St. John's Collegian

Vol. LXIV - No. 3 ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND Feb. 7, 1951

THE VISIONARY

From the first, she felt herself to be a stranger. On the long ride down the character of the land changed until it all seemed alien to her--the gullied red clay fields, the swept bare earth around the cabins in the country, the lush growth of weeds pressing close to the swept yards, and the thick twisting live growth of vines in the ravines and hollows.

And the people whom she saw through the spotted windows of the coach she would never know, they would remain foreign to her. She watched them as the train passed, gathering its carfuls of the scent of honeysuckle--the barefoot women standing in the open doorways of their shacks, their listless eyes following the train, their shoulders drooping from childbearing and water carrying and hoeing and lifting under the crescent heat of the sun, and the men, the tall lank slow-moving men, drudging behind horses and mules on the dusty roads, in the deep fields.

Then there was the town, Berkton, its streets filled with red dust and heat, its people lounging and indolent, rocking and watching from their porches. And over everything was the washing, insistent heat, coming with the sun in the morning, battering at the houses and streets, and only reluctantly subsiding into its holes with the late darkness.

In this land, in this town, Marsha felt lonely and insecure, a stranger to the earth and to the people, their customs and beliefs. And she was glad to get a job at the college, for a college was a familiar place, and it would take her out of the daily solitude of the hot little room which Jim had found for them when he came to take over his duties at the airport.

As she approached the campus, briskly and promptly, the first morning, she felt she was reaching an oasis both in time and place, in the center of the harsh, sunbeaten town. There was an air about the place of faded fashionableness and isolation and disuse. Far back, down a long chipped walk through a densely green and cool campus, was Jefferson Hall, with its shadows of elegance. Graceful tall columns lined the portico of the main building, and at right angles was a weather-grayed frame ell, fronted by a long veranda. The curving graveled driveway which passed the portico was tangled with weeds, scars of missing bricks spotted the main building, and the unchecked growth of vines and brush mocked at the past formality of the grounds. But as she walked down the chipped walk, for the first time, Marsha felt at home. About Grandon College there was a suggestion of the south she had known from the stories of her childhood, a place of leisure and languor and chivalry. And the silence of the slow waiting moments in the shade-darkened anteroom (the office was still locked and the corridors deserted when she arrived), the enchantment of the almost-familiar south crept upon her. Oak and magnolia trees interlaced their branches high above the window, and the sun spattered off their glossy leaves to fall in a broken pattern upon the ground. Sounds drowsed through the halls of the building--distant unknown footsteps, mellow voices speaking unheard words, dusky silence. Perhaps the genteel traditions of the old south did still

---

on reading e e cummings

out of the powder
blue
a-coming
hail
and farewell
out of a somewhat
odd(-)
ly worded
tell
ing of
t
o
o

H. V. Herman

survive, she thought--in just such places, old and quiet, and protected by green walls of trees and shrubs from the bright, blank, hard-shelled present. And here, perhaps, there might be escape from the tight-lipped beliefs and hatreds of the heat-wearied people of Berkton.

Slow steps echoing down the corridor woke her from her musing. A big colored man carrying a bucket and mop came even with the door, stopped, looked from her to the office door. "Nobody here yet," he said softly. "I'll let you in."

He unlocked the door and backed away, bobbing his cropped head at her as she thanked him, then shuffled back into the hall to start the slow rhythm of his mop against the boards of the floor.

Miss Crampton hurried in a few minutes later, a slender, fussy woman, dressed in a flowered and flounced cotton dress. "Oh, my dear, good morning," she said, touching her fingers to Marsha's. "I'm just so glad to have you here. I'm not usually so late, but everything happened this morning, just everything. Now it won't happen again, but if it does Dobbs will let you in and you can go right to work. I'll explain what you're to do."

Marsha followed her into the small inner office which was hers as registrar, publicity director and assistant to the president, and waited while she opened some envelopes and placed the enclosed letters on two piles. One stack Miss Crampton put to one side, the other she handed to Marsha. "You're to answer these," she said in her soft quick voice. "Copy this letter," she leafed through a confused pile of sheets and pulled one out. "Putting in the applicant's name and address, of course," she added, looking at Marsha brightly. "And if you find any name which is checked with a little check mark, bring it to me, and I'll explain about it. There's a different letter.. but I'll explain that later. Is everything clear? If you have any question, any question at all, just come in and ask me, you hear," she said. "Just come in and ask me."

The letter which Marsha was to type was a response to requests for information about the college. Whether the writer asked for a catalog or an application blank or the requirements of a specific subject, the same flowery and unbusiness-like letter, with an additional paragraph concerning the course inquired about, was sent in answer. Marsha laughed softly to herself as she typed the flourishing sentences extolling the college's advantages... *the location of Grandon College* (the letter said), *on the shore of lovely Grandon Lake, and the climate, are unsurpassed.. a large and extensive campus and facilities for all sports...horseback riding, canoeing, golf, tennis are among the outdoor sports facilities...unexcelled educational advantages* (This was a small statement at the end of the third paragraph)...*we should be glad* (the letter ended) *to consider your application. As our enrollment is almost completed, we suggest that you write again at an early date.*

Writing these phrases in the slow quiet of the morning, sitting in the scrambled disorder of the dark office, Marsha hugged the atmosphere like a shawl around her shoulders. The pleasant disarray of unfinished work, the typewriters set on a shelf against one wall as if the southern gentlewoman had only reluctantly discarded quill pen for these modern contrivances, the occasional low flowing voices, formed a background for the gentle ineffectuality of the office. Remembering the brisk and severe rooms in which she had worked in the north, the brusque stereotyped letters which she had written there, Marsha again smiled with a delight in the softness and languor of the office. This was indeed a pleasant place in which to work.

The colored man who had let her into the office came in twice during the morning, once with a mail bag on his shoulder, then, about eleven, with a pitcher of ice water from which he poured glasses for Miss Crampton, and for Marsha and the other typist. Miss Crampton rustled to her door and called to him as he started out. "Oh, Dobbs."

"Yes-um, yes-um," he stood a little stooped, waiting.

"Mrs. Peters, this is Dobbs," Miss Crampton said to Marsha. "Dobbs carries the mail and brings our ice water and does other little jobs around the college," she said lightly. "Mrs. Peters is our new secretary," she added in an afterthought to Dobbs.

"Yes-um, yes-um," he said, bobbing his head, waiting uneasily.

"Good morning," Marsha said clearly. "I met...," she didn't know whether Dobbs was his first name or his last, she was thinking. He was introduced as a child might be introduced, with a pat on his head and a list of his talents..."We met this morning," she added carefully. At least she would let him know that she knew him, that she had looked at him.

Then he had shuffled out the door to his other little jobs, and Marsha sat in front of her typewriter looking at the faded picture of a gentle people which she had imagined. There was only two dimensions on the picture, chivalry and gentility. But behind the canvas, in the third dimension, were such waiting, stooped people as Dobbs.

In the days that followed Grandon College came into focus. Here there was a skim of kinliness over the accepted base of repression, and rigid, just below the surface of the kindliness, could be seen the shape of the conduct which must be followed. This, then, was the patina of the south.

And under this thin, lusterless patina showed another harsh pattern, clearly drawn by a second form letter, protecting the girls with good southern name, the familiar and accepted sound of Ashe, Tipton, Pendergrass, Quinn, Pate, Sewell, from girls whose names suggested a difference in background or religion. The answer to these girls was brusque and discouraging. *Our enrollment is almost filled...the very highest standards of scholarship are required...we do not anticipate any vacancies...*

In this atmosphere when she spoke to Dobbs the amenities of greeting echoed their vacant unmeaning back at Marsha. Her voice, she felt, had the same sound of rigidity and indifference as the others in the office. If there was time she would add something about the morning news, the weather, the heat, but her sentences sounded ungainly, and at times a feeling of half-shame would catch her, a wondering if her efforts seemed those of pity rather than honesty. But a man's a human being, she thought stubbornly, and was made to be treated as such. Even if I'm the only one who does so. And the morning Dobbs answered her without his usual prefacing "yes-um, yes-um", she felt that he had recognized that, to her at least, he was not just a shadowy cutout of a man, to be spoken to only when there was something to be done.

In August she left the college, left the false kindliness of the staff. Her reason was a practical, northern reason. After weeks of typing the same form letter she had suggested that it could be lithoprinted, leaving a space in which the name of the prospective student would be typed. The lithoprinting could be done from a photograph of a master copy done on one of their own typewriters, she explained, and, if the heading were carefully aligned, the letter would still look like a personal one. Miss Crandall at first said she would think about it, and later, prodded by Marsha, answered, "No, oh no, we just can't do that, the letters must be written to each prospect--they must be individual letters."

"I don't feel I can spend my time typing the same letter over and over," Marsha said. But that would make no difference, she knew. She saw now that at Grandon they were holding fast to all the gestures of the past, whether they were meaningless, or viscous, or false. And in the bright heat of the present the gestures showed that the chivalry which once imbued them had been lost.

For a time Marsha didn't see Dobbs, then unexpectedly, she met him in the supermarket. He had been sweeping the floor, and had stepped aside to let her pass, watching with a waiting look in his eyes.

Marsha glanced by him, then back. "I didn't expect to see you here," she said with surprise. "Aren't you working at the College anymore?"

"No-um," Dobbs said. "No-um. They didn't pay me much so I came over here."

"No, they didn't pay much," she agreed. She had been paid fifty cents an hour--the other typists thirty-five, Miss Crampton had told her privily. Dobbs must have gotten even less. "Do you like it here?"

"Oh, yes-um. It's good work. I like it here." He bobbed his head at her.

"That's good. I changed jobs too," she added. "I'm working in Quinby's law office."

"Yes-um. I knew you left," Dobbs told her.

They stood for a moment, waiting and awkward, until Marsha said "Well, I'll see you again then," and started on down the

alleys of canned goods.

Their meetings were not frequent during the long fall and the late winter. Sometimes on her way to work, Marsha would see his shambling figure and would wait to walk the courthouse block with him, speaking awkwardly of the news, the weather, or asking again if he still liked his work, but one morning, a crisp morning in November, was a day for more than ordinary greetings. She was walking with a delight in the slim tendrils of clouds lying softly above the low buildings of the town square, in the cerulean sky, and in the air, fresh as spring water. It was a crisp fall day, strayed down from the north, from the mountains, from home, and she filled her mind with it.

"What a wonderful sparkling morning," she said when she met Dobbs, and her voice was glowing. "It's like...like mountain water, clear, cool water. And the clouds--have you noticed them?--they're beautiful today."

"No-um, I hadn't looked," Dobbs answered, his face surprised. He lifted his head to look above the roofs of town. "They are pretty," he said slowly, appreciation in his voice. He walked on a little way, watching the changing shapes and colors, and still, when Marsha left him, his eyes were on the low-streaking clouds.

They met only once again. Jim had been transferred and they were returning north after Christmas. Her last time in the supermarket, Marsha looked especially for Dobbs. "I came to say goodbye," she told him when she found him. "I'm going back up north, back to New England." Her voice was full with anticipation.

Dobbs stooped slightly over his broom, his face inexpressive. "Yes-um," he said slowly. "I'm sorry you're going."

"Perhaps we'll meet again some time," Marsha said.

"No-um, I guess not." Dobbs paused and looked past her. "Are there a lot of jobs up north?" he asked unexpectedly.

Marsha was quiet a moment, doubts and qualifications crowding into her mind, the cold of New England, of New York, the expensive, squalid tenements of which she had read, Dobb's age, his inadequate clothing, his experience in, so far as she knew, only menial jobs, and northern intolerance. Would he be better off up there, or had she somehow represented a place where there was respect and humility before man?

"I don't know about jobs." This was true, she told herself; she was evading the other questions but this was the one he had asked. "There might be some in New York, but I don't know." If only she knew someone. If she could just tell him to go see Mr. So-and-so if you want to go north, or I'll talk to him, he'll get you a job. Or if even she knew employment figures and needs, and discriminative practices. She was failing him and herself. "I wish I could tell you, but I can't."

His face was impassive again, and his voice. "Yes-um," he said. "I just wondered."

He had seen her doubts and qualifications, she was sure. And there was nothing she could say to soften the shattering of a dream. "Well, good luck to you," her voice was awkward again. "And good-bye."

"Yes-um. Goodbye-um."

When she went out the door he was still standing motionless, his eyes on the clouds which hung over the alien roofs of Berkton.

D. L. Hammerschmidt

THE ROMANCE OF URINE

Appendix to a Lab. Report

Greek: τὸ οὖρον (neuter accusative or nominative)

Sanskrit: *vari* or *var*, water

Icelandic: *ur*, drizzling rain; *ver*, the sea

Anglo-Saxon: *woer*, the sea

Original sense: water

Etymological Dictionary of the English Language; Skeat, W. W.; 4th Ed., Oxford, 1924

Macduff: What three things does drink especially provoke?

Porter: Marry, Sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine.

Shakespeare

Macbeth, ii, 3, 32

As to grinning when jobbernowls urin'd upon me, 'Tis false.

'A. Pasquin'

New Brighton Guide, 1796

Any minute and extended examination of a phenomenon inflicts upon the examiner the risk of myopia. The myopia of over-specialization, the myopia which makes his microcosm swell and fill the world which contains it. In such a way may urine come to be merely the waste product of cats and frogs and (possibly) man. But although urine may be this and little more, the concept of urine and the force of literary allusion to it is infinitely greater.

Aristotle was saturated with concern for the phenomenon and inquired, "Why is it that sweet-smelling seeds and plants promote the flow of urine?" but ran into a snag when garlic was attributed the same faculty. In the same milennium some Freudian import must have been attributed Herodotus' report of Mandane "..whom, hyr father on a night dreamed to haue let her vryne in.. great aboundance." And Pliny observed the startling phenomenon of somebodies' "..urine (after it is made) congealeth into a certain ycie substance."

By 1325 (at least insofar as records show) the amber fluid was beginning to be looked on with less weightiness. At that time Cambden sung, "He wole wagge his urine in a vessel of glaz." This apparently set a precedent which was, however, not immediately exploited, for it was 302 years before someone accepted the irreverence enough to josh about it: and then it was disparaging. In 1623 Hart expostulated on the title-page of his work "The manifold errors and abuses of ignorant Vrine-monging Empirickes", and then in 1625, apparently infatuated with the epithet, he wrote of "The ordinarie sort of vrine-monging Physitians." The reference is to the diagnostic practice first mentioned 300 years earlier in Daunce of Machabree, to wit: "Maister of Phisike, which on your vryine so looks and gase and stare agaynst the sunne."

About this time the word took on an idiomatic value, and Massinger has one of his play characters report on an ambitious youth apparently aspiring to a position of some eminence: "This hopeful youth Vrines vpon your monument." Once the poesy started, the trickle turned into a stream and we have P. Fletcher in 1633 write in his Purple Isl. (II. xxiv) "Into a lake the Urine-river falls".

(By the way, Ben Jonson must have been taken with the miracle he could produce almost at will, for he conceitedly boasted about it in his Volpone (IV, i) "By the way, I cheapened sprats: and at St. Markes, I vrin'd." Which seems somewhat pointed reference.)

Its metaphorical use had passed into a commonplace when in 1662 Mathew advertised "(He) meets with my pills..and..quite stopt his Urine of Blood." But a vestige of sobriety remained in the cocked-eye of observers and Bacon, after what must have been extensive experimentation, pontifically reported that "The quantity..of..drink, which a man..receiveth into his body, is.. much more than he voideth again..by urine or by sweating."

When in his Fancies (1638), Ford proclaimed, "I will..urine in thy bason" (I,ii), how was the listener to take him? Was he showing contempt? or was he accepting a touching token of hospitality? Boyle (Exposition of Natural Philosophy, 1663)might have taken the negative attitude for he wrote, "Vrin is a Body, which..is to be.. homely and despised." On the other hand, a Flemish husbandryman might have taken another view (largess) because it was noted (1837) "The carrots..by the help of the urine-cart, soon swell to good size." (Note the dignity the word had achieved, it was being hyphenated!)

With the muscular advent of science to sharpen his eyes, Fleming in 1828 marked a new milestone in man's mastery of nature. Solemnly he reported that "(The dog) urines sidewise, lifting his hind leg", and this was unquestioningly (and we hope gratefully) incorporated into the corpus of man's accumulated knowledge.

Sandek

THE LAST TRIAL

Watching behind a thousand-cloaked doubt
Life, dancing in eyes, glancing at me
Roundabout, I mourn,
Mourn for the death of a downy look,
Feasted on in the shrouded sympathy
Of a time when ---------- Alone
I walked in meditation through an empty night,
Cast in remote vacuums of silent death,
Renewing a love of another love's plight,
Lost forever with my love's breath.
Of a time now ---------- Together
Balanced on a perimeter of careful delight
Can I again, blankly expecting response
Smile (and lightly frown) at her,
Or through the appeal of a fiery calm
Do I dare then suddenly ask
"Is it all right if I love you?"

- Robert Hazo

ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

A pair of cinnamon vines
Reached
For the ledge of my windowsill,
And wrapped their unexpected finger tips
Around each other in the upward verticil;
Nature's phylacteries eclipse
The Circean spell of reason's shrines.

Three naked heart-shaped leaves
Pleached
The resurrection on my screen
And formed a bloodless trinity before
My sleepy eyes could divine the clever scene;
Morning pierced the spermophore
And furnished Bernard with premises.

A winged and holy bard
Preached
The muses' verdurous dogma,
While reptilian veins darkened my room
With their weirdly inspired botanical pneuma;
I drew the blind and chose the gloom
Of rootless dream in mind's graveyard.

- Louis Graff

ON MY FATHER'S DEAFNESS

Inside the conch a whisper lives,
A whisper of the sea;
The faintness of the distant surf
Repeats a melody
Of notes that float above the bar
Like white wings circling for a sign
To reassure God's fugitives.

Not far from shore a pharos braves
The rushing tides of truth;
Lone Ptolemy observes the stars,
And makes his earth the sleuth
Of heaven's twinkling cryptograph
Whose brilliant mysteries protect
A lonely sailor on the waves.

A distant buoy bell forewarns
Of unseen coral reefs;
The depths of inner reckonings
Give sailors no relief
From sirens of an unlaunched soul
Inundated by a pool
Of semen's geocentric scorn.

A Copernican novation
Breaks the curse;
The center of the universe
Is Zion's new born Son.

Louis Graff