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THE ALEMBIC

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Editorial ................................................................. 5

On Ne Peut Rien Faire
  Robert McIntyre '70 .............................................. 7

Three Poems
  Joseph P. Dolan '67 .............................................. 9

Two Counterviews
  Dennis A. Wentraub '67 ....................................... 14

Photography
  Roy Traugott '67 .................................................. 23

Poem
  Stephen V. Grillo '67 .......................................... 32

Thank God It's Friday
  Joseph P. Dolan '67 ............................................ 36

Art
  Robert J. MacDonald '67 ....................................... 6, 19, 35, 40
This year the ALEMBIC awards a prize of twenty-five dollars to each of three students whose artistic endeavors and contributions to our magazine have been judged deserving of special acknowledgment.

No particular work has been singled-out, rather an accomplished quality sustained throughout the artist’s efforts has been our consideration. Included in these judgments was much fine material submitted but not selected for publication; however, emphasis was on works that appeared in these issues.

Thus Joseph Dolan ’67 is honored for his distinguished work in both prose and poetry. The poems published in the ALEMBIC are a small sampling of his endeavors. These and his prose work give impressive evidence of his ability.

Stephen V. Grillo’s work has been considerable and distinguished. In graphic arts, poetry and prose, he has contributed often and successfully. A distinctive and adventurous style is the hallmark of both his literary and artistic efforts.

Roy Traugott receives our graphic arts award this year for his provocative and appealing photography. In these three issues, he has exhibited a camera artistry that is clearly distinguished by its originality and expressiveness — two vital aspects of a new and challenging art form.

THE EDITORS

Providence College Alembic
On ne peut rien faire

And yet I cannot hear them as before
This new one is not the same as the old.

All winter I have been out in the cold
Listening for songs, but they sing no more.
Lonely, listless, have I passed this winter
Without hearing from them a single sound.

The one that I once knew took them around
The misty mountain, and they stay with her.

One would wonder why they stay; still they do.
It’s time for Spring; she ought to let them free.
Perhaps they’re afraid of newness or me,
And won’t return unless she also does so.
They ought to know that she who’s with me now
Is near as nice as she whom they have crowned.

(Ah bien, qu’est-ce qu’on peut faire?
Maybe I must wait for her to bring them.)

By Robert McIntyre '70
Three Poems

By Joseph P. Dolan ’67
Sitting in Ste. Chapelle

Though I’d seen already Chartres and Reims,
I was unprepared for Ste. Chapelle,
A kind of stone and glass diaphany
Quite unlike the older, “classic” styles.
These, by clever use of arch and cornice,
In subtle alternation of space with mass,
Suck one up to the very vaults and leave
One strangely disconcerted by the smooth translation.
But sitting in Ste. Chapelle is like being at the center
Of a prism through whose thousand faces pass
The spectral distillations of a world
Converging on a single point of familiar reference.
What in Chartres and Reims I learned to under-
Stand, what there remorseless logic compelled
Me to perceive beyond myself, I saw
In an instant, somehow, sitting in Ste. Chapelle.
Billiards

Casually shaking blue dust from my Thunderbolt Zeus-like upon the Elysian Expanse of a green, Pythagorean planet,
I considered how three beings there Could best be fated to lift divine ennui. Expressly forbidden according to the rules To have them all at once respond (Being after all a human sort of god),
I chose the nearest of the three As messenger to communicate my will To those whose sacreligious immobility lay at the heart of my displeasure
While calculating various ploys and gambits,
I found those two in the farther vastness Could not at this remove be simultaneously Informed, but that I had an equal choice Which of them I might contact first, whether The blushing red one, or the pensive yellow.
For no other reason than family resemblance I settled on the latter, and despatching A bolt let my servant streak to him By the quickest path; but by some unknown Agency (perhaps a Titan’s groan) My Mercury rebounded from my farthest Redoubts unopposed and gave me not A meteor, but first a scarlet sleeve.
"... Denn Im Nicht Erkennen Wird
Die Wahrheit Erkannt"

Letter of Meister Eckhart to the Congregation

Brothers and Sisters,

Please allow me the liberty of addressing you informally,
For I see that we shall never get on unless
I make a small confession. Some of my critics
Have called me a mystic, and though perhaps
I would contest the name, the fact remains that
I often experience something difficult to express.
Forgive me then, if I confuse or shock you,
But there are no ordinary forms or colors
Or sounds specific to its origin which I
Could use to tell you of it; moreover, the problem
Of finding a means is only compounded by the inner
Compulsion I feel to convey in full its uniqueness,
Which has already on two occasions made me
Preach to the poor-box of an empty church: you see
In desperation I have seized upon words — why? Well,
The more closely words define their limits,
The more subtly they convince they have none;
With words one can work wonders, plumbing depths
To soar beyond them, for tree-like they root in that
Of which we are only dimly aware, rise then
Branchless through our proper element, and spread
To the sun at which we cannot look directly.
But in the end I can only hint at boundaries,
Only shine a light in caves which open to the truth,
And know: only the hand that erases can write the
True thing. And yet despite the risks I must
Go on, allowing you the choice to listen
Or to leave when Sundays I must preach; I beg you,
Do not leave; will to understand, and let us,
Wresting reason to our own advantage,
Dare impossibilities together.

Your servant,

Eckhart von Hochheim
Two Counterviews
By Dennis A. Wentraub '67

M. Antonioni's "Blow-Up"
Barbara Garson's "Mac Bird"
HENRIK IBSEN: When We Dead Awaken We Realize That We Have Never Lived.

ARGH-H. Another cinematic non-review of M. Antonioni's impressive Blow-Up. This time it's Esquire's own Wilfred Sheed (April Issue). For all his ambivalence Mr. Sheed makes some remarkably misleading observations. Consider the following hyperbole "...Antonioni has nothing to say about photography; and nothing to say, this time around, about modern society." In fact Blow-Up is a direct statement about today's Pop World — it is an imaginative director's view of the wasteland that is "Pop". What the film may lack in depth of insight is more than compensated by the artistry of its composition. Example: when we are told that our technology and our culture is dehumanizing us we see it ingeniously expressed in a "sexual" rite between an incessantly clicking photographer — the film's non-hero — and his aroused but curiously self-satisfied studio model. The sterility of their relationship is such that the photographer manipulates his subject for the sake of a picture, while she in turn luxuriates in her own self-indulgent warmth.

The joyful white-faced group of young people who we see at the film's inception and conclusion, ostensibly collecting for some unnamed charity, are representative in an encapsulated form of all the happily frenetic Mod World — and in the progress of the film and between these two reference points Antonioni tells us that they are an effervescent waste. The two scenes frame the film and suggest that its internal rhythm radiates from the central episode, which surrounds the photographer's discovery of pure evil in a superficially innocent and serene world. While taking photographs for a book on life-studies, David Hemmings, as the Mod Londoner, records a richly whole-
some sequence between a man and a young woman (Vanessa Redgrave) in a lushly green park. Back in his studio Hemmings blows-up the film into enormous enlargements which reveal to his restrained horror an act of evil, cooperative, gratuitous, and performed without guilt. The evil is murder. Almost everything in the *Blow-Up* illuminates and dramatizes the meaning of the Mod photographer’s darkroom discovery and his inability to act or to promote any action on the basis of what he learns.

Today’s Pop World (in its art, its morality, its personal relations) is dominated tyrannically, we have been told, by fact stripped of value (our un-mythic age) and by the latter’s arbitrary assignation. Thus in the film Antonioni shows us the photographer who makes love with a camera, an airplane propeller that is bought for no ascertainable reason, a speckled-Pollock-like painting that is meaningful only to its creator who admits he does not understand it, a guitar fragment that is the object of desire for some hysterical rock ‘n’ roll fans and an antique shop that is a depository for the meaningless things we are proliferating our world with. These are unobtrusive elements in the film’s *movement* (“progress” might be a misleading descriptive). But taken collectively they function as meaningful symbols of the present condition. But the most damning observation that Antonioni makes is that the “In” world is not involved and electrically aware, but rather they are dreadfully and appallingly asleep. Antonioni’s hippies are insulated from the real world of evil — the Central Park murder — by self-indulgence and illusion: they are showed chomping on pot like the lotos-eaters of old. The lovers of the rock-beat in another sequence stand mannequin-mugged. Like the white-faced charity collectors (are they impoverished?) they are “dead” and our “hero” moves amongst them. Far from “feeling nothing,” as one critic has suggested, Hemmings attempts in the patiently lyrical
movement of this film (we are drugged along) to break out of the torpor of his time. The subject of Antonioni's work is his failure to do so. The conclusion of the film is significant in this respect. Once again the laughing and oddly dressed charity collectors pour into our view; in a park Hemmings watches as the youths pretend to play a game of tennis, while the others dutifully watch the invisible ball being smashed from one “player” to the other. The inevitable happens. One of the players strikes the imaginary sphere onto the grass near where the photographer has been watching. All stare with quiet intensity at what he will do. If we are to understand the youths as representing a “Culture” that we have seen elsewhere in the film, then we must see the photographer's decision to toss the ball onto the court as a capitulation, of whose implications I think he is now perhaps dimly self-conscious, to their world of frivolous un-meaning.
Mac Bird

A great American, I fear, is getting old. At least the initial signs of moral myopia and a hardening of the sensibilities are beginning to manifest themselves. I refer to F. B. I. Chief J. Edgar Hoover’s charge that Barbara Garson’s burlesque of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, “Mac Bird,” which substitutes characters and events of our time — dealing centrally with the Kennedy tragedy — is a “‘satirical’ piece of trash which maliciously defames the President of our country and insinuates he murdered his predecessor.” He further charges that Mrs. Garson is to be classed with those who are “determined to destroy all acceptable standards of personal conduct and sane behavior.” J. Edgar Hoover’s outrage is not justified; Mrs. Garson’s satire is not the tool of moral and social anarchy. Nor should we label “trash” (i.e., to pass aesthetic judgment) on a work of literature merely because we disagree with its conclusions. The fact is, however, that an intelligent reading of “Mac Bird” with a rudimentary knowledge of the author’s sources will suggest to the reader (as it did to Walter Kerr in the New York Times, Robert Brustein in the New Republic, and Dwight MacDonald in the New York Review of Books — to name a few respected reviewers) that Mrs. Garson is not asking her audience to accept the proposition that L. B. J. shared in the complicity of J. F. K.’s assassination. There is good reason to believe that Mrs. Garson’s emphasis, dramatic and polemic, is elsewhere. In “Mac Bird” the central figure is clearly implicated in the destruction of John Ken O’Dunc, yet Mrs. Garson has withdrawn considerably — and I think significantly — from the hideous degree of involvement of a Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play who actually executes the deed and does not darkly arrange for the possibility of its occurrence, as does Mac Bird. Mrs. Garson is not being sly or covert. To considerable extent I suspect she is somewhat the prisoner of a
Shakespearian plot that she has selected because of its over-
all potential contemporary application. Within the play
it should be noted that as much veracity is injected into
the situational possibility that Lord Stevenson, the egg of
head, was toppled by a poison dart and not a heart seizure,
that Ted Ken O‘Dunc’s plane crash resulted from a “pecu-
liar” failure of the engine, that Lady Mac Bird’s passion
to line the highways of America with flowers is guilt com-
pensation (“out, out damned odor, out!”), or that the
blackout on the “Eastern Kingdom” was an act of a dis-
approving deity. All this is sheer fantasy of equal sub-
stance within the framework of the play. The problem if
we are honest is within ourselves: Mrs. Garson has, at least
for some, uttered the unutterable, and perhaps we will be
a healthier nation once we have gotten this haunting pos-
sibility out of our collective unconscious. The play affects,
again for some, a painful catharsis by exposing a “live pos-
sibility.” It is our own fears which we bring to the play
that have evoked reactions to “Mac Bird” which we see
epitomized in J. Edgar Hoover’s comments. If this were
not the case then no doubt we would hear vehement de-
nunciations of the “allegation” that L. B. J. liquidated
Stevenson when he saw that the intellectual might break
with him — or some other such nonsense. The emphasis
of “Mac Bird” seems in general to be on the duplicity and
greed-for-power of all our political establishment, for all
its conscientious cultivation of more innocent images. Mrs.
Garson’s perspective is so considerably estranged from the
major part of her audience that at times her angular vision
warps beyond the comic and the satiric to the gratuitously
cruel (i.e., Garson’s treatment of Lynda Mac Bird and Ted
Ken O‘Dunc, for painful starters) — to be sure, Mrs. Gar-
son serves up a scalding brew. And yet “Mac Bird’s” author
knows what it is to be satirical and comic — the Wayne
of Morse as a noble Quixote-figure, the Bob Ken O‘Dunc

20
home that is "bugged", Mac Bird's promise of a "smooth society." Perhaps if we think about it, there is some measure of irony in the way Mrs. Garson's ingenious manipulation of her sources throws back at us our accurate-inaccurate, unkind-justified, cliched views of our leaders — views that we too often assume out of intellectual laziness and which we are inclined to repeat in place of meaningful conversation. Thus we have the cold calculating Kennedys (their plastic hearts injected with brine), the Johnsonian effusiveness which is at once wonderful, suspect, and pathetic (Mac Bird sends Ted a "wreath immediately" when the latter breaks his arm in a plane accident), Johnson-the-homespun, Kennedy-the-intellectual (images cultivated and dutifully digested), creeping socialism in our federal government ("ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can give to serve the state.")

Mrs. Garson's most inspired inclusion is Lord Stevenson as the Egg of Head (although I offer Mrs. Garson as official historian of the Ken O'Dunc realm, Lord William of Manchester); here we see Mrs. Garson making excellent use of her literary heritage and political insight. With a conscious glance back to the greater figures of St. Thomas More and St. Thomas A'Becket, the "Great egg must choose between his own intellectual integrity which would bring about his break with Mac Bird, sentencing him to an exile in the hinterlands of political influence, and the temptation to be "secure" and "work within for change." For a brief moment we see a man considering the posture, The Profile Of Courage:

    Egg: "There's rumors round but I have seen no proof."

    Robert Ken O'Dunc: "There's proof enough for one who wants to see."

    Egg: "To see, or not to see? That is the question . . ."
Photography

By Roy Traugott '67
Poem
By Stephen V. Grillo '67

I
suspended in the darkness
of even a morning in May,
the falling birds shriek and cry
that I, like Calchas, shall
one day reach ruined Claros
and die in a confrontation with
reality, while the sight of fallen
birds turns May to blackness.

II
previously, though heavy with early morning pain, the
blackness seemed kinder: there were no prophetic birds
then, just the heaviness: a deeply furrowed man slouched
with drink and drowned in trouble; an unwatched television
arrogantly rolled its one oversized eye in an inane parody
on death; a couch bore the burden of a heavily burdened
woman; that same oversized eye rolled its reflection onto
the stainless steel oven door and half-drawn yellow
shades. in my bed I talked to the whiteness, of the sheets;
I talked to God who says I'll burn near Colophon; wraith-
like Mopsus sifted through most of the twenty-four slats
of a Roman's Venetian blind and spoke the horror of the
world in the loud tones of exaggeration, as I writhed in
self-doubt. The sound of falling birds turned May to its
twenty-ninth day, long since dying.
III
the audible drift of distant traffic
moans in the loneliness of shadowless dawn;
the fallen birds float naked now
in the morning rain that runs the
gray and green and punished and
purges the streets with mystical messages.
They swirl in the gutters faintly calling
as the yawning sewers suck them in;
at 5:30 A.M. the memory of fallen birds
floats out into the feather-stunned bay.

IV
the rain speaks loudly,
beating the roof with messages —
ideas for the rotting skulls
of all that dead humanity that lies
in every grain of sand and fills
reservoirs of decomposition, then
reappears as blood for the engines
that mash their thoughts inaudible.

V
the dreamless night, turns the spring
to summer, long since dying,
and my youth gazes wishfully
at the whiteness of the sheets,
the emptiness of my bed.
VI
suspended in grey shadowless dawn
the winged soothsayers leave the mist to silence;
their ominous prophecies wane in the
sharp light and tormented stillness;
workmen ready with the morning sun;
memory fades into apprehensive consciousness,
heavy eyelids dull my restlessness,
the thought of Claros alone pervades.
the darknight’s radiant sun dresses in blue,
it’s highminded day which covers all,
the kind night runs free and naked.
I’ll reach Claros by day.

VII
four cigarettes lie on a bed of ashes making love in the
public of the desk lamp’s 60 watt eye that bathes them in
smokeless heat.

VIII
thankfully, the increased light at
7:AM sends hope filtering through
the screened window and informs
the drawings on the wall that the
day will proceed exactly as scheduled:
birds will fly clear of Claros today.
I knew, I guess, that it wasn't very good, but I had expected Bob to show at least some kind of appreciation. At least originality was in my favor. There had been a rash of shrill, well-meaning and totally tasteless underground broadsides passed around campus in the past few months, none of which ever got beyond "Volume One: Number One" before being found out and suppressed. But there was always a replacement. The names changed, and perhaps even the authors changed, but the theme was always the same, and the shrillness and self-righteousness always there. A small, liberal-arts Catholic men's college suffers from chronic criticism of its — to put in a word — chronic anachronism. But this discontent never breaks out into the open except at times when the tantalizing hint of a possible liberalization is sensed by those most impressed by their own awareness of the problem. One has to admire, however, the guts of a group of students who will risk a lot to publish a diatribe against the existing order, even if it is tactless, untrue, and, in the end, futile. But after watching a quick succession of Fifth Columns, Sixth Chaplains, and Voices in the Wilderness, I had decided that things were going too far, and that a corrective or countervorce must make its presence felt on the field of protest. I called my contribution "Pinhead," parodying the style of the super-sincere student critic, couching my ridiculous overstatements of all the current complaints in the inflammatory and supercilious vocabulary then in vogue. It was obvious that only the author of "Pinhead" could be the arbiter of the new order, once the old was destroyed — I trusted to my readers' sensitivity to irony to perceive the joke.
Bob read it through — much too quickly, I thought — without the slightest grimmace of mirth betraying itself on his face. My pride compelled me to make a few feeble attempts to explain what I had hardly thought were subtleties, but the satirical dimension of the thing seemed to escape him. Disillusionment twanged off-key in my brain, and I should have simply feigned agreement to his remark that what I had written could easily be subject to misunderstanding. But I felt, as I said, compelled to point out how transparently ironical even the title was. I even took the liberty of remarking that his own analysis of it might have been clouded by subscription to the very attitudes I intended to satirize. The humor of this had no visible effect on him either, so I left the situation well enough alone. I didn’t want to jeopardize a friendship.

We talked on about the book for our Seminar in Western Civilization which we would be reading for the next session: Heidegger’s Existence and Being. Bob learned that I didn’t have a copy yet and offered to lend me his. He would be going home for the weekend and wouldn’t be needing his. We went up to his room and I had to endure a few more pointed reminders that I was going to be stuck on campus while he was in New York escorting some Norwegian girl to the theater. I went back to my room and flung Existence and Being onto my bed, and I considered joining it for a small nap until Alex knocked and let himself in. He peered critically around my room and took few pains to conceal his disapproval. When pressures mount, I can’t be bothered keeping my room in order. Of course, even when I am at leisure, I still tend to throw things around, but then, at least, I admit to being bothered by it. Anyway, Alex is the fastidious type who has some kind of Neo-Platonic idea about beauty, that if your body is beautiful, that means your soul is. How he has transferred this into terms of house-keeping, I’ll never
know. I don’t hold with dirt and disorder, but the mentality which equates them with moral corruption shall forever evade my powers of understanding. I dress and arrange my surroundings with as much care and taste as my inner promptings decree, and I refuse to act in mere fulfillment of some arbitrary norm, and if Alex doesn’t like it, he can lump it.

“I came to give you this,” he said, carefully picking up, as if in reproach, *Existence and Being* from the corner of the bed and putting it neatly on a stack of other paperbacks on my desk.

“Since you like Rilke so much, I thought you’d like reading this paper on the Duino Elegies I did last year. I couldn’t stand doing it, but it got a good mark, and you did say you’d like to see anything I might have of interest about German literature.”

I probably winced, but I had said it, and I did like Rilke.

“Yes, thanks; I’ll read it tonight and give it back to you tomorrow, if you want.”

“Oh, there’s no hurry. Return it whenever your done.”

However great an annoyance his air of superiority is (these remarks were delivered with a maddening suaveness), in spite of it I still like him. Besides, he is intelligent and reading his paper would definitely be to my benefit: it would be scholarly, tight, thorough, if doubtless (I told myself) unimaginative. On top of actually having a better average than mine, though only slightly so, Alex is also the possessor of that kind of Ivy-League good looks which draws that well-made, well-connected, and well-heeled type of girl which populates exclusive and prestige-encrusted New England colleges; and being rich and coming from a
socially prominent family himself (it was always a mystery to me why he chose to go to college here), he was, in fact, besieged by husband-hunting harpies at almost every moment of the day and night. And yet, while finding the time to distribute his favors liberally among them, he also could write thorough, tight, scholarly, and very well-received papers on Rilke, whom he hated, and be the leading political figure on campus by virtue of his personal friendship with most of the faculty. He also lets me borrow his car (a dark green Mercedes 230 SL, which I can barely keep from drooling on) on the rare occasions when I go on the kind of date which demands geographical mobility. My attitude therefore varies from outright envy to honest affection, and I sometimes feel guilty for not being able to analyze my motives at any given time for cultivating his friendship.

"Are you going home this week-end, too, Alex?"

"Yes. I'm all caught up on my work and I have to see Anne on a matter of considerable importance."

He was always caught up, the bastard. And Anne: one of those long-legged, blond-haired, clean-looking girls who emanate a seraphic glow of passivity and well-being. I wouldn't be surprised if they were planning (or were forced to plan) to get married, but I wisely refused to mention anything about the subject. It would have been premature, anyway, since I knew that Alex still saw a good deal of other girls, all apparently of the same genetic stock — all scrubbed, Teutonic, and faintly bovine.

"Can I borrow your typewriter while you're gone? Mine is being cleaned and I have to get out a philosophy paper by Monday." This was my way of appearing aloof, untouched by carnal desires, and scholarly as well. And somehow it flattered his self-esteem to think he was helping me on the way toward academic respectability.
“Sure, but you'll have to come over early, because I'm leaving before dinner.”

“O.K.”

He left. How stupid, I thought. A pathetically boring week-end was staring me in the face and the only people who could be expected to take the edge off it were either going or gone — or, like Martha, had been left. Martha is this girl I know, whom I can pretty accurately describe by saying she is the opposite of Alex’s sort. I stopped seeing her a couple of months ago. We knew each other too well, I guess, or else it was that we got tired of trying to find out what neither of us did know. At any rate, she was always somebody to go see on a week-end, and for the present, I had little hope that *Existence and Being* would be much diversion. If I were Heidegger, up in my little chalet in the Black Forest surrounded by trees and mountains and no people and piles of blank foolscap, writing down my meditations, I could be quite self-sufficient and happy and even resent the incursion of the world. But what about people like me who don't have much worth writing down? Who aren't powerfully subtle philosophers? Who just want to make the best of a bad, dull business?

I decided, therefore, to sublimate all my self-pity by going down to Sam's after dinner. I was avoiding the Quodlibet Taproom at all costs, because I was sure to meet acquaintances there and be forced to listen to discussions of all the things I did not want to hear about. Sometimes I don't mind feeling like a college kid, but this was obviously not one of those times. Sitting around a table over a couple of pitchers of beer listening to anecdotes of sexual and academic conquests, minute critical analyses of detested faculty members and other students, facile solutions to national and international political problems, in other words, absorbing the mystique of college life which floats
over those pitchers of beer (those ugly fluted glass pitchers which bounce when you drop them and are hardly transparent any more through the millions of tiny scratches on them) held no appeal for me. And the thought of that horribly stagey lighting by which you can barely see the end of your cigarette — it's called "indirect," and that's the truth if I ever heard it (they've even put red filters over the light bulbs, carefully concealed as they are, to dim the atmosphere further) — this, as they say, turned me off.

Sam's on the other hand, must make a significant drain on the current-producing capability of the local power company. To say it is bright inside gives only the faintest notion of the oceanic billows of light which rebound and swirl in immense tidal tour billions, enveloping you, penetrating you, freeing and overwhelming you at the same time. Eight glorious humming fluorescent fixtures festoon the ceiling and blaze coolly down from their empyrean height, and make the chrome-plated, plastic-covered bar stools and the polished oak bar itself seem endowed with lives of their own. The bar is straight—not the horseshoe type, which, I suppose, makes for economy, but a good, long straight bar stretching down the whole length of the room on the right side. Four tables parallel it on the left side —this is where on Wednesdays the Hi-Lo Jack Tournament takes place, and which, during the rest of the week, remains empty. Sam's is not a prosperous establishment, and Sam must be shrewd to get more than only a couple of 15¢ draught beers from his working-class customers. Running this card tournament is one way he's found, and he even has the players arranged into clubs with their own names and has them all listed on a big blackboard above the bar with their current scores and standings. And—this is one reason why I find the place so interesting—one of the clubs is made up solely of deaf people. After years of having them come and play on Wednesdays, Sam
can understand and use their sign language and he is extremely proud of this. For one thing, it means that they can't cheat him, but it also means that he can settle arguments and give directions. One of the other chief inducements is the free steamed clams on Friday night and the free tripe on Saturday night. You can hardly have half a dish of tripe in that tomato sauce Sam makes without at least two bags of potato chips and five beers to go along with it. Sam is honest, but shrewd.

Tonight, of course, I was anxious for some steamed clams, but mostly I wanted to see that old man. It was not tournament night, so I knew the place would be fairly quiet—except for Angelo's cavortings—and I was certain that that old man would be there. He is always there. Sam lets this poor old man sit on a bench in the corner between the door and the front window where he can keep warm and get a free beer from time to time. I don't know where he spends the night, but I wouldn't be surprised if Sam lets him sleep in his garage. The old boy just sits in his corner, with his hands on the edge of the bench, arms stiff, so that his shoulders are pushed up and his neck and chin are buried between them. He looks out from beneath a crumpled grey felt hat with a wide brim, and out of those eyes shine featureless years of silence and the dim glint of inarticulate longing. The rest of his face is pasty and hangs in sad lines, but those frightening eyes are caverns of bottled passion and look at me whenever I come as though I were responsible for their imprisoning so much, or as though I bore the promise of redeeming their sins—I am never sure whether his gaze is one of accusation or one of pleading. Somehow his soul has been unable to pierce through its own defenses, I thought to myself, and he would not be able to die in peace until the pageantry of human existence as it paraded through Sam's
night after night had burned itself into him and he had learned to love it—or until someone chose to deliver him from his purgatory.

He was right by the door, as usual, so as not to miss anyone, and when he smiled unexpectedly at me I became quite bewildered. He soon relapsed into expressionlessness, however, and I began to re-gather my wits. Sam said hello and I sat down toward one end of the bar, away from the color TV and near the door, but far enough away from the old man not to be obliged to speak to him. I knew he was looking at me, but I knew too that it was too far for him to speak. It was strange, but I had never heard him say a single word. I wasn't even sure he could speak. Maybe that was why I was afraid to hear him say something—it would have been too uncanny. I could now make out his outline in my inverted-pear shaped stem glass and as I looked through it, filled with the yellow-amber liquid bubbling mysteriously from the bottom and sides, it seemed as though he were a presence within the glass itself, conjuring himself up in froth and bubbles and foam to make an offer for my soul.

I took a long swallow and told Sam to give the old guy a beer. Looking straight at him he seemed harmless enough and I felt an inner release of tension, for just knowing he was there made me look in a different light on my boredom: Here was someone stuck for the week-end, just as I was.

I couldn't help listening now, however, to Sam's trying to stop an argument.

"You're both right, I tell you. You're right and he's right. Can't you see it's a case where you're both right?"

I had no way of knowing whether or not Sam was right, but it was obvious that each of the two disputants was con-
vinced of the mutual exclusiveness of their opinions. Sam kept at it, though; apparently worried that they would settle their argument outside instead of reaching a reconciliation at his bar—to be sealed, perhaps, by another round of drinks.

"Each of you two are right," said Sam, again and again. "You're right as far as you go, and you're right as far as you go. Neither of you are wrong."

I'll have to admit that Sam was simply irresistible. The two of them by degrees began to agree with him, and I became pretty much convinced that both of them were right, too. And I began to admire Sam all the more for having some kind of higher vision which could reconcile apparent contradictions. I wanted to ask him what the principle of this higher order was, the one he used to resolve all the arguments daily spun out before him, arguments which he disposed of almost with a flourish by wrenching them into a transcendent harmony. But I doubted that Sam would be willing to betray his secret, even if he could have told me what it was. And if he did tell me, would I have understood it? I shoved my empty glass at him and he filled it up carefully from the tap, keeping the head down to a minimum. I asked him how his son, Willie, was doing.

"Just fine," he said. "He's taking that computer-programming course over at your school now, you know."

This was, in fact, the first I'd heard of Willie doing such an exotic thing as learning how to program computers. To tell the truth, the whole idea seemed so incongruous, I almost burst out laughing.

"No kidding," I said, in a muffled voice.

Then it occurred to me that it was no less incongruous that I was drinking beer at Sam's, where four-letter words
are almost necessary to make oneself understandable. Emptying my glass and having it filled again, I suddenly thought that this was just the kind of joke Martha would appreciate. I'd have to tell her about it, I decided. Bob and Alex wouldn't get it.
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