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A Vindication of Two much-injured Women

HUGH McKELLAR

IT is with the greatest pleasure that we announce to the world of English studies that all existing books, notes, and critical studies on *King Lear* will soon have to be burned, buried, or otherwise disposed of. For scholarship on this masterpiece has been knocked galley-west by the discovery, in some romantic old thatched cottage in England, of a newsy letter dated from Stratford-on-Avon, July 5, 1604, which indicates that the present interpretation of *King Lear* is radically and viciously wrong, since it is really a highly practical moral and edifying tract. This means, of course, that our attitudes toward the various characters will have to be completely altered; so, by way of breaking the bombshell gently, we have undertaken to set forth clearly how two characters who have hitherto been regarded with loathing, were originally intended as paragons of injured virtue. We refer, of course, to their Graces the Duchesses of Albany and Cornwall—Goneril and Regan, for short. Radical as this change of approach may seem, we rejoice to see that before long, critical scholarship will be forced to agree with us.

The reader will remember that in the play, as heretofore understood, Regan and Goneril display their amicable qualities in the very first scene. Their estimable parent having decided to divide his kingdom among his daughters (provided they love him) and then go and live with them, both ladies vow and declare that they love him to the very borders of idolatry, and are rewarded with nice large slices of kingdom. Their silly young sister Cordelia is not so smart, and if the King of France hadn't agreed to marry her, what would have become of her? We are not surprised to learn later that this monarch's subjects rebel against him; a man who had no better sense than to marry a woman without any money was created expressly to be rebelled against. Be that as it may, before long the father and daughters have some differences of opinion, which result in Lear's explaining to them just what they are, in terms which do not permit of misunderstanding. He then runs out into a rainstorm and goes mad; and all critics have blamed this on his wicked daughters.

Well! all that, we trust, will be changed by the epoch-making letter we are about to present. It was written by a nice young man whose parents, having paid well to have him taught the rather superfluous accomplistments of reading and writing, were confronted with the problem of getting some return on their expenditure. To this end they apprenticed him to a lawyer in Stratford, warning him to write home frequently so they would be sure he hadn't forgotten how. Since Stratford was a rather quiet place, he had a bit of difficulty finding enough news to fill up the frequent letters his parents demanded; but fortunately his lodgings at the lawyer's commanded a fine view of those inexhaustible sources of news—the People Next Door.

All things considered, they were rather nice people, but there was a skeleton in their closet. The head of the house, a Mr. Shakespeare by name, came of a long line of genteel land-owners, and his father had held several important offices in town. But this degenerate scion was in the habit of

jaunting off to London every so often, for the wicked reason of writing and acting plays. Plays being the most presumptuous of known creations (except actors), it would clearly be his fault if a plague should visit Stratford . . .His wife bore her cross bravely, for it must be admitted that play-acting was fairly lucrative, and money goes a long way towards soothing outraged moral sensibilities. This year, Mr. S. had set off for London early in June, but had returned unexpectedly after three weeks' time—and the drama preserved in this famous letter was about to unroll. For the reader's convenience we will not follow the quaint Elizabethan constructions and spelling, but will present a synopsis of the main ideas.

It seems that late one afternoon the apprentice, glancing out the window, saw an elderly lady dismount from an ox-cart and walk up to the house next door. He learned that her name was Mrs. Hathaway, and that she had come to visit her daughter and grand-children. The additional pleasure of visiting her son-in-law seemed to disconcert her slightly; but Ann Shakespeare welcomed her warmly, and shortly afterward was seen upstairs airing the famous second best bed. Just as she was shaking the pillows out the window, rain began to fall, and the apprentice had to desist from his observations when she closed all the windows. However, the next morning a hot sun coaxed open every window in Stratford, and he was able to record for posterity what happened next door.

Old Mrs. Hathaway descended to breakfast to find her son-in-law casually dipping strawberries in wine, and when he inquired how she had slept, she told him in detail. She declared that the bed was disgraceful: it was lumpy, and smelled mouldy, and she had been first too hot, then too cold—such a thing to expect a person to sleep in! Moreover, she had had *company* of a particularly ravenous nature. She would swear he had brought them back from the London playhouses; she was used to the Stratford variety, but these blood-thirsty monsters! Her daughter's extreme confusion and profuse apologies were not shared by the master of the house, who continued to dip strawberries with a cool regularity which stung the old lady beyond endurance. Her voice began to carry as she inquired why, if poor Annie felt she simply couldn't behave herself, why she had to take up with the likes of him—wicked, nasty, play-acting sinner! She wouldn't stop for breakfast in the house of such a man, see if she would! She would go right out into the street and hail an ox-cart to take her home. Son Will making not the slightest objection, she carried out her threat, to the delectation of the whole street; and as she was leaving, she poured out an aria of invective and epithet, which was carried to still greater heights by the sight of her son-in-law calmly noting down her expressions with pad and pencil. Amid delighted cries of "More!" from the gathering crowd, she seized the neckyoke of a passing ox-team and mounted the vehicle behind with the greatest dignity. And thus she made her exit from fair Stratford.

Mr. Shakespeare, still tranquil, was heard to remark, "Just imagine, Annie dear, if we had that to put up with all the time! Two generations in a single house of storms the cause are, and of bitter brawling." At this point he was rebuked by his wife, that he should turn an affront to her dear mother into his miserable blank verse. Was ever woman so ill-used as she? A compliment from her husband on the fluency of her own blank verse provoked her so extremely that only the non-appearance of an ox-cart prevented her following the maternal example.

Can it be doubted, now, that this is the inspiration for *King Lear*, especially since some of the choicest remarks which Lear showers on his daughters coincide exactly with those in the letter? Therefore, who wants to hang onto outdated theories about the purpose of the play? Obviously Shakespeare was pouring out his mighty genius on behalf of people who have cantankerous oldsters quartered on them—especially where the two generations are so much alike they can't get along for love nor money. The wholesome moral to be drawn is that you should take out enough insurance that you will never have to go to live with your children. So it is clear that Regan and Goneril are objects of sympathy.

Take Goneril, now. She is obviously the type who would be a perfect housekeeper. Every chair in Albany Castle would have its proper place, and she would not suffer that its foot be moved. One can imagine Goneril, after giving a state dinner, sitting down to count the spoons; and if she lacked one, taking tea with her noble acquaintances until she found which one had filched it. Not that she would be too parsimonious to buy a new one, but that spoon would have its proper place in her buffet, a place which no other spoon could fill so well.

To such a woman, it would be a matter of utmost importance that meals should be served piping hot on the stroke of the set hour. If an unlucky cook sent up dinner at two minutes past seven, Her Grace would eat it in stony, ominous silence; after which she would descend to the kitchen with a determined air. . . . . Later, Oswald would run down to place an ad in the London Times (which surely goes back at least that far) that the Duchess of Albany needed a new cook; and if you went strilling behind the castle, you might stumble over a little mound of fresh earth . . . She would have Albany well trained if he didn't get home at twelve, he got no lunch. You can see, then, what would happen when Lear moved in with his hundred knights, and took to romping in two hours after dinner-time, crying "Let me not stay a jot for dinner, go get it ready!" He was wounding Goneril in the most vital part of her self-esteem; if one can't maintain a regular dinner-hour, what is there left in life for one? Moreover, one hundred men in her house whom she couldn't order around would be an insupportable provocation. Who can wonder that she decided he should pay an extended visit to Her Grace the Duchess of Cornwall?

Now, many people consider Regan a venomous little brunette with no scruples at all. Assuredly this was not Shakespeare's intention: he was a loyal Englishman, and every true Briton knows that a member of the Peerage can do no wrong. *Nous regardons a deux fois,* in such a case. Even if Regan were not the paragon she is, still she is a Royal Duchess, and as such, free from all breath of slander. However, she is overflowing with love and virtue. We know that she loved her father, because right before our eyes he asked her, and she said she did. Cordelia suggested that she didn't love her husband, but she proves her love right before our eyes by undertaking to assist him in a minor surgical operation which he thought needed performing, on the strength of the text, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." He wasn't the only one who could play around with people's anatomy either. Like a dutiful nurse, whose place it is to spare the doctor any inconvenience, she undertook to restrain a servant whose ideas differed from her husband's by exploring his thoracic cavity with a sword. Was it her fault if the exploration proved fatal? She just didn't have much acquaintance with medicine, for later poison disagrees

with her . . . Regan was a considerate hostess: she told her father that she would prefer him to go out in the rain because she couldn't make him as comfortable as she would like to, and she didn't do things by halves. She also offered to have her own servants look in at him once a month or so to see if he wanted anything, so he wouldn't have to keep those troublesome knights. Yet, in spite of the love, virtue, consideration, and executive ability which we have clearly shown Regan to possess, she got a rough deal: her father called her everything he could lay his tongue to, and the critics agree. Well, that will be changed!

It is further laid to the charge of Their Graces that they both fell in love with a gentleman who is usually referred to simply as the Bastard. We use the word with reluctance, but unfortunately that was the gentleman's condition. After hearing their father's description of them, the poor ladies doubtless felt they and he had a great deal in common. Regan's decision to fall in love with him was undoubtedly wise: she had no husband any more, and the husband whom she had loved so devotedly had with his dying breath promoted Edmund to a high position. What better choice could she make for the bestowal of her heart? We grant that it was a bit grabby of Goneril to fall in love with Edmund while she still had a husband, but likely he had been late for dinner again, and she thought he was getting out of hand. No doubt she was convinced she could train Edmund properly. But we think it was for the best that they were all killed, for if Goneril had got him, he too might have taken to coming in late, which would have frustrated poor Goneril and made her unhappy. Better dead.

And what need I say more? For time would fail me to tell of their many other excellences and virtues. I close, then, in the serene conviction that virtue is its own reward, and that we may have been the humble instrument of uncovering what Shakespeare really is in this great play: that only justifiable kind of artist, a moral writer. To this end he has presented these gentle ladies, whose edifying portraits we have just reconstructed in their proper proportions; and we advise all our gentle readers to ponder well their good example.

FINNEGAN

Alastair Macdonald

From silver river's little dipper
Pleur-est-belle when spate ebb-bending
Arch!
A silver glimmer tipple. Aye,
Warm chesting musky
Frangipanepain
Says Finagain
The shagged chieftain
Bunching strong, gorse-flinging Druid mounds.
Eye shining whinn thin howling everywhere,
Big hollow thunder old,
Bone hollow subway new
Beneath tram trodding city
Dusty Fillegan is there.

Where Albertine Went

D. C. SLOTE

FROM somewhere behind her, Margaret could hear the faint music of a phonograph. She was not conscious of the music as something separate; rather, the softened tones of an oboe were part of the composite picture that lay revealed before her. With the front of her shoes on one side of the threshold, and her heels on the other, she stood poised between the warmth of the house and the chill air of the night.

She leaned slowly against the door-post and tried to catch the sound of the music, rather wishing she had increased the volume of the phonograph before. Standing there on the threshhold, she knew how very far away the phonograph was, even though it was just around the hall corner.

The shadows behind the tree were suddenly increased. Margaret looked intently at them and realized that someone had walked past the house. As she watched, a figure moved quickly down the street, became lost among the tree shadows.

Her hands and breast were getting chilled from the outside air, but her back was still quite warm. She enjoyed the sensation, not daring to move her legs because of the coldness of the cloth in her skirt.

The shadows behind the tree were again disturbed as someone passed through them. Margaret watched eagerly, and to her surprise she noticed that it was the same person who had been going in the opposite direction a few moments before. Now the figure stopped in front of the house, staring at her. She suddenly realized that it was the young man who lived several blocks down the street.

"I thought I saw you there," the figure said. "You know, you present a very interesting picture standing like that on the threshold with your face in deep shadow. When I passed you a few moments ago, you were completely oblivious to my presence, so I just walked on. Funny though, I got a block down, when I though I'd come back to see if you were still here and . . ."

Margaret smiled back at him, knowing very well that her smile would be invisible at this distance. She turned and looked squarely at the bulb, and tried to think of something to say. When she had first met this fellow, about two weeks ago, just after he had moved into the new house, she had been speechless. She *did* manage a few smiles, but words were impossible. Now, at her secure distance from the other fellow, she felt sure of herself. It would not be too difficult to speak to him now, since he is so far away and his face is invisible.

"I — didn't see you when you went by, because I was . . . thinking about . . .well, I noticed you after you had passed the tree." (Margaret had almost said that she knew he had passed the house because of the disturbed shadows, but she realized in time that one does not mention things like that.)

"I'm glad you noticed me, anyway, no matter when it was," the

young man laughed quietly. "Aren't you afraid of the cold, standing there without a coat? Why don't you get something on and come for a walk?"

"My parents aren't home tonight," Margaret answered quickly.

"That's too bad. It's a beautiful night for a walk, you know. As a matter of fact, I've been walking for about an hour and just a little while ago I began to feel cold. But if we went for another walk, I would soon warm up again. It's really too bad you can't come."

Margaret watched him in silence. She knew she should either say or do something but, for some reason, she hesitated. There was something that disturbed her about this man in front of her. She remembered that last week she had been on the bus and this same dark man had suddenly got on, and sat opposite her. For absolutely no reason, Margaret had felt ashamed, had twisted her fingers worriedly and had fixed her eyes on the floor. When she had ventured to look up, the man was staring quizzically at her, and had suddenly smiled. Her embarrassment was frightening; her whole vision was blurred so that the figure of the man opposite her began to twist and bend before her. Somehow his open smile was transformed into a hideous leer that spread over his whole face, dancing and undulating crazily before Margaret's vision. Suddenly she had leapt to her feet, her ears bursting with the sound of her own heartbeat, and got off the bus several blocks ahead of her usual stop. She had walked slowly then, through the night, thinking of the man's face, of his eyes, and the way he had smiled; and she knew, as she walked down her own darkened street, that she would again dream those strange dreams.

"Perhaps you had better go in then, if you won't deign to come with me," the man was laughing at her. Margaret looked intently at him, still loath to break the perfect beauty of the situation. She wanted to remember the softened tones of the phonograph blending with the night ahead of her; she wanted to etch in her mind forever that unreal glare of light from the bulb, and the way the darkness crouched just beyond its radiance.

"Wait a minute," said Margaret, "I'll get my jacket and come with you."

The tree had witnessed many nights since then. The snows had come and violently beat at its branches, twining around each twig, feeling everything and sifting among the open pieces of bark, and then they had left, and summer had returned. Margaret had gone past it often, as she went up the walk to the house, and there had always been the dark man who walked along beside her. For months they were always together; she would sometimes clasp the dark man's hand, and they would stand silently, very happy. Always they would nod to the tree as they passed, and smile at each other, realizing that their respective thoughts need not be spoken.

And in the night, after they had begun to walk slowly along the darkened streets, they would listen to the wind, a dark wind, singing loudly in the still-naked trees. Everywhere they would sense the smell of freshness, of darkness, of soft lamplight, the taste of wind, of dampness, and of loud tree-songs. Sometimes, when the man looked carefully and slowly at her, Margaret would realize how much they both agreed with night and the wonderful things of the darkness. It was only when

she was alone that she would think about the immensity of their relationship, and would think softly to herself:

"I love you, Life; and I fear you, Death; and I am lost to your Sister, Beauty.

But then the man would come again, and they would walk together far from home, out towards the meadow. When they lay in the grasses, they felt very secret, very small, and held tightly in each other's arms, Margaret would talk against the man's lips, saying the words of lovers, and then not remembering what she had said. The meadow was always dark when they got up to go home; the moon had vanished, and a wind had sprung up, so that the long, unkempt weeds rustled and swayed against their bodies as they crept through them. One night they startled a rabbit ahead of them, and they stood, hand in hand, as the noise of the invisible animal died away among the grass. Then they were on the street again, and would walk home.

And then suddenly, the man was gone . . .

Now, as Margaret comes along slowly, she is alone. It is the grey part of the day, when grey thoughts and grey deeds occur. Nothing harsh or violent can ever happen at this time, for on the grey bridge between daylight and darkness the traveller must have a respite. Margaret is nearing the end of the bridge for this day, and the greyness is slowly becoming thicker. She walks past the tree, into the house, and pushing open the door of her room she steps in. For a minute she lingers on the threshold and thinks of a night some months ago when she had stood on a threshold as she looked into the tree-shadows, and then come the memories of the nights she had spent in the old meadow. She pounds her pillow slightly and sinks her head upon it. And the same feeling again seizes her. Whenever she is alone in her room at this time of the day, she becomes lost in the tunnels of her own thoughts. The enormously hollow feeling again strikes her stomach, and she feels very small, and lost. She is alone, and she realizes sickeningly that that fact is the only sure thing left for her. Those nights in the meadow! The darkness they had shared! The tree-tunnels where the wind sighed! Are they all lost to her? She feels she is dying in the night, and she is hollow, and sick and very tired. She sinks farther back on her pillow, watching the faint crepuscular light from the window as it glosses over the sharp details of furniture and room, so that everything becomes softly unreal. The bed-post seems to blend evenly with the wallpaper behind it; the dresser blends into the lamp beside it, slowly engulfing it in a calculated march of fuzziness; the window seems to elongate both ways and spill its light over the floor and ceiling. Margaret watches and the window becomes darker as the evening approaches, as though a great eye were slowly blinking shut. She is fascinated as the rest of the room blends faster and faster into a grey amorphous whole, that has the eye of the window at its centre. The shadows of the room lengthen, the bed-post shadow engulfs and catches that of the little desk-lamp, the other shadows creep faster and faster around and around the window's eye. Margaret has the sensation of revolving, of going slowly at first, then more quickly. The one spot of light ahead of her forms the nucleus of the rushing, shadowy shapes; a great hub about which the whole room revolves for an indefinable period,

then suddenly stops. And once again she is lost in the wondrous meadow.

She is swept up by the darkness and walks swiftly through the tall, cool grass. There are violins and human voices in every tree, while men pirouette through mazes of tall, glass-like reeds. The trees whisper at her but she hurries past, running in that silly careening fashion that used to make Mother so angry. She can hear a far-off whisper from the tree-tops, and the whisper screams her terrible secret at her. She runs, with her hands to her ears, knowing that her name is not "Margaret," and that here, in the meadow, she must realize that the grasses know, and the night-noises see her in her naked nakedness. But still she hears the terrible, frozen whisper clad in the dark man's voice. Margaret remembers how the great river flows, and how the stars march, in metred step, across the heavens, and the great beauty of the man with the voice of a tree-wind-whisper. The face of the man, of her mother and her father whirl past, and still she thinks of a hot summer's day, and dust, and the sun's sting and how the river flows. . .

There will be more dust, trees, and glass faces, tomorrow!

WHAT SHAKESPEARE SAID . . .

GLORIA WEICHEL

Examinations: *"Present fears are less than horrible imaginings"* (MacBeth).

Teachers: *"The instruments of darkness tell us truths"* (MacBeth).

Med Shows: *"Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair and make my seated heart knock at my ribs"* (MacBeth).

Decorating Committees: *"I pity you"* (Twelfth Night).

The Buzzer: *"A heavy summons"* (MacBeth).

Report Cards: *"This is a sorry sight"* (MacBeth).

Lady Teachers: *"Shrill-shrieking daughters"* (King Henry V).

Rugby: *"You do unbind your noble strength"* (MacBeth).

Holidays: *"A day in April never came so sweet"* (Merchant of Venice).

Latin: *"Why should I play the Roman fool?"* (MacBeth).

High Marks: *"I fear thou play'dst most foully for it"* (MacBeth).

French: *"What strange noises are these?"* (MacBeth).

Students: *"The sleepers of the house"* (MacBeth).

A Graduate Picture: *"The portrait of a blinking idiot"* (Merchant of Venice).

Physics: *"Throw Physic to the dogs"* (MacBeth).

Homework: *"It spoils the pleasure of the time"* (MacBeth).

Spares: *"The rest is labour"* (MacBeth).

Failure in College: *"A careless trifle"* (MacBeth).

Lunch at the Cafeteria: *"It is a banquet to me"* (MacBeth).

A Chemistry Book: *"A book where men may read strange matters"* (MacBeth).

Nurseries for Children: *"Tears shall drown the wind"* (MacBeth).

The Brass Rail: *"Be not found there"* (MacBeth).

Oui Lien

KEITH MORRISON

HE was awakened by the rays of the morning sun shining through the cell window. For a moment he could not remember where he was, but soon the sounds of life from the village in the valley below reached his ears. The sun could just be seen over the tops of distant mountains as he shuffled over to the barred window. Even at that early hour the sweating farmers were *'taaming* their heavily laden baskets of vegetables down to the market in the valley. Slowly winding their way down the mountain paths these early morning wayfarers paid no attention to the old Chinese prison dug into the side of the hill above them.

For many minutes the prisoner stood motionless by the window. As the mist withdrew up the steep, uneven slopes, Martin could distinguish the familiar outline of the valley floor with its small village. Down there were narrow, winding streets enclosed on each side by crude homes. Those by the river's edge were propped up on bamboo piles. A few sampans moved slowly up the filthy river. This Kwang-Si village for the past ten months had been his home here in China's remote south-west corner. He had become attached to the village people as he worked among them, ministering to their spiritual needs. He was known as "Father Martin" to even the small children.

As the village in the alley began to stir, Martin could hear the shouts of children at play. Now and then the guttural voice of a street vender audibly advertising his wares could be heard, as well as the syncopated tapping of a hollow bamboo announcing to the villagers the approach of a portable restaurant. Soon in the distance could be distinguished the periodic clangings of the many private blacksmiths on their crude anvils.

The children, the peasants, the labourers; Martin had learned to love them all. His work in the village had been difficult at first but, finally, the confidence of the Chinese had been won by Martin's sincerity in desiring to help them. A small chapel had been erected where the priest patiently performed his religious functions. The very poor villagers as well as the richer landlords came to Father Martin for confession and counsel. One evening, only a few weeks previously, just as Martin was closing the chapel for the night, a young peasant girl drew near. In the dusk's faint light he was attracted to the simple beauty of *Oui Lien,* her innocent smile, and her shy yet charming disposition. As the days passed, Martin and *Oui Lien* saw each other often, either under the pretext of religious duty or secretly in the moonlit evenings by a clump of bamboos near a deserted pagoda. On one of these meetings, as they conversed in low undertones, *Oui Lien* stopped short. Smiling up into his eyes, she whispered *"Ngoi oui nai, Martin!"* The priest knew he loved her, too, but the words stuck in his throat. This was the first time he had ever felt so attracted to the natural beauty and grace of the Chinese girl.

The sounds from the village below were sickening to Martin. He loved to walk in freedom through those busy streets and smell the thousand odours that only exist in a Chinese village: the odours of dried fish, of garlic, of camphor wood, of stagnant gutters, of slain animals on

the market, of beer from the village inn . . . Ah, that was it! . . . Martin . . . a murderer! The picture of the preceding evening flashed across his mind: in front of the village inn . . . the insult to *Oui Lien* . . . his anger . . . the ensuing commotion . . . and sudden unconsciousness. He remembered now with a bitter heart. When he had regained consciousness he was being dragged by rough Chinese police to the jail and was thrown into this filthy cell, accused of murder.

Like a sweet taste in his mouth was his recollection of *Oui Lien.* She loved him; she would not forget him.

The sun was casting long shadows and the mountains were boldly outlined against the red of the evening sky. Shadows slowly lengthened. Darkness deepened. Martin lay in a heap on the damp prison floor. His body was weak from the beating he had taken and from passing the day without food. Through the windows he carelessly watched the stars appear. Life held no hope. Day was gone and *Oui Lien* had not come. Then, without warning, the room was in complete darkness. A human form, on the other side of the bars, blotted out the light of the stars. The prisoner made an effort to raise his head . . . silence . . .

"Martin," whispered a girl's voice.

"Oui Lien!"

A key turned in the cell door. Father Martin's head fell with a thump to the floor.

LEARNING

Alastair Macdonald

—A window trapping eyes with ink-shot light
And stilling blood in mazes erudite,
Or yet a door that leads past those it led,
To life across the threshold of the dead?
No doors or windows, false or true, have touched my ken.
Has life an incubation room for living men?
Is it then a hand that guides the touch,
The breathing, shadowed roots of life to clutch,
Deep through the starry earth of cloven time,
Or, more, an herb bestowing life sublime?
Nobody digs a pit to reach his spade so shining,
Or climbs to catch a fly that on his nose is dining.
Can learning, as across an edgeless blade
Blue silk is drawn, the width of ripple grade
That's come and gone, both not, so flowing fast,
Or stop the hurtling surface of the past?
Nor life, can it be caught, being just a shimm'ring This,
Like God some say, a flash of time through time's abyss.

The Leaven of Yesterdays

NEIL CARSON

IT was five o'clock.

In the offices of the Metropolitan Trust Co., Mr. Matterby carefully laid down his pen, straightened the ink well and blotter, arranged his papers neatly for the next day's work, and locked his desk.

"You're away early tonight, Walter."

"Yes. I'm in rather a hurry, Cliff." He slipped on an old faded overcoat as he spoke.

"I suppose you'll be coming to bowling club, tonight?"

Mr. Matterby said rather quickly, "No, I'm afraid not. I have another engagement."

"Must be pretty special if you're skipping club. You old dog!"

"Yes, rather special." He turned and hurried down the steps to the street. "Bother Cliff's prying!" he thought irritably. "A man has absolutely no privacy in an office like that."

In the street he walked briskly along in the secure anonymity of the evening crowd. Gradually his anger left him and he relaxed in the teeming impersonality of the city.

Years of restaurant meals and streetcar rides with newspapers had hardened into habit and a fear of change. Suddenly he dreaded the evening ahead of him and he impulsively consulted his memo pad. "5.30 pick up corsage; 6.30 call for Mildred; 7.00 dinner; 8.30 theatre." A vague feeling of omission gnawed the edges of his consciousness. No. He was positive there was nothing else. He was feeling annoyed with himself when he reached the corner flower shop.

Inside, the cool heavy scent of flowers opened a whole forgotten world of dusty memories — of gardens and summer and the lazy bee. The blossoms stood in awkward bouquets, prisoned in a lifeless china world. He thought how much Mildred was like these flowers — delicate and helpless and sometimes, he thought, afraid. He wondered if some day standing alone with her, he could tell her that. But his words were so clumsy! Mr. Matterby looked back over numberless flowerless years and coughed to attract the clerk.

Finally a young girl appeared from the back of the store.

"Yes, sir?" she smiled brightly.

"I believe there was to be a corsage ready for me today."

"What was the name?"

"Oh — Matterby, Mr. Walter Matterby."

"Just a minute, please; I'll see." She examined a number of small wrapped packages. "Yes, here it is, Mr. Matterby. That'll be three dollars, please. Thank you."

When he reached his room at the boarding house, he placed the flowers on the window-sill and hurriedly began to dress. From his room he could look out along the street and watch the crowds fleeing the last heat of the day. Hundreds of faces that went about their lives oblivious of each other. How incredible it was that just five months ago he and Mildred could have passed by in the street like that — perhaps they had, not knowing that some day they would meet and that one night he would be going to ask her . . . It was really incredible. What little hinges our lives move on, mere coincidences. Why if he had not lent that book to Bob Wallace he would never have met her! He remembered going down to Bob's room that night, intending to get it back. He was feeling annoyed at having to ask for it. If people borrowed books, the least they could do was to return them in decent time! By the time he reached the first floor he was quite angry. The door was ajar and the room was dark. As no one responded to his knock he went into the room and switched on the light. A girl he had never seen before was sitting by the window, gazing out into the darkness.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I — I knocked but there was no answer. As the room was dark I thought there was no one here. I'm terribly sorry." He backed awkwardly out of the room.

"Please don't apologize. I understand. I just moved in this morning."

"You mean Bob Wallace has left? How annoying!"
"Is there anything I can do?"

"No, I don't think so. Thank you. You see, Mr. Wallace had borrowed a book of mine. I had no idea he was leaving. It's nothing important really."

"Oh, wait a minute. There were some things left here. Just a second and I'll look." She went to a small book shelf, nervously brushing her hair. "Yes, this must be it. Chinese poetry! How fascinating."

"It's — it's just something I like to pick up occasionally. I'm very grateful." He saw suddenly that she had been crying before he came in and a feeling of helpless concern overcame him. "I'm very sorry," he hesitated; "I'm afraid I've come at a very bad time."

"Please don't be," she smiled kindly.

"Are — are you interested in poetry? You might like to look through this some time . . ."

"You are very kind. Yes, yes, I would like to. And now that we're neighbours perhaps we'll meet more often, Mr. . . . "

"Matterby; Walter Matterby. Yes, I hope so. Yes. Good night."

They had passed occasionally after that and one night he had asked her out to dinner. Since that night they had seen each other often and gradually they had grown quite close together. Although she tried to hide it, he felt that behind her youth and laughter was a sorrow that he somehow comforted. And when he was with her his shy awkward age fell away and he felt happier than he had ever before.

He was startled into the present by the jangling of the alarm clock.

Six-twenty! He hurriedly finished dressing then he fumbled in his billfold for money, tickets — tickets! Oh, damnation! He'd forgotten them! Now they'd have to get them at the box office and that meant getting there well before curtain time. How very annoying.

Later at her room, Mildred answered his knock, smiling warmly. "Hello. I'll just be a minute. You're much too punctual."

"Oh, not at all," he said, pleased. "It's six thirty-two by me, so you see I'm really two minutes overdue. I brought you a little something for tonight."

"Walter, how lovely. But you shouldn't have gone to all that expense."

"Well, tonight is rather special, isn't it?"

"Special? Oh yes, the theatre and everything, you mean?"

He hesitated slightly, "Yes." She hadn't remembered. Of course, it was silly of him to have hoped she would. The whole idea had been ridiculous. Thank goodness he hadn't mentioned the real reason. He thought in agony how he had been going to include a "Three Months Anniversary" card with the flowers.

"Walter, I'm afraid you'll have to pin them on for me. I'm all nervous tonight. Look at my hands tremble. Oh, careful honey! You're crushing them! Walter!"

But it was too late. One of the fragile blossoms lay broken in his hands.

"Now that was clumsy," he said angrily. "I'm sorry I'm afraid I've ruined it."

"Never mind. I'll wear it with one flower less. We cannot spoil our evening because of a broken rose."

That evening, dinner was quieter than usual. In their conversations, Mildred was always the leader, exploring with excitement those regions of thought where he could not follow but only share indirectly. But tonight she frequently fell silent and saw in a flickering light infinite sadness where he, less wise, could see only a sinking candle flame. And though he felt that somewhere in the hinterland of memory there grew a word that he could pluck and offer to her in the silence, his blind tongue could not find it. So he sat stiffly and stirred his drink and his dreams, swirling his life and hers together towards the impossible.

Finally she said, "Walter, must we go to the theatre tonight?"

Surprised, he said, "Of course not, Mildred, if you'd rather not."

He felt somewhat relieved that he had not bought the tickets.

"I'd much rather we went somewhere where we could talk. Just this once."

They left the restaurant and took a cab to the park. A thin curled lizard of a moon had just crawled into the sky and dragged its idly flicking its tail across the lake. Somewhere in its solitude a cricket affirmed the goodness of existence. A faint breeze disturbed the leaves which tossed

restlessly in sleep. They leaned on the railing of the walk and listened to the talking of the waves.

At last he spoke. "Mildred I'm not very good at expressing myself, but these past few months have been the happiest of my life. I know I'm not young any longer, but I have a steady job and—"

"Oh, Walter, let's not talk about anything — just for a while at least. The night is so peaceful, let's not disturb it for a while." They stood together for a long while. Then she said, "You have been very kind and understanding to me, Walter. You'll never know how much it has meant to me. And I have been very selfish and demanding, I'm afraid."

"You know that's not true."

"But I was afraid — afraid you would not understand — and so wanted your kindness." After a silence she said, "Did you know that I had been crying that night we met? Then you came in, just when I needed someone so badly. . . I was thinking of killing myself."

"Oh no, Mildred! Why?"

"It was foolish, really, and I could never have found the courage."

"Please, you mustn't talk about it."

"Have you ever known what it is like to want to die?"

"It's over now, dear."

"Before I came here — it seems so long ago — I was very much in love. The boy was young, a salesman. It wasn't a good job but he was expecting a promotion and then he said we could get married. Then one day he was moved to another city and a few weeks later he wrote and told me it was all off."

"I see. You still love him, don't you?"

"No, I don't think I ever really loved him. It's hard to remember now. But you see — I'm going to have a baby."

They did not look at each other. He gripped the hard cold railing and watched the moon's shattered image drowning in the lake. And suddenly he realized why she had come here, realized that she knew he would try to propose if they were alone. And she had not intended to tell him. A wave of fear and relief swept over him as he thought of it. How narrowly he had missed making an utter fool of himself. In the darkness he could only mumble, "I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I didn't understand."

"Now you know."

"If there's anything I can do. Do you need any money?"

"No. You are too generous. Now I think we'd better go home."

"Yes. Yes, perhaps."

Somehow they made their way back home, creeping along the back alleys of conversation, pretending this had always been the way between their lives. And when they stood outside her room, each was alone again. She turned and smiled sadly, "I'm sorry I ruined our evening."

"Well there are other evenings," he said cheerily. "Good-night, Mildred."

"Good-bye Walter."

He climbed the stairs wearily and in his room flung himself dazedly on his bed. How horribly grotesque the whole incident seemed. Why was it that everything his life touched seemed to twist into mockery? It was so late, so late and he was growing tired. Perhaps — perhaps it had been his fault. He did not know. Better in the solitude of his room to press his dreams between the pages of a book.

SONG TO A WANDERER

Diane McLaren

My beloved traces weary footsteps through rutted rice lands,
And drops a tear of pity for the homeless and the less-loved,
Who wander forever across this waste earth-water,
Breathing world's air but never balm of the soul-fed;
O' he is my erring light-of-love, a very votive tremble,
A somethingness of spirit and of cosmic mystery,
An unknown vagrant wanderer, whither bound?
Whose coming will light my Spring like Balder's smile.

By all the green, grey, clear, turgid waters pilgrims know
He seeks; the high-born Himalayas and their holy secrets
Are his, the earth-born, the displaced, the yearning.
Hope lies lily-petalled on the breast of my beloved!

When we were young, when he began these wanderings,
Then the strength of mighty stallions surged in limbs
That knew no going back. The gentler peace he buffeted,
Jostled away. For him the flight and search. His lips
Knew no soft sigh, but only male audacity of purpose:
"I cannot stay, I cannot stay, I must take my canoe
And vanish away, for the Wanderer spirit is calling me."
Gods, how long the searching takes! A mere eternity
Of your time would not equal its tithe. We were young!

Where Does Your Hope Lie Youth?

Jack Chambers

Where does your hope lie, youth, down the delirious slope
to the ripe bodies in the delicious grove
of wine-filled breasts
where chuckling friends to sooth you satisfied?
What of the calm days, when sleep must dull the body
unprepared for the knowledge of praise
and future thirsts from repetitious neglect
circling deliriums nulled with wines?
What of the early ways, the crude strong steps into the green hills
and the powerful air alone?
Sharp solitudes, singled despair.
The glimmering suggestion of foggy praise and tightening
flesh cords,
and the white flesh curdling blue with age
have toppled the proud foundation and bent
a green young core aware.
The mute unyielding trumpets have levelled the singing
monument to love
like the sea and the shore has washed the wordless
particles below all surfaces.
—even in the passing of the moons they cannot fully rise
but half submerge and bleat in stunted tongues.

Save all that is beautiful until the end.
Put it away until your dying day.
Save all music for your passing
Place a poem where you lay.
Pluck all songs from birds of flying
And with them fill your ending air
And taste the sound of human grasses
Earth's skull will wear your hair.

Small twinkle-voiced cricket
Cuddled in the dregs of a tree-tall world
Your brittle harmony between the hushing trees
Is heard by those million stars and all the sunken houses
Shook by iron echoes in the ringing streets
Stretch dark and listen.

Trial of a City

DIANE LANE

A DRAMATIC FANTASY IN VERSE BY EARLE BIRNEY

IF there were ever a need for a sympathetic understanding of society and a faith in humanity, it would be in the twentieth century. At the present time, as in all ages, thoughtful men hopefully turn to the poets for a strengthening re-estimate of the human condition. Unfortunately they are often disappointed. Modern poetry has too frequently shown itself to be in one extreme highly personal and esoteric and, in the other, conventional and commonplace. A brighter side to the picture is the gradual development of the new humanism, an ideal toward which many of our finest poets are now striving. In the modern sense, humanism signifies, not a return to classic letters in opposition to dogmatism as in the Renaissance, but an address to humanity at large. That modern poetry has failed to erect a vital humanism against the mechanical forces of our materialistic age is now being recognized, and the tendency of the poet to condemn the ills of our society rather than to understand them is losing effect. Chaucer and Langland, the major poets of the Middle Ages, realized the necessity of retaining a balance between the personal and the impersonal, the individual and his social values, and several significant modern poets are following their example.

A sympathetic yet realistic social consciousness is implicit in the work of the Canadian poet, Earle Birney. Esteemed as one of Canada's more original modern poets, Mr. Birney established his literary reputation in 1942 with the publication of *David and Other Poems,* followed by *Now is Time, The Strait of Anian,* and recently *Trial of a City and Other Verse.*

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Birney is not an imitator of the school of Eliot or Dylan Thomas. Technically his work reflects the influence of pre-Chaucerian verse. Occasionally, as in *Anglo-Saxon Street* and in one part of *Trial of a City,* he deliberately imitates Anglo-Saxon poetic techniques, alliteration, mid-line hiatus and descriptive compounds. Indirectly throughout all his work, the characteristic rhythmical verse movement, sparing use of adjectives and strength of expression may also be traced to the early English poetry.

A realistic nationalism is one of Mr. Birney's significant contributions to Canadian poetry. He has frequently shown an interest in interpreting world events and conditions in Canadian terms. *Now Is Time* was hailed as one of the most powerful expressions of a Canadian's reaction to the Second World War to appear. Mr. Birney's poetry has revealed him as a humanist, interested in people, events and conditions of the present time. His realistic, straightforward picture of modern life is enriched by an ironic sense of humour. The irony, however, rarely marred by cynicism, is constructive and does not obliterate an ultimate faith in humanity.

Trial of a City is a witty, cleverly contrived fantasy satirizing the modern materialistic attitude toward life. A poem in dramatic form, it is modelled on the procedure of a public hearing. The time is "five years later," the place, a basement of the Vancouver courthouse. The subject

under controversy is the proposed damnation of the great city of Vancouver — now two million souls — by the Office of the Future. In more general terms, modern civilization is on trial for its life.

The Office of the Future, represented by Mr. Gabriel Powers, can see no adequate excuse for the continued existence of this vast metropolis. In Powers' words,

> Its lifeliness decreases and must ever
> pass into nothingmist.

The people of the city naturally object and have hired Mr. P. S. Legion for their defense. The Minister of History presides over the hearing and much to the discomposure of the defense, rules that only the dead may testify for they alone are neutral in the issue.

Legion is the epitome of an easily recognized point of view. A shallow materialist, bursting with a strictly commercial civic pride, in his eyes the modern way of life is irreproachable. Industrial progress, frigidaires, pressure cookers, ten thousand science grads a year, a twelve-hour week, to him are the ultimate of human achievement. The humour of the drama is always at Legion's expense. The witty remarks of the sardonic representative of the Future constantly bewilder and deliberately misinterpret this worthy representative of the people. Mr. Powers speaks in a strange vocabulary of his own, the language of the future. His subtle puns, suggestive compounds and apt malapropisms reduce Legion's protests to the ridiculous and add direful overtones to the statements of the witnesses.

The ghosts who appear to testify have all taken time out of eternity to observe the modern city of Vancouver. The first witness for the city is the discoverer of Burrard Inlet, Captain Vancouver himself. He prefers the forest he observed on his first visit to the city that has risen to take its place, remarking,

> 'Tis big as my old London, and as dun,
> As planless, not so plaguey, but less fun.

Mr. Powers now summons the chief of the Salish, the first Indian to meet Captain Vancouver's exploration party. With lyric simplicity the chief describes the happy, peaceful life of his people before the coming of the white man. With naive insight he effectively points out the unfortunate results of "civilization" on his simple tribe. His testimony is a powerful strike against Legion's insistence on the advantages of "culture built on art and thinking, nylon, telephones, jet planes, gadgets for the wife."

The parade of witnesses continues. Professor Seen, a geologist, speaking in a terse imitation of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, describes the geological history of the area and the millions of years spent in its formation. Powers retaliates by pointing out the insignificance of two hundred years of civilized development. Gassy Jack Deighton, a loquacious, sinning old-time bar keeper — according to Legion, "Vancouver's first guest-lodge proprietor" — despite a three-page prose testimony succeeds in alternately shocking and amusing the hearing rather than providing a

defense. Powers' remark "There goes the very gas the city swelled from" seems to be apt for the moment.

In contrast to Gassy Jack, Powers calls for the Fourteenth Century author of *Piers, the Plowman,* moralist Will Langland, who "plucked London's praying pride six sanctuaries agone." Langland's speeches, imitative of Middle English verse, are intense and ironically significant. In a concisely fluent alliterative meter he reveals the unhappy results of the mechanical age on the human being. He illustrates the greed, lack of faith, self-satisfaction, the superficial estimate of human values, the futility of a materialistic attitude. Although Legion promptly condemns him as a Red, Langland is really deploring the lack of moral strength as the author of *Piers, the Plowman,* did six hundred years ago.

The case for the city seems to be lost. The witnesses, under the prompting of Powers, revealing the evils of our age, have failed to balance the scale. Suddenly an indignant housewife bursts in. Mrs. Anyone represents the essential qualities of life which up until now have been obscured by the machinery of modern living. The eternal optimist, she feels that beauty, love, hope and peace all still have their place in the world. Legion and his commercialism fade away and she becomes a vital representative of humanity. Her insistence that the future's threat of death only intensifies living completely defeats Powers' case, and the city is saved from damnation.

Poetry reflecting a social condition, to have a direct intellectual significance, is of necessity lengthy, usually written in the form of satire, drama or narrative. The poet is frequently in danger of becoming prosaic and commonplace. However, Mr. Birney has a unique talent for versification and has skillfully varied his technique in *Trial of a City.* The Anglo-Saxon and Middle English imitations are clever, the diction is simple yet powerfully precise. The excessive punning and elaborate figurative language is sometimes too contrived, but is a witty contrast to the serious tone of several of the other speakers. The lyric excellence and vivid emotional intensity achieved in the picturesque lines of the Indian chief make his speeches some of the most poetically satisfying in the drama.

The Vancouver setting creates an atmosphere of immediacy and does not weaken the satirical force. The implications of the poem may apply to any modern city. Variety in tone and in treatment of theme have made *Trial of a City* an entertaining as well as thought-provoking piece of work.

FLIGHT

Jack Chambers

Circle, circle afar in height of the empty land
steering vision in space
high of the printless sand,
raked with heated immobility and stand
then swoop ever, swoop ever
soar to twist and search a footless air
high of the printless sand.
Climb endlessly, climb endlessly by tired wing
onto flying cloud
dive recklessly, watch hungrily
apart from the empty crowd.
Perch alone in the dark, quiver and call,
fall to hunger down the searcher's wall
dead with the loveless crowd.

THE PARANOID

Letitia Burke

Down the dusty road of Time,
I walk alone, I walk alone.
While those around me snicker and sneer,
And laugh and giggle with affected scorn.
Of those blind fools, I have no fear:
They trample each other with heedless glee.
Clutching, scrappling, grappling for all
Reaching for big things, actually small.
I pass along the way . . . alone.
Unmindful of their thrusts and jibes,
Their evil looks and malicious talk,
Because I dare, alone to walk.
Here and there, a scornful stare
Or some deceitful smile,
Or whispered praise or friendly pat,
All designed to catch me in their trap.
But my eyes are opened . . .
A thoughtful, watchful vigilance I keep.
They shall not drag me into their lair,
Or bind me forever, in a hideous snare—
No; I'll stay clear of their muck and slime,
Their dreadful clutch with hands of grime.
Time passes on and on . . .
And I with it alone, alone,
All, all alone
And my tears are my own to weep.

SOMEDAY

Jaime Alonso

Someday you shall climb a tree
In the same way that now
Your life springs, like a fountain,
Towards the stars . . . .
Someday you shall climb a tree
Sweetly and gently,
From the intimate entrails of the earth . . .
Along with the symphony of a latent rhythm
You shall ascend
From among the ashes of your past
And, flowered in love,
Your hands shall burst into branches
To hold generously the nest
Of premature hopes. . .
Someday
You shall climb an elm
Of deep and ancient roots
And shall flow
With Franciscan humility
By the green ways of the sap . . .
And then . . . and only then . . .
You shall understand
The creative frenzy of the earth
And shall thank God
For giving you a son . . .

FALLEN IDOLS

Ronald Logan

Once a black cat crept where the blue Sphinx slept
And only the stars took heed
What a meeting was theirs!
What inscrutable stares!
No sound save black ibis in reed.
Like a ripple of ink was the cat's stealthy slink
In approaching the eighth of the seven,
There placing her head, paws 'twixt claws as the bed,
Fell to dreaming beneath the black heaven.
And of that dream? . . . but who dares say?
—Black music no piper should play,
Because it was that of a king and a cat
That once both were gods of a day.

THE INEVITABLE VEGETABLE

Dona J. Murray

Methinks that I shall never see
A pest quite like the lowly pea,
Which, in its green and limpid state,
Reclines serene upon my plate.
Not once, not twice, but oft each week,
Until I hesitate to peek
At menu, dish—through kitchen door,
For fear I find the pea once more.
Somehow a plague of insects light
Upon most plants—perhaps, a blight,
Strikes corn or cauliflower or sprout,
And now and then there is a drought,
But of all plants, one always thrives,
Despite the germs, the pea survives.
It is not that I find its flavour
Though dull it be, so hard to savour,
But just the routine technicality
That it is lacking personality.
Presented plain or drenched in cream—
With carrots makes a common team,
But pea it was and does remain,
My palling tongue longs to refrain,
Still hostesses, resolved to please,
Renew insult with "More green peas?"
Must I accept with equanimity
The pesky pea—unto infinity?