk to his bottle (once Mac George Bundy called me a "solitary writer"), I slaved daily at my play. I finally finished one Sunday—the furnace in De Wolfe Street gave out, huddled in my bathrobe and overcoat, taking all the parts as I composed them, crying, whispering and yelling so excitedly I hardly

³⁹ Brenda Murphy Maddox, b. 1924. A prolific biographer and journalist

⁴² *Summa cum Laude*, Radcliffe, 1953.

⁴⁴ Actor and writer. Harvard, 1954.

⁴⁵ Prolific and prize-winning poet and translator.

heard the furnace-man's knock at the door. He stared at me with the tear stains of my denouement on my face, felt the radiator gingerly and slithered back out of the room like a snake through wet grass.

The first read-through of the *Agamemnon* was in Christ Church. Molly Howe's "React, you Councilors," cracked through the parish hall, like a ringmaster's whip, and I knew from that instant what certain hands my play was in. Perhaps working with Yeats at the Abbey had sharpened her sense how to give direction.

Yeats apparently directed his productions as impressionistically as he cast them. Dennis Johnston remembered Yeats's coaching an inexperienced actor through his exit: 'You are Napoleon in retreat from Moscow, the world around you one Sahara of snow.' When the actor looked puzzled, the stage director shouted from the house, "What Mr. Yeats means is that you're to take one look to your right, one look to your left, shrug your shoulders and walk off the stage." Mrs. Johnston was then (1934) playing Mrs. Henderson, the medium in Yeats's *The Words Upon the Window Pane*; and Yeats idiosyncratically thought she should look heavier (his feminine ideal then was Mae West). Yeats boarded a tram she was on with his wife and beamed across the aisle at her, completely unaware that his fly was unbuttoned, "acres and acres of drawers from navel to knee". That night she received a wire from him, "Mrs. Dennis Johnston: Fatten. WBY" to which she immediately replied "W.B. Yeats: Button. Shelagh Johnston."

Cambridge was to the fifties what Dublin was in the heyday of the Abbey. People came from all over the East Coast for the classic Shakespeare at the brilliantly inventive Brattle Repertory. And such superbly natural actors and actresses as Elizabeth Richards, F. M. Kimball, Nora Sayre and Donald Stewart filled the Junior Common Rooms and Dining Halls of the Houses after dinner almost every week. No one on Broadway could have filled the roles of my Clytemnestra and her court poet, Aegon, with the strong humanity of Edward Finnegan, the Poet's Theater's sole Equity Actor, and Polly Thayer (Starr), still one of country's best painters, whom I had the luck to see as

Helen of Troy (“Beauty is a kind of deafness.”) in a play of MacLeish's put on in the handsome long study one sunset-leached afternoon in the house of Mrs. William James on Irving Street. Polly Thayer had the baffled nobility of a Spartan Princess at odds with her challenged honor and the turns of history and Edward Finnegan the tormented impotence of a man who recognizes that the disaster he can foresee is largely of his own making. Molly's sure directorial ear helped them through the occasional paper lace of my first try at heroic elevation into the authenticity of the indestructible plot that underlay it. Agamemnon had its premiere the 6 and 7 February 1953 in Sanders Theater in Memorial Hall, a building raised in 1870 in memory of the Harvard men who had fallen in the Union army in the Civil War. Those days the clock in its massive tower deeply tolled the hour twenty-four times a day (a fire brought it down in Fifty-four). Ruskin Gothic in its formidable dignity, it lords over its own island behind the Harvard Yard, divided by an aisle of epitaphs into a huge dining hall glazed with irreplaceable panels of stained glass bright as precious stones and a vast basilica of oak the color of aging honey. High above its stage a text in timeless Latin chastens the grief it memorializes.⁴⁶

No matter what the period of a play, its action comments on the period of its production. Tradition has it that when Sophocles' Chorus praising Colonus was first intoned, with its celebration of

The olive, fertile and self-sown,
The terror of our enemies
That no hand tames nor tears away,

the Athenian audience shook with tears because the Spartans had cut down the olive trees in the Peloponnesian War. As we have said, the problems in my family colored my sense of the solubility of the problems of the world outside: all peace was but a

⁴⁶ It is probably this text derived from *Daniel XII:3*: “QUI AUTEM DOCTI FUERINT FULGEBUNT QUASI SPLENDOR FIRMAMENTI ET QUI AD IUSTITIAM ERUDIUNT MULTOS QUASI STELLAE IN PERPETUAS AETERNITATES.” “Moreover they who have been learned shall shine like the splendor of the firmament, and they who educate many to justice shall shine as stars for perpetual eternities.” Translation by Mason Hammond, Pope Professor of Latin Language and Literature Emeritus.

threatened armistice; the end of one war was the seedbed of the next, life on earth being one long war from the beginning. Molly Howe's device for underlining that conviction in my play was to weave the music by Shostakovich played at Stalin's funeral through the return of Agamemnon to the palace of the Atrides to his murder at the end of the play. That worked so well, that after the murder was enacted on the audience's level, and Clytemnestra in her dark evening cloak wheeled to acknowledge her guilt ("What had to be done, I did. They're dead down there. I hit him with the ax. They're dead down there."), the audience gasped, because her cloak was lined with bloodred silk from shoulders to the ground. Molly's direction of the cast through such details made the production an astonishing success; and the distinguished audience the bare two nights of its run spread the news to the extent that I had the New York agent which committed me to theater within a week [sic]. Elinor Hughes (*Boston Herald*, 7 February 1953) said of it: "There is a fair amount of action, limited, of course, by the script books and by the production scheme which hints at realistic performance but does not for the most part actually show it. The device works quite well, except for certain moments when Mr. Alfred's text tends to burst its formal boundaries and soar to heights of genuine dramatic excitement. Then the spectator longs to release the performers from their book and set them acting in dead earnest." Mr. MacLeish generously called it "one of the few really successful verse plays of the generation"; but for me the triumph of the whole venture was when Elizabeth Bowen, one of the greatest writers of this age, walked across the room, took my Cassandra, Elizabeth Richards, by the hand, and elegantly stammered: "You mm-ade me cry."

Amazingly enough, I had not been anxious about the outcome of the play as I was about my oncoming doctoral orals. I read for them exhaustively [for] two years, augmenting literary histories with deep reading in the works which characterized each period; and my friend, Jonas Barish⁴⁷, then a tutor in Dunster House, gave me mock orals over and over till the eve, when he gave me the first martini of my life, and whisked me off to the movies right after dinner. It was the kind of martini that Hemingway, with an eye on the General's conviction of the necessary reserves before a battle called a

⁴⁷ 1922–1998, scholar and teacher, Professor of English, University of California at Berkeley.

Montgomery—nineteen parts gin to one of vermouth. My gums and jaw went instantly numb, and I came to wild-eyed as the movie was ended and had to be led home. Jonas's martini had done its blessed work however; I fell into a dreamless sleep the moment my head hit my pillow.

Orals boards then were kept anonymous as firing squads. When I entered the room ten o'clock the following morning, I saw with deep relief the familiar faces of Mr. Whiting and Mr. Munn. The third man, however, was Hyder Edward Rollins, whose bibliographical courses with their blizzard of papers, I had avoided like the plague. "Who are yew?" he said in his deepest Texan, "I don't know yew." When I told him, my heart a third sole to my feet, I saw with alarm that the other two were the shortest fuses in the Department, Howard Mumford Jones, called "Donald Mumford Duck" because of the fury of his outbursts at ignorant candidates, and Perry Miller, famous for having stopped an orals dead because a student didn't know the name of one book. I chain-smoked my way through two packs of cigarettes and never stopped talking until the five-minute break between hours. When I reentered the room, and found them all standing, I thought my goose was cooked. But they clustered round me, shook my hand, and sent me home early, two whole centuries of literature unexamined. That afternoon Samuel Eliot Morison took me to [the] Symphony. "I take it you passed," he said at the intermission, and left before the Mahler that he did not want to sit through.

Delirious with relief, I realized I would never have to take another examination again. That and the success of the sections I led, deepened my sense of belonging to the University in earnest. I had fixed on the Orrery⁴⁸ papers in Houghton as a thesis topic, with George Sherburn as my advisor. My notion was, noble earl that he was, since he had known Pope and Swift personally, I might be able to do a kind of *Paidea* of an Eighteenth Century noble patron. But one entry after another in his journal reading "Supped with Swift; I was in good form" convinced me of the futility of that dream. Mr. Whiting then suggested that if I made the Middle Ages my field, there might be an

⁴⁸Letters to and from Charles Boyle, 4th Earl of Orrery, and John Boyle, Earl of Cork and Orrery. Boyle was a soldier and dramatist and corresponded with some of the literary lights of his day, including Jonathan Swift.

opening for me as in Instructor at Mr. Magoun's retirement. I switched my topic to Old English poetry and have not regretted it since.

Lillian Hellman used to say that I loved people as compulsively as dog-lovers did dogs. She was right. My students intrigued as much as delighted me. I held open office hours night and day, since my rooms in DeWolfe Street were right in the middle of the Harvard Houses. After nine thirty each night, I served coffee to whoever came and talked them deaf, dumb and blind on every subject from Stevens's "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" to the latest ups and downs in classroom romance. One night I particularly remember a boy and a girl came so on the outs they talked to each other only through me. When I asked what was the matter, the girl said, "I got an A-minus and he got a B-plus". I offered them sticky buns from Otto's; and thank Heaven, they smiled and made up.

Otto's was one of the last true bakeries in Cambridge, with its ovens in the Otto's was one of the last family-bakeries in Cambridge, with its own ovens in the basement. Its windows kept the seasons, Christmas, [The rest of this sentence is missing.]

When I became a resident tutor in Kirkland House through the recommendation of Robert O'Clair, who had become its House-Librarian, I kept the coffee hours up. As opposed to the thirteen Houses, now all coeducational, there were seven undergraduate Houses at Harvard then all male, sophomores through seniors. Patterned after the Oxford Colleges, each House had its own Senior Common Room, and library. Kirkland, whose Master was the Pope Professor of Classical Literature, Mason Hammond, had a superb one of Latin and Greek classics, in a beautiful eighteenth century house, fireplaces crackling in its main rooms. Each of us tutors had charge of one entry. When it came time for me to herd the boys in my entry, above the Dining Hall, to the Master's Residence for tea, I at last found the Harvard I had imagined—calm, traditional, and patrician, Hammond's wife, Florence, irresistibly lovely, serving tea off silver on Thursday afternoons, to the boys in their date clothes as the streets darkened outside and grew still.

