Skyblue’s Memoirs

by Dallas Wiebe
Skyblue's Memoirs
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This chapbook is a selection of excerpts from Skyblue's Memoirs, an unpublished novel that was finished in 1972, by Dallas Wiebe.

This chapbook is for William Ruth Harmon.

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"Watch Out for Obscure Publications"
Preface

Skyblue's Memoirs has three main real characters in it. There is Skyblue the Badass, who arrived in Cincinnati on Easter morning of 1963. (The reader might want to re-read the ending of Skyblue the Badass if his or her memory is not clear on that arrival.) A second important character is William Weary, who was Skyblue's neighbor when Skyblue was a young man. Mr. Weary was an invalid then and Skyblue used to read to him, talk to him, get his medicines from the drug store, turn him in his bed and bathe his bedsores. Mr. Weary watched Skyblue grow up, as did the third important character, Kitty Carbuncle, who was Skyblue's first grade teacher. She taught him how to read, followed his academic career and wept when he got his Ph.D.

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The minimal plot is not important because Skyblue's Memoirs is about the year 1969. That was the year when Richard Nixon became president of the United States. It was the year the right wing took over our government and initiated its police state tactics. It was the year when individual rights were repressed and paranoia was rampant. It was a year of death, fear and police violence. It was a year when we suspected that something awful was being done to us by the self-righteous, pious, moralizing men in the White House. And we were right. Except that we had no idea how vicious they actually were. Now we know some of it and know that our paranoia was justified. We await the future when Richard Nixon will say he committed no crimes.

D.W., 1972
I'm a farmer—Kansas born. And I grew up in that great emptiness which always seemed emptier than empty to me. Born into that great void (read "abyss") I've been trying to fill it up ever since. When I walked along those antique roads, diddled the pristine dust with my toes, sat out the blistering cold of Winter or the singeing heat of Summer, called my pimples to a reckoning with trumpeting fingers, read up the ages and memorized the words of other great walkers, I wondered if my sure-fire joy was really what would be comforting and filling. My formula was of my youth, say, four. Very early on my uncles and aunts said, "He's a happy child." Ever since I've been trying to fill up the void (read "abyss") with joy. Oh I know that there's evil in this world. Christ Almighty, how can I not know that? But because my tiny tin cup runneth over with happiness, not evil, my friends (read "colleagues") say I'm naïve, silly, spooked by innocence. I just don't see why joy, mostly manifested in song, can't be as filling as wrong. Sometimes, for instance, in the midst of chaos, death, hate, riots, paranoia, neuroses, cancer, murder, lust, war, American presidents, cops, senators, perverts and ministers of various gospels, I look deep into my heart and, de profundis, I find there a joy and peace that will not let me go until I've burst out into beatific song. Suddenly, now, I'm walking again across the toothpick grass of a Kansas pasture. It is night and the stars are too thick to be separated into celestial graffiti. In the distance, on the horizon, there is a mound of light. It glows like a radioactive egg. I can see. I know what it is. I know what it means. I know that I
walk, smile and sing in a world of tiddlywinks and checkers. The
glowering egg is the world of Monopoly.

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I wish to consider now the phrase, “born in sin.” Some
phrase that. It always took me and made wonders. Christ, what
did I do? Why should I have to pay for the sins of my fathers?
Seems damned unfair, even now. But when I came kicking and
howling into Bethel Hospital on that flaky Winter night, I didn’t
know it until later but the whole miserable Old Testament was
tattooed on my brain. Outside, it was cold as a dog’s hind leg and
the wind as quick as a cucumber. Inside, it was warm as the
plague and as silent as a rock. Nurses waited outside, chatting and
humming. The doctor winked and winced at the magnificence of
the umbilicus. Because dangling free at the other end was a son of
Adam who never got a chance to make any choice about apples or
trees of knowledge of good and evil. Because it didn’t really seem
to make much difference, I mean about good and evil. The good
came to be so tenuous and the evil so immediate. And, I think, it
patterned out after, say, wisdom, like “Can a man of perception
respect himself at all?” Or, another one: “The direct, legitimate
fruit of consciousness is inertia.” Those words seem to get it all. It
put me up where I could gather and cover certain things and
protect them against the hot hand of hate. And when I saw what
those wondrous bits of wisdom implied, why then I thought and
thought and thought about it. If from a hole a man can sneer out,
who then is lost? If for the sake of choice reason shrivels, who
then is aghast? If for the sake of freedom the green shade slips,
who then knows how we were born? If for the sake of you the crooked dog buries your hot eyes, who
then knows the will of the rhino? If for the sake of man I have
looked through the glass knees of the ostrich, who then is to say
how the dim trails of the Indians will lead off into smallpox? For I
have seen the dim lines of cooking pits. I have watched the first buffalo wallow. I have heard the fish telling of the iron men and the horses, telling of fires that cleanse and of cold that barbecues. Oh anemophilous world, withdraw and leave me my candor. Pull out my puerile stops. Fill with jellied wafts my pipes.

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My father was a tall man. I guess he stood 6' 8" or so. His head often hit the tops of doorways and he suffered all his life from back trouble. When he died at the age of fifty-four (born 1900), he couldn't lift a bucket of water. In fact, there were times when someone, usually me, had to lift a glass of water to his lips so that he could drink. I'd stand on a chair, even when I was full grown, and slowly tip the glass across his god-awful breath. If I poured too fast he punched me in the stomach by swinging his arms sideways like the sidearm delivery of certain baseball pitchers. Somehow he could get me in the pit of the stomach. I can't explain it, but he did manage to punch effectively. When he milked a cow, he hunched on the stool, gripped the bucket with his knees and cursed with every jerk of his hand because of the pain that frittered out from his spine. The catch was that he had to be helped up from the milking stool. So that sometimes when he was sitting there and the cow started pissing and the piss was washing over him and he was shouting for my help and he couldn't get up, I'd think, "Take that, you son-of-a-bitch." He'd sit there yelling for help while I sidled over to him to get him out of range of the fire hoses of our watery cows. Sometimes, while his legs and lap soaked up the splatter, I would waltz up, deadpan, help him into a stoop, kick the stool out from under him and then let him drop into a pile of cowshit. Actually, he was too heavy for me to hold and often, if I was lucky, one of the cows would kick him while he was down.
My mother was the happy one and I'm sure I got my joy from her. She used to sing all the time—barroom songs, hymns, folk songs, popular songs, anything. I remember how she'd be scrubbing on a washboard and singing "I come to the garden alone." She was happy and short. In fact, one of the reasons I had to water my father was that my mother was too short to do it even if she stood on a chair. She must have been only about four or four and one half feet tall. She had long blond hair that never faded and she was fat. Her cheeks hung like draperies. Her legs looked like they had dropsiding on them made out of skin. Her knees and ankles made one post with undulant wrinkles around it. When she walked the fat jigged up and down. Trembled like sound waves through science films. Her life was really nothing. She procreated twice, me and Grassgreen, my sister. Apart from that she washed clothes, cooked, went to church, sang and died a horrible death.

In it all, I grew up a quiet and happy boy. I was well attended by my mother, and my sister loved me more than she would or could tell. We spent a lot of time together and when she got married I was lonely. I had, always, few friends. My one close friend, Chester Weatherwax, turned out to be a fierce fraud. I guess that he's really kind of in a sort of way possibly what my problem is and always was. Everything, for me, always seemed to get off to a good start and seemed to be so good. Like my life, for instance. Then the whole thing would break around my ears. And yet I've always thought that maybe things could get better. Say things started out bad, like my athletic career. Say things got better. Say I became captain of the team. A star. Not on your life. Because of my early quick growth I was often thought to be a good athlete. After the first game, I was on the bench. Or say that my great belief in knowing and writing started out bad. Say I got
published early. Got my reputation quick. Say things got up to advances, Pulitzers and Nobels. Enough of that. Or say my love life started out bad, or mediocre, and got better. Say I went from behind the schoolhouse to motels. From hotels to altars. Say I went from midwestern dummies to slick smelling city broads. God! One thing I do know. Probably the only thing I truly know. I've always believed in writing down. Writing down whatever. Fill up sheets of paper to whatever end. I decided early that I was going to be educated. I saw it. I saw learning as my escape. I was pushed along and everyone in that arid world I grew up in talked about education and art. In fact, I was nursed along because I got good grades in school. I was pried out of my prim ignorance into novels, poetry, painting, the violin. Thus it was I entered that Vaseline lined tube called degrees. My problem now is that nothing stands too clear. I'm not too sure anymore what it all was and where it all goes. I'm not too sure what happened—if it did.

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I'm writing these memoirs from my disappointment in the city of Cincinnati, the Queen City. I'm writing out of disillusionment and depression. When I stopped on Westwood Northern Boulevard in my green Bel Air in 1963 on a peaceful Sunday and looked down on the sleeping city, I thought, “This is it.” I thought that surely here the beauty of the place would make me fit again. The city is it, but certainly not the “it” I expected, or, at least, longed for. I saw that lovely view and I thought that here hearts would surely be tempered by that loveliness. I saw that distant fairy castle and thought that over there was my rest. I looked down into the alleys and streets of the Millcreek Valley and saw that pure Sabbath air and knew that here I could be. I rolled down that steep road and sang the song of the sanguine fool. I hoped for very much. I knew it was there waiting. But not so. I found that the Queen City is just another Newton—on a large scale. I found that the city was uptight about soap and haircuts. I
found that disagreement was equivalent to treason. I found spies, sneers and the same old cops. I found dullness, vulgarity and bad beer. I found in this clean city, this super-clean city, the same old spiritual foulness. Now, I realize, I'm becoming like the city. Now, I realize, the city is making me after its own image. Yesterday it occurred to me that it's a long way from the rural refreshment of a squeezed udder to The Cincinnati Enquirer. And yesterday I bought a gun.

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In this the year of the big double suck, 1969, I am thirty-nine years old. The bloom has faded. I am turning turtle in the human race. I am frightened of just about everything. I am frightened of burglars, shadows, darkness, sunburn, plaster falling, plumbing problems, my weak neck muscles, DDT, herbicides, atomic fallout, flat tires, riots, cops, sex, writing. So I shake a little now and then to let some of that fright out. From top to bottom I let go and feel the cold tingle run into, through, across and around me. Sometimes at night I lie awake and worry until dawn comes with the deadly smog of the city and I get frightened of that too. Sometimes I lie awake at night and am comforted by the gentle click in the thermostat of my electric blanket—then I wonder if the blanket could short out on my humid and rabid fungus and electrocute me. I'm even afraid when I type that I might slip a finger between the keys and break it. I go lightly on the keys. I go quickly along the street. I go nervous in my car. I stay home at night. I eat no canned tuna. I quit smoking every night. I'm even considering starting to pray again, the best argument for that kneeling and whining being the irregular beat of my heart—which scares the shit out of me.
Now, I realize, I'm becoming like the city.

So I shake a little now and then...
Long days in the hard seats of grade school came away as the unending scrutiny of a teacher's rump. With gratitude for the tight skirts and the panty lines showing. Brassiere straps snapped handsomely across and under silken blouses. High heels clacking o'er the wooden floors and fuzzy upper lips leaking honey down the legs of boys. Ink wells full and bubble gum cards stashed away, we went through the multiplication tables, the addition tables, the subtraction tables, the division tables, spelled out words into stars beside our names, studied the Fertile Crescent, memorized the Tigris and the Euphrates and the Shatt-al-Arab, memorized the "Star Spangled Banner," saluted the flag and prayed the Lord's Prayer, spread out valentines, masked up for Halloween, slugged away at recesses and rode bicycles in endless shuttles to and from empty plates—all to fill in the pungent energies set loose by whispering thighs. All to work off the hot presence of forty years of frustration. All to work off the hard tit into the shoulder, the hand dropped between the legs, the lipstick rolled into lips, the silk stockings spread for air. And to sit it out and wait for the first big break. To sit it out while those massive thighs pitched and rolled across a blackboard. To sit it out while calves bobbed up and down aisles and spelling words flitted out into a hardon. To sit it out while tits loomed through report cards and paddles. With it all, the constant reading to slough off hot skin, until the old man would say, "I wonder what's wrong with that boy?" And the old lady would answer, "It's all them books he's reading." Who could know what it would or did come to? All those books so distant and senseless. All those books about mighty deeds and horrifying myths. All those books about a kind of love that no farm boy ever could or would get close to. Who could know what it would come to? How do you go through a lot of reading tempered by limited experience and a timid soul? Who was the hideous joker who put *The Lady of the Lake* and a volcanic crotch in the same classroom?
They would appear, suddenly, hanging from washline poles with bricks tied to their tails. Or there would be a cloud of dust along a country road where one was being dragged until only the paw would dangle from the back bumper of the car. Once I saw one tied to a wheel and it was still alive. The dead ones were generally thrown about, say into an open door of a Spring night. There would be a knock. You'd go. No one apparent. Suddenly a dead cat would fly by and into the living room. Sometimes the cats had maggots in them. But there was certainly and always the smell. I could never quite get to it all. I kept thinking that somewhere out there, sometime in the future or past, somehow in the shilly-shally mind of myself, I could see the first impulse to kill cats. Rats and mice presented no particular mystification. You owed them death for the way the rats could fill a stack of unthreshed oats with dirt. You owed them destruction for the way mice got into bread and oatmeal and left black turds. Coyotes were supposed to take chickens, but I never actually saw that. Hawks were supposed to get young pigs and chicks. But I never saw that. Cats had no such reputation or actual record. Yet the first fix on any cat, especially a wild one, was to kill it. Here I speak for others, not for myself. I did not—I tell it now for my own clear conscience's sake—kill cats for pleasure. In fact, when the yowling started in the heat of Spring, I'd hear the frantic thrashing of young men rushing after the tom to get him before he sank his teeth into another female neck. When the fierce screams of frantic toms came on in the hot thrust of Summer, rifles cracked and there was split silence. And I was afraid of it all. Why that racing through weeds and shrubs to break a back with a club and then leave the poor animal to slowly starve under the spirea? Why nocturnal chases through the rose bushes to cut off a head and hang the headless body from a mailbox? Why the spastic torture in the dim rubbings of emptiness? Because when the hot dawns broke out we stretched, hid our young, hooked up our

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claws carefully covered our excrement, purred out into the fields and sank our steel teeth into the neck of our old adversary.

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My sister, Grassgreen, is older than me. She's ten years older than me. She's very pretty and she looks like the Venus de Milo complete. She's very sexy and she knows it. She's the eternal female and I know it. When she calls me, and she often does, she calls me Skybaby and I call her Grassgrab. We're on familiar terms and we rely on each other. When she was young and at home, she worked in a clothing store for a while and she was shy about it all. One night, after work, she was raped in an alley. She was just sixteen then and when she told me about the attack she cried until I cried with her. She told only me that the man who raped her wore a mask, knocked her out and left two dollars in her purse. We split the two bucks and, fortunately, she didn't get pregnant. From then on—I was just six years old then—it became my job to sit and listen to her weeping, to be with her and just sit by her. Especially did I have to do that when there were storms or when our parents left us, as they often did, alone. She was always a little plump and she smelled like freshly plowed ground.

Grassgreen married Dirtbrown in 1941 when she was twenty-one. It was a gorgeous affair. We had ice cream bars and we played Picking Up Pawpaws. She cried all during the ceremony and her white gown was streaked when she bawled her way into a Model-A coupe, red with rumble seat, and headed off to the Ozarks for a honeymoon. I remember that I called out, as they pulled out of sight, "Good luck!" Grassgreen waved to me and that was the end of my comforting her in tornado and rain, in hail and snow, in cold and wind, in measles and mumps, in scarlet fever and chicken pox, in acne and cramps, in dead boy friends and in rape. Dirtbrown never liked me much. I think he suspected my secret knowledge—things he didn't know—about her life.
Certainly only I carried in my bosom the secret of her lost virginity. And something, too, that even she never knew. Years later, when I was in high school, my cousin, Brickred, told me that he had watched, from behind a trash can, his father do it. Later, he, Brickred, threw the abandoned bloomers into the front seat of a car parked nearby.

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Oh William Weary, I remember the limpid evenings when I sat on the warm concrete behind Ferdinand Elementary and laid my arm around the quick shoulders of the girls. My approach was always from the left, my left arm getting behind and somewhere around the belt, my right going for the neck to pin it back against the hard bricks. And while my left slid up her ribs, my right examined her femurs. Crickets scratched out their ditties in the shadows, elfin stars tingled across the heavens, elm trees hissed among the twitching bats, night hawks tittered around in the darkness and I, I murmured into her ear of Spring and the rank grasp of love. Somewhere away screen doors slammed, curtains dropped shut, dogs barked, trucks whined through their multifarious gears and old parents slumbered off into oblivion. In the dying city I turned to her who was my prize for the night and crossed with her the Lethe of lust, rowed her across the Cocytus of craftiness, stroked her away from the Styx of conscience and washed her in the Jordan of jeopardy. After those cringing claspings on the warm concrete, we'd ride our bicycles home and sleep pitifully into another unlikely dawn, our bodies exhausted and our juices refilling.

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My tender years were enjoyable at times. I remember the rhythm band in Kindergarten. I was usually assigned a block of wine-colored wood that made a brief but deep tone when struck
with another piece of wood. That was special because there was only one of them, just as there was only one tambourine. (The instruments of ecstasy were carefully rationed to us). I remember, with pleasure, lying on rugs and listening to “The Waltz of the Flowers” from The Nutcracker Suite and “Poupée Valsante”—on an old upright Victrola, hand cranked and nasally unwinding. First grade under a hanging plant and the idiot stories of Dick, Jane and Spot. Second grade and the stacked pork that was a teacher. Third grade with an hermaphrodite. Fourth, the teacher had a mustache. Fifth grade and whippings, slappings and unmanageable perfumes. Sixth and the thrust to softball. All the rest slipping out into that which memory does good, the obliteration of irrelevant detail about our lives. Somehow that kaleidoscope of waiting ended and I found that what I was waiting for was girls. There I was, twelve years old. Six feet tall, blond and blue-eyed. In the seventh grade and a girl handed me a cookie from the Home Economics class. I knew then what it meant. I knew I could take the chocolate chip cookie. I knew that if I took it there was more intended. Vague meaning, but meant. I knew that if I took the cookie I was in a groove in which all I could control was the speed—sometimes. I knew that if I took the cookie I became indebted to the giver of the cookie. It was a special cookie and I knew that acceptance was all. I took the chocolate chip cookie. And thank God I did take that chocolate chip cookie because that was the end of grade school. That was the beginning of Junior High. Oh chocolate chip cookie! Oh thank you!

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When I lay in my room, Mr. Weary, in the pit and pith of Winter and when the winds broke through the broken window pane, my bones ached, my toes shriveled, my ears curled, my hair stiffened and I was afraid. Flagrant freezing told me things I didn’t want to know. Haphazard punishment wrote out wild stories on my dumb body. The wizard frigidity of the Arctic told me legends
and made myths of the long nights. So it was that when the cold flooded into my room, I turned to the visions of Spring and waited for the ripe songs of robins, the flitting of thrushes, the cavorting of mockingbirds. It was a strong effect, all that wind and cold. If no visions came, the night stumbled along with me in its own manner. Creeping, crawling, scratching by, the darkness recalcitrant and rude. How was I to find literature near enough? If the snow whistled across my comforter, how was I to find the flip piety of the poets worthy of immediacy? How could I care about iambic pentameters and ottava rimas? I came not in the hot pencils of the bards. I came not through the sharp ears of lavender versers. I came not by the unnatural lisplings of unacknowledged lawmakers. I froze in my visions. I trembled in my connotations. I sneezed my lines. When the icicles hung and the snow drifts shifted lazily along the wind paths, when the windows frosted into hieroglyphics of berserk frigidity, when the roads piled high with dusty snow and the weather stripping in the doorways was my aeolian harp, how was I to worry about him who was silent on a peak of Darien? How was I to give a damn about a “still unravish’d bride of quietness?” How was I to care for lonely knights, pale and drawn? How was I to worry about Triton and his wreathed horn? How was I to wonder and wish for Byzantiums and dolphin-torn seas? My poetry, Mr. Weary, came when the winds stopped, the cold broke and the dripping water in the eaves told me that tomorrow my sun would break clear and glorious. Told me in the metronome of dying snow that tomorrow the ice would crack and that the cold’s great gift was that moisture that would limp down into the soil for the necessary greening of Spring. My piety, Mr. Weary, is of the loam and not the false words of the poets. To hell with their precious little feelings. My love is the first leaf of the tulip, the yellow bud’s breaking in the morning, the iris at night, the spirea on May Day, the Bethlehem Stars in the backyard, the lilac bush filling the night with the hot scents of Summer. It may be, Mr. Weary, that before poetry is the root, before verse is the leaf, before the strophe is the bole, before meter is the flower, before
form is the pistil, the stamen and the wet seed. It may be, Mr. Weary, that the final redundancy is the poet.

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Miss Carbuncle, I remember the Isar and the Prinzegenten Theater. The river was fast and clean. The opera house was clear and exact. The dim blue lights arose from the orchestra pit and the overture came for *Die Zauberflöte*. I could have left then. But the beauty! The tranquility! In a never-never land of German Singspiel involved in birdmen and purifications. To be left after the holocaust was more than I could think. When the vague loves of the works were over and the river whipped by in the night, I leaned over and watched that whiteness splashing by. I leaned into that melancholy clutch that is our emptiness. Deep in the city of Hitler and Löwenbräu, I measured those things against what might exist for me. "Trembling in my neck and my calves, I saw there what profound folly spews from our dirty souls. Each spot der Führer walked on remained hallowed ground. Local inhabitants knew where his martyrs were once buried, where the Putsch took place, where he crossed the Isar and headed for the guns in front of the Feldherrnhalle, where he reviewed his troops, where he belched out his platitudes of hate. Sometimes when, and if, there was talk of him, a misty glaze came over the eyes of the citizens. Those were the days, my friends! Guiltless. Boastful. Hard. Hateful. Resentful. Triumphant. Still singing sons of the Afrika Korps. Still melancholy. Still sad. Still Aryan.

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Against it all the wily strength of the word. Against it all the flat slap of the right phrase. Against it all, the simple force of the simple sentence. Against the subversion of the person, the straight strength of grammar. Against the plangent goose of the grim legions, the fine pride of the paragraph. Against the petty hates of
It may be...that the final redundancy is the poet.

Against the subversion of the person, the straight strength of grammar.
the world, the prancing plot, the supple progression, the static structure, the crowning conception. Mr. Weary, the written word in its full panoply, the written word in its dandy parade, the written word in all its grandest duds, stands as a last resort against that which must be fended off. Simply stated things refine the resistance. Simply articulated ideas declare an independence. Simply stated things constitute a nation of the self. Simplicity is the first revolution; after that nations of ramifications. To refine. To polish. To conceive without ornament and then live out a fierce precision. To get the surprise often that is information. To care. All these against old night and the uncreating word. When this great discipline lies butchered on the darkening plain and the scholars have retreated to their caves, when the great annihilistic holocaust has come tripping out of the clouds, then, and only then, will the fending end. Then will the mind drop down into the burning earth. Until that time? Mr. Weary, I assert. I assert one single idea that stands across the frail fending that is my ordeal. Until that time, Mr. Weary, I assert that the only principle of order left in this world is the syntax of our prose.

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My first horse of my very own was a gelding named Billie. I worked for him for two weeks. My pay was the horse. The owner had purchased him because that was necessary to get the bridle and saddle that went with him. Billie was useless, except to me, and I earned him fair and square. And he was worth all that work. He was formerly a polo pony and had grace and control. When I rode him I had to be careful not to fall since he turned so quickly. The first time I rode him I did hit the dust, but he knew not to bolt. I curried him and fed him. Watered him and watched him. Loved him and rode him. Petted him and trimmed him. For two months. Then he died. A truck came for him and took him away with those other corpses, stiff bodies piled in a truck with their legs akimbo in the air. I felt sick until I began to think of those mornings when I
would get up at dawn, saddle up Billie and pound out on those vast, empty country roads. Before the blistering heat of the day. Before chores and labor. Before an accursed world fell down over my eyes. Feet up and proud. Dancing along the hedgerows where the brown thrashers flew in and seemed to come apart as they went into the underbrush. Prancing along before the greasy breakfast of the farm. Prancing along while skunks and ’possums cleaned up the carrion they had worked on most of the night. Raccoons slipping quickly into their hollow trees. Birds awake and squabbling for the first bites of the day. The air cool and clear before the wind might kick up and comb the land of its gentility. The leather in the saddle squeaking. Skin along Billie’s neck quivering with every pat. And the gentle hoofs clicking in the first light of day. I riding out into that world, a prince, made so by my fine horse. Head up, Billie, the castle is just dead ahead. Prance high, Billie, the flags are waving and the trumpets are warmed. Quick and lithe, Billie, she waits with her long yellow hair for us to take her away. Sure and easy, Billie, we are there.

Billie died in September of 1945 and I got a mare named Nancy. She was a spotted animal and fat in the croup. Her body was mostly white: Black tail. Brown head and black ears. Mane white. She was big and clumsy. Couldn’t run well. Not at all like Billie, but she lived and so I rode her, usually with no saddle. Sometimes with no bridle, just the halter, because she was well trained. I suppose she was about ten years old already when I got her for twenty-five dollars from a farmer whose wife had just been killed in a corn-picker. He was quitting farming and going out to California, I remember. He sold everything but his Model-A two-door, black with red wire wheels. His wife’s ashes were in a Mason jar in the back seat of the car. So were his son’s. I got Nancy by bidding at auction and I remember the man watching me and signaling to the auctioneer to let me have her for whatever I could bid. Dirtbrown lent me two dollars and I got her for the twenty-five. The man then came to me and told me about the mare. How she was wild and hard when young. Told me she had
foaled three times and could foal again. Told how he had gotten
her for his son who was killed on Iwo Jima. How he had taken
care of her, curried her, brushed her, trimmed her hoofs, pulled the
burrs from her tail. Had ridden her to exercise her. Because his
son could no longer do it because he was just a bunch of ashes in a
Mason jar. Told me how pleased he was that such a fine young
man would have her. Knew I would take good care of her. Knew
I would love her and respect her. Knew I would be gentle to the
spotted mare and protect her. I promised. We saw him drive away
from the farm after all was sold and while we loaded Nancy into
Dirtbrown's International truck. He stopped at his roadside
mailbox, checked to see if any mail was there. Looked back once
and then drove away. He wrote to his one sister once and he asked
about Nancy. She called me and asked about the mare and I told
her. That was in 1951, just before the army. She told me that the
man was doing well in California. He was already a sergeant in
the Los Angeles police force. Told me that he had remarried and
had another son. That day I rode out and the next day I rode out
for the last time. Nancy died while I was away in Germany. My
father kept the money he got for her carcass and spent it all playing
pinball machines.

***

I grew up busy. I studied a lot and read all the time. I liked
books and what they had to say. Especially books about animals.
More especially, books about dogs and horses: Black Beauty,
Black Stallion, Tawny, Rusty, Call of the Wild, Bob Son of Battle,
Lassie Come Home, My Friend Flicka. I liked as well those books
about the frontier; books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, books about
Daniel Boone and Kit Carson. Not to mention those books about
men whose names still run in my mind: De Soto, Hudson, Cartier,
Ponce de Leon, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado (1510-1554?).
But most of my time seems to have gone into music and religion.
Yes sir, of a Wednesday night I walked to the church and practiced
an anthem. Of a Saturday afternoon there was a final rehearsal. Of a Sunday morning, having sung our dirty little hearts out, infinite hours in the choir loft while a cadaver maundered about what we already had sung in four short verses. Not to mention special preparations for Christmas, Easter, baptisms, christenings, funerals. Then there was the learning of the violin. Orchestra practice. Rehearsals. Grade school, junior high school and high school zipped by and I remember only that it seemed, in its bits and pieces, to last forever. With all that I remember the fierce orthodoxy of the Midwest, how any deviation was crushed immediately, how any thought at all was buried under scorn, ridicule, threat and power. And if necessary, the police. How any possible sign of rebellion brought out every possible variation in the mind. I grew up busy, under threat, and I do not forgive those who enforced those threats. I forgive them only inasmuch as they drove me into my mind. For instance, of an evening I would sit, defeated and beaten, in the back of the barn and watch things go by. I’d sit on a bale of alfalfa and lean my eye against a knothole to see what was out there. Or I would sit behind the barn on a pile of fence posts on a Summer evening and let my mind wander where it would. The long habit of daydream came that way. I grew up busy, under threat and full of wonder. I grew up busy, finally, with the business of revery. There, in the back of the barn or on a pile of fence posts, I would watch the folding star flashing, watch the fabulous sunsets, watch the cool night fold about my world. Deep in that darkness I would sometimes feel at home. There, in the sure comfort of night I would go off into those worlds that became my world for a moment in the night.

***

Late in the Cincinnati darkness, I wrote, Mr. Weary, permutations of passions and allomorphs of fear. Trembling in the neck under riot and bigotry, I thought I saw once that those images came from the necessary variation within the word as it clings on
in time. Too easy to end the word and its necessity. Too facile the mind’s image of itself and its passions. I wrote then fracture, fend, permutation, allomorph, images. I wrote catalogue as the simplest fact known to me. To write out the things that are within my darkness. Put down, put down without literary allusion, reference or context. Put down without paraphrase or quotation. Find out one brief point that might exist for you as now. So it was I came to hand, foot, breath, whisper. So it was I came to clock, table, chair, sofa. So it was I came to Aldebaran, Betelgeuse, Sirius. So it was I wrote down owl, sparrow, cow. Until the whole mother-loving magic of myself as sum dingled softly in the brooks of my belonging. Then outward to what more can be known. Wrote down: life is a closed book. Wrote down: argue with success, time and tide wait for me somewhere, a stitch in time saves nothing, absence makes the heart grow, a penny saved is a penny spurned, he who hesitates is. Wrote out the last variants: better to have loved and lost, a prophet is always without honor, kick sleeping dogs until they get out of your way, the road to ruin is greased, no dog has his day, the worm turns when he sees the light, out of sight is out of sight, luck is humor, all the world is a dressing room. Wrote down, I, Skyblue, did: advertisement is time; time is money; space is wealth. Time is pathos; pathos is perversion; time is perversion. Space is luck; luck is lyric; space is lyric. Death is German; puns are German; puns are death. A book is space; Kansas is space; North Carolina is a billboard. Faith is a snowflake; superstition is a flash flood. To know. To have one thing clear in it all. Wrote down: in a time of revolution reason is a gun. To know a point. Allomorphs of fear. Permutations of passion. Mr. Weary, I wrote to boggle. I wrote to dandle. I wrote out of the Cincinnati darkness while sirens howled, the mayors deviated, the city council evaded, the police scoffed, the judges prattled. In all that, I wrote out, by God: dongthaster pesters. Scribbling, I waited for that last light by which I could see the Volkdorp gnarl.
Look at it again this way. Literature is a form of deceit. I don’t mean that business about verisimilitude. I don’t mean illusions of reality. I mean that literature pretends that man is important. Just look at the crummy people made into heroes in our literature. Achilles and Agamemnon are thugs. Odysseus is a liar, a thief and a confidence man. Dante, slogging through Hell, takes comfort in the sufferings of his enemies. Roland is a loser. Don Quixote is senile. Werther is a melodramatic slob. Emma Bovary is a bitch. Pip is a dunce. Ishmael is a liar. Gatsby is a crook. Jake Barnes is impotent. Augie March is sterile. Herzog is a whimpering cuckold. Why write about them? Why bother with the shitty careers of fools? Only our literature makes them important. Our literature makes their lives significant. And that’s a lie, because they’re not. It’s style. The writer’s style. That’s really what does it. Style: a mode of lying. If you’d meet literary heroes in real life, you’d run screaming through the streets. Style: the diffusion of the repulsive. If you’d meet literary characters next door, you’d vomit. Style: the dipsy-doodle of knowing. Style: prestidigitation of perception. Style: a form of depravity. If you’d see literary characters, you’d never read about them. If writers told you the truth about literary characters, they wouldn’t be worth writing about. If writers could really render illusions of reality, we’d all weep, or commit suicide. If writers could really create verisimilitude, it would be pointless; we’d all be dead or insane. So, Mr. Weary, literature helps us to tolerate life because it remakes it according to some predetermined dream. It makes life into schemes, hence into sense. Literature makes life seem coherent and important. It is, necessarily, a form of hopefulness. But it is daydream. It’s all romance. Literature is not an illusion of reality. It has its own kind of reality, and that kind of reality has more to do with wish-fulfillment than it does with the reality that presumably gives rise to it. Literature is fraud. A form of deceit. I
mean to tell you that literature is vanity. And I mean to tell you that vanity is emptiness.

More pathetic still is that idiot faith in our language. The jolly confidence of the novelist that his words can say something. He ought to know better. Language is, at best, imprecise. It is helpless to convey ideas clearly. It is helpless to give directions precisely. It is helpless to voice hopes and desires. Not only that, language is unable to be individual. Most people never say a single, simple thought of their own. Most people never speak for or of themselves. They quote. God damn they quote. Cliches, literary references, jargon from sports, newspapers. People don’t talk; they paraphrase. People don’t talk; they say what they’ve been taught to say. Even learned people. Mr. Weary, I know professors of English who can’t say anything without quoting or paraphrasing from what they’ve read. Shameful. Pathetic. Learned men unable to speak for themselves because of their learning. But more important, the idiotic faith that language transmits something. At best, Mr. Weary, our meanings are problematical. The best we can hope for is good will on the part of the person we’re speaking to. The best we can hope for is that the person we address is intelligent enough to guess what we mean.

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I am baseball and Guillaume Dufay. I am “An die Freude” and “Rainy Day Woman.” I am “Die Galgenlieder” and pinball machines. I am Ulysses and Justa Dream. I am a bullhorn and a sonnet. I am Sirhan Sirhan and the Thresher. I am Buddenbrooks and dog shit. I am a Chicago pig and the “St. Matthew’s Passion.” I am tennis and Mt. Adams. I am Simon and Garfunkel. I am Lovin’ Spoonful and Muhammed Ali. I am Chester and Festus. I am Rin Tin Tin and Walt Disney. I am nylon hose and a baroque organ. I am Chaucer and Hitler. I am Siberia and Palm Beach. I am a camera and a brush. I am the atomic bomb and “Jesus Loves Me.” I am Millcreek Valley and Revelation. I am Hesston and
Zimmerdale. I am Sand Creek and the Pacific Ocean. I am a cloud and a clod. I am Don Juan and Richard Nixon. I am the Carew Tower and an ant hill. I am a footprint and an atoll. I am Alaska and Tierra del Fuego. I am the grizzly bear and the archangel. I am the shark and the shepherd. I am Jesus and Jiminy Cricket. I am John Milton and an outhouse. I am a firehose and a fix. I am heroin and aspirin. I am the aged sow and the first umbilicus. I am the Triceratops and the Shetland pony. I am a tit and a sea gull. I am first and foremost. I am dig and delve. I am the F-111 and a snail. I am the hamburger and the hysterectomy. I am inhale and exhale. I am Robert Bly and Saint Francis. I am George Wallace and the Mississippi River. I am stomach and pump. I am jump suit and Bible. I am the Beatles and the pill. I am cancer and the common cold. I am John Wayne and Jonathan Edwards. I am Genesis and Portnoy's Complaint. I am Freud and fear. I am mercy and the ICBM. I am Stalin and Eisenhower. I am Kansas and North Carolina. I am Skyblue and Red Norder. I am the grim fuck and the villanelle and all pinned together on a facile giggle.

Grassgreen had several boyfriends before she married Dirtbrown. The one most memorable was a tall young man named Marcus. He was older than Greengrass. He was about twenty-four when he dated her and she was about sixteen. He too was a farmer and a good one. He had inherited a large farm and was living on it and working the land by himself. Handsome, tall, strong. Wore a mustache, brown and full. I remember his giving me a dime. Once he gave me a piggy-back ride to get me out of his way. Once he caught me peeking in the bushes and took off my pants and swatted my bare ass. Nonetheless, I thought him great and Greengrass did too. Of a Saturday evening, they sat on the front porch in the swing. He'd drive his old pickup truck to our old house on Nago! Street, park it, and pretty soon, while I lay in my
room, I'd hear the squeaking of swing chains, the cracking and snapping of slats, the grinding of feet against the floor as they shifted around in various embraces. Say there was spirea. Say the iris was out. Say there were lots of mosquitoes and beetles. Say the bats dived in close and took insects right off the ear. Say Greengrass giggled and snuggled. Once Greengrass and I drove out, she driving the old DeSoto, to his farm. It was huge and flat. The house was old and paintless. He lived in one room and cooked in the kitchen. We went in briefly and then sat on the porch. He was covered with dirt. She was covered with Evening in Paris. I sat alone, a chaperone of six or seven. Then he drove his big Case plowing tractor back into the field and we drove back to Newton. That was the last time we saw him. A neighbor found him three days later. His tractor had rolled over on top of him and he was crushed into the bottom of a gully. At his funeral, the casket was not open. Grassgreen and I and one other woman attended the funeral. The minister, I remember, wore overalls and tennis shoes because he came in, for a few hours, from his own plowing to preach in order to preside over the burial of the dead. We, the four of us, then followed the hearse out to Greenwood Cemetery, saw the casket lowered, threw clods of dirt onto the booming lid. As we left, the other lady, dressed in black with a thick black veil, looked at Greengrass and me for a while. She rode back to town in the hearse. Greengrass and I walked back and she wept all the way. We never saw the other lady again. We wouldn't have recognized her if we had. A few weeks after the funeral, Grassgreen began receiving Good Housekeeping in the mail. It was a present from Marcus, posthumous. I missed him for a long time because I admired him so much. I remember well that the last time we saw him, the time we drove out to his farm, that as he walked away to his tractor to return to the field, he walked behind our DeSoto, stopped, waved to us and grinned, squatted with his back to the car, hooked his hands under the bumper and lifted the back end of the car off the ground. On his way to his tractor he
jumped into the air and kicked his heels together. Cavalierly waved his straw hat to us as he roared out to tear up the earth.

***

Grassgreen had another boyfriend, maybe more, I don’t know, before she married Dirtbrown. Her other boyfriend was Oliver Winger, a town fellow and slick. Oliver wore rubber bands around his sleeves to hold up the baggy parts of the arms. He wore two-colored patent leather shoes, say, brown and white. He wore white socks and garters to hold them up. His straw hats always had red bands around them. He swaggered a lot and used toothpicks constantly. His mustache was always neat; he shaved twice a day. His vests were bright red or orange. Black bow ties and thick black belts. Sometimes yellow or blue suspenders. He drove a Model-A Ford with a rumble seat in it. Canvas top, brown, and the car was green with red wire wheels. Country class, it was, to the point of parody. But, by God, when he rode up Nagol Street to pick up Grassgreen, he was king of the bricks. When he turned down from Broadway, he owned the gutters. When he stopped in front of our house, he passed out sticks of chewing gum, usually Dentyne. When the first drive-in movie opened in Wichita, he took Grassgreen there. She was the first woman in Newton to spend one whole date in the same car seat. Oliver was like that. He passed out of her life when she was nineteen and he was twenty-three. He simply disappeared. No one ever knew where he went. His car, his garage, his house, were all intact and nothing was out of order. For many years his mother questioned the police and other people about the bodies found floating rotten in the rivers of the state. Questioned everyone about those skeletons found when digging sewer ditches. Questioned everyone about those corpses found in country ditches, in open sewers, in wheat fields, in abandoned barns, in dry wells, in weed patches, in trunks of abandoned cars. If one of those skeletons was Oliver, it was not known. Silence and emptiness. Silence and absence. The bright
red wire wheels and the rumble seat auctioned off and made into a hot rod. His clothes appearing now and them on Salvation Army indigents. Grassgreen with her Bible full of little notes when he sent her and which she burned on the night before she got married.

***

I told you before, Mr. Weary, and I’ll tell you again. I was a happy child and I’m a happy man in spite of it all. I think my memories are happy ones. For instance, I think I could recall every girl I ever loved if I wanted to. I think I could recall all that deep happiness, that profound joy, that ran in my veins when I kissed them whenever and whysoever. I think I could recall the screaming shivering that hooked through my muscles when I touched their breasts. I think I could define the smooth moments, specifically, when they clapped hands to my genitals. And sometimes when I recall all that, I feel such a fierce joy that I become nauseated. So complete and comprehending that it brings pain. So gross the pleasure that I feel dizzy. What luck, I tell myself then, to be born with sense and goodness, to be born a child of joy. For that reason alone, I’ve tried all my life to treat people with love, respect and humor. I’ve tried not to do bad. I’ve tried to help the helpless, sooth the wrinkled, iron out the unwashed. Of course, all I’ve ever gotten for it is a lot of shit. I didn’t expect rewards, but I didn’t expect resentment and retaliation. I know that’s naïve, don’t tell me. You’ve told me that before. I don’t need to be told anymore. No more telling. Don’t make things worse. Hell, Mr. Weary, we pathetic people got to stick together. Or else we’re done. Or else we’re dead. Because of governments, principalities, powers. Oh Geistliche Lieder, comfort me! As opposed to the motorcycles that gnaw the airs outside my room. Oh comfort in Dufay’s “Franc cuer gentil.” Or in the center of a Kansas wheatfield, until the onset of the gross noises of the jets settling down into Wichita and the falling hiss of DDT as it silences the brown thrasher. He can’t twitter. I can’t make it. He can’t make it when
...the squeaking of swing chains, the cracking and snapping of slats...

We...threw clods of dirt onto the booming lid.
his mating call from the grass and the hedges gets lost in the somber snarl of a passing gas truck. Oh joy, get off my back. Love, get off my shoulders. Sympathy, get off my brain. Good will, get your teeth out of my veins. Humor, take your hot fingers from my throat. Desperate comfort in the giggle. Desperate force when the Abendrot slides along the cold hands and Red Norder climbs the black tower to scan the false fronts of the Sudfolk.

***

McGarry is opening it. Cracking it beautifully. I look around and the walls tilt. I look up into the great black slit. I look up into that vast emptiness that spills up and out from the Queen City. I look down and away. I see the floor spew back. I see the world jiggle. I hear a rustling. I hear rattling and swishing. I hear cursing and whispering. I hear rolling wheels, beating wings, grunts and squeals. I hear shouting coming on. I hear exhortations and challenges. I look and I see the blue mob hovering in the western sky. I see the thin blue line spread out in single arc across the dark heavens. Shoulder to shoulder they fly, wings beating slowly, with their swords held out in front of their faces as crosses, the handles up and the points pointing to the earth and me. Before them, directly overhead, Gabriel holding out the blue flag of heaven and Michael lifting up his sword of fire, their wings beating gently to hover, and shouting for courage. Screaming out their defiance to the snarling and sneering now coming from the eastern skies. Where I look and I see. I look there and I see and I fear for the blue ridge of the west. I look and I see himself riding up with howls of defiance and provoking. I see himself riding a pale, bony horse before the hosts of the nether lands. I see the black armor draped over his face and about his body. Behind him, Lt. Commander Tarheel riding a huge, brown boar and carrying the great red flag, his arms like hammers, his head in a gladiator’s helmet, ready to drill down the adversary. Behind Tarheel, the three black flags of death, judgment and hell, carried by howling,
slobbering cops. Then the five drums and four trumpets, the drums rolling out a savage death march. The trumpets blasting up a fanfare for annihilation. The nine companies across: Hessians riding black flies, coonskin caps on alligators, peace treaties in gold sluices, concrete pentagons in black Cadillacs, American flags in covered wagons, English poets on feathered coffins, Gideon Bibles in wooden drawers, footballs on kangaroo rats, Sicilians on hissing Blutwurst. And stretching back east, beyond the range of sight, the three huge masses. Three huge marching troops. Ten thousand municipal judges, ten thousand county sheriffs and ten thousand college presidents. Marching and chanting, “death, kill, death, kill.” With himself leading up and on in the black armor, screaming and shouting. Rocking the sky with his massive challenges.

High over benighted Cincinnati, the blue flag of heaven waves in the face of the red flag of himself, who howls out that he has come in peace, that his intentions are goodness and decency. Howls out that he comes to establish law and order among the blue creeps of heaven. Accuses the blue forces of aggression. Accuses them of having broken the treaty of the Fall. Accuses them of being the pawn of a certain foreign power. Tells them to get back on their reservation or he will destroy them. Tells them they are dirty and need haircuts. Accuscs them of burning and spitting on the flag of North Carolina. Howls out that here is his new frontier and manifest destiny has brought him up here. Offers them a new treaty in which they must leave Harvey County and live at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. Gabriel refuses the treaty with a shout of defiance. Himself turns to his troops and tells them to bring democracy to the blue bums whether they want it or not. They lift their weapons. Howl. Shout. Razz. Sneer. Stick out their tongues and give Gabriel the finger. After the gross-out, the forces of himself put on their armoring, fix their weapons, raise their whips and wait for the word to slaughter.

Himself shakes and snarls. The drums grumble; trumpets blat. Tarheel sweats holding down his great boar. The mounts
dance; the foot soldiers jump up and down. The flags pitch and roll. Himself turns to look at his own troops. He is satisfied. They are sweating and gnawing at themselves. Himself raises his right fist. His army stares. Himself smiles. Then he shouts out the command. Howls out, “Dasypus Novemcinctus!” His army charges in the word of the once fallen general. They charge across the arc of heaven and smash into the thin blue line. They charge across their commander, their captains, their flags, drums and trumpets. They charge up to and past Gabriel and the trembling banner of Harvey County. They charge up to and past the burning sword of Michael. And smash into the swords of the angels. Hessians sizzle by on their flies and rake their halberds across ducking noses. Blutwurst carry over the Sicilians who pound heads with their pearl-handled billy clubs. Coonskin caps spur up their winged alligators and hack down with tin Bowie knives. Footballs whip their kangaroo rats high and drop, pinning down the blue gowns with spiked shoes. Hoofed prophylactics drive wooden drawers over scrambling limbs and the Gideon Bibles sling out their tambourines and collection plates, neatly severing heads. Fanged burros pull gold sluices full of peace treaties. Smallpox rains down. English poets cock their quills, fire, puncture heads, retreat and charge again on their feathered coffins. Snapping turtles nip off legs, drag covered wagons full of American flags across the breaking line. In black Cadillacs, concrete pentagons fire off plastic prisons to mash retreating angels.

Gabriel holds high the blue banner, but it falls. Michael fights back with his troops, his burning sword slashing and clipping. The blue line breaks, fast. They run. Himself spurs on his pale horse. Tarheel jeers and follows. Foot soldiers march in and slaughter the wounded, strip the dead, pick up fallen weapons. Municipal judges gavel down the gasping victims. County sheriffs drop gas-filled balloons on the crawling wounded. College presidents pot shot with IBM cards at the helpless angels. While Michael slowly falls back to protect his retreating troops. Which
scatter. Flee wildly down across Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, to Harvey County where they hide out in rabbit burrows. Michael follows. Crawls underground. Crawls down to the secret cave where Gabriel waits. Where they still wait. Where they still hide. Where they still suffer from grievous wounds. Where they lie hidden under the flights of black flies that bomb and strafe the pleasant fields of Kansas. Hidden, they wait out the vast defeat. And whence they do not expect to come again.

In Bedlam they worked him with their harping-irons. In Bedlam they made bets on his life. In Bedlam they let him have his cat and some sunlight. In Bedlam his friends left him. In Bedlam he prayed for those treated worse than himself. In Bedlam he remembered the owls in the towers. In Bedlam he remembered his maker and praised. Praised and praised in the multitudes of things and the praise there is in each one of them. God’s whole grand world felt his benedictions from Bedlam. God bless Kit Smart. God damn Dr. Samuel Johnson, who used Smart’s jubilation as the occasion for a turgid quip.


Darkness on the face of the earth and on the face of the waters. Where sunlight was is now cold. Where leaves and grass were is now dust. Vast desolation of the ending of it all. No more
does the chisel of the sculptor scratch. No longer does the eye of
the painter register the flaring rump of the world. Undone the
poet's thick mind. Amputated the fingers of the novelist.
Unstrung the instruments of joy. In the layers of the earth, worms
shrivel. Under the broken trees, carpets of dead birds. On the
farms, plow rust and seed dries out. Milch cows lie on dust as
little mounds. Horses' hoofs roll in the deadly wind. Where there
was laughter is now silence. Where there was grunting and
squealing is now emptiness. Where the grand bull roared, where
the grand cock crowed, where the gross boar slobbered, cracking
and breaking of worlds of doing. Waves of dead fish rise against
the continents. Morbid whales roll aimlessly through the waves.
Thick oil covers the creatures of the deep. The bright and shining
morning star breaks and there is no more.
DALLAS WIEBE was born in Newton, Kansas, on January 9, 1930. He grew up there and attended Newton public schools, graduating from high school in 1948. He attended Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, and graduated in 1954 with a B.A. in English Literature. From 1954-1960 he studied at the University of Michigan, receiving his M.A. in Literature in 1955 and his Ph.D. in English and American Literature in 1960. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with the fiction of Wyndham Lewis. He taught at the University of Wisconsin from 1960-1963 and then moved to the University of Cincinnati. After teaching for thirty-two years at the University of Cincinnati, mostly in the creative writing program in the English Department, he retired in January of 1995. He is now Emeritus Professor. His publications include two novels: *Skyblue the Badass* (Doubleday-Paris Review Editions, 1969) and *Our Asian Journey* (MLR Editions Canada, 1997). He has published four books of short stories: *The Transparent Eyeball* (Burning Deck, 1982), *Going to the Mountain* (Burning Deck, 1988) *Skyblue's Essays* (Burning Deck, 1995) and *The Vox Populi Street Stories* (Burning Deck, 2003). He received the Aga Khan Fiction Prize from *Paris Review* in 1978 and the next year a Pushcart Prize. In 1998 he was awarded the Ohio Arts Council's Governor's Award for Individual Artist. His stories have appeared in many journals, including *Paris Review, North American Review, Epoch, Fiction International* and others. His poems have appeared in numerous journals and he has published a book of minimalist poems entitled *The Kansas Poems* (1987). He was a founder and editor of *Cincinnati Poetry Review* through the first twenty-four issues. He is a founder and former president of the Cincinnati Writers’ Project. Currently he is at work putting together an anthology of poems about Mozart and rewriting his unpublished book of short stories entitled *Slapsticks*. 
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Dalla Wilhe