WOODEN TEETH

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Leslie Williams
(FLOATING AWAY)

by Marek Thiel

The man keeps pushing sounds
out of his mouth
with his tongue,
but the sounds keep falling
onto the floor and his tongue
is so long that it drags upon
the ground, unwittingly picking up
these self-same sounds
to be re-dribbled, so that
he stands in this pool of drool
making himself a circular waterfall.

This is no Niagra, but there
certainly is a leak somewhere.
I think I'll build me a raft,
and strike out west for an hour or so.

JONAH

by Carmen Lattimore

Jonah took his recorder
everywhere he did
all his life
taped everything we said
thought he was something
else he did
played to himself
again and again
what we said
what he said
we never knew
if he died
found all the tapes
we did
played them back
again we did
what we said
what we said
played them back
again and again
and again ...

WINTER REFLECTING

THE INNER MUG

by Chris Horn

Winding their way about my sustenance
Fingering the warmth to its degree
I state back from concentric circles
A HINTERLAND COMEDY
A BOOK REVIEW

by

Gary Walton

The Natural Man by Ed McClanahan (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux) Hb/dj $11.50

A fiction writer friend of mine (himself a veteran of nearly thirty books) once told me that all great American writers come from the "hinterlands." What he meant was that good fiction must have a firm sense of place and, more importantly, a solid sense of character. His rationale was that a writer who grows up in a small town atmosphere is more apt to become inundated with the character of the town and the characters the town spawns. Moreover, the writer has the time to study the delicate interrelationships between people that is at the heart of the best fiction. He named several authors, such as Mark Twain, Sherwood Anderson, and Ernest Hemingway, as examples to prove his point. I'm beginning to wonder if there isn't some truth to what he says.

Ed McClanahan was born in Kentucky and grew up with that strong sense of place of which my friend had spoken. His new book, The Natural Man, can easily fit into that "hinterland" tradition of American fiction. The epigraph, lifted from Cooper's The Prairie, is a tip-off to not only the locale of the story but also to its generally irreverent and comic tone. It states: "You are of the class, mammals; order, primates; genus, homo; species, Kentucky." The book is an outrageously funny, yet warm, look at a young man's rite-of-passage into manhood in a small rural town in the 1940's. The town is called the "City of Needmore, population 478 where they're all at home! Where prosperity is a-s-always just around the corner."

The story centers on the relationship between Harry Eastep, the narrative point of view (and reluctant virgin) who is constantly searching for some means to get "Oodles" Ockerman (his boss' daughter) to help him relieve his unfortunate condition, and a "six feet five inches tall . 238 pound ... fifteen year old man-of-the-world who 'was ugly as sin' and 'plainly knew no fear, nor any shame" named Monk McHornig.

Monk, a founding from a big-city orphanage, is recruited by the Burdock County Bulldogs (Harry's alma mater) to play basketball for them. It is said he plays ball "the way Pretty Boy Floyd played cops and robbers." Monk brags that he has "the diliest mind and the diliest mouth of any man or boy in the entire recorded history of Burdock County." So far no one has challenged that opinion. Since basketball is the center around which life revolves in that part of Kentucky, Harry, who is also a promising man of letters, is not so subtly impressed into the service of the high school to write Monk's English papers for him. It isn't long before a mutual respect grows between the two boys. In the end Monk condescends to teach Harry some of his hard-won carnal knowledge.

Harry's innocence is pointed to again and again in the book. For example, at one point his father tries to give him some paternal advice on sex during a hair-cut:
'Son,' he murmured solemnly, as his scissors danced snick-
snick-snack about Harry’s ears like a metallic butterfly, ‘did
you know the Bible says ‘tis better to cast they seed upon
the belly of a hoor than on the ground?’
‘It is?’ Harry said delightedly, before he could stop himself.
He’d always suspected it would indeed be a great deal bet-
ter, but he’d certainly never supposed the Bible would sup-
port him in that opinion.
Thus, is Harry undaunted in his search for an elusive cure for
his tenacious virginity.
But beyond the jokes and the overtly bawdy nature of The
Natural Man, there is an underlying mastery of craft which sets it
apart from much other fiction. McClanahan’s language is a mix-
ture of highly sophisticated prose and earthy dialogue; it dances
along the page, grabs the reader and entrances him in a whirl of
verbiage, before he is aware of it. Here, for example, is a
paragraph describing a voyeuristic incident outside of fair maid
Oodles’ window in which Harry watches her naked form while his
libidinal restraint is driven nearly to the breaking point:

A moment fairly gravid with possibility, Oodles’ ample
charms for once in her life truly appreciated and she didn’t
even know it. Oodles Ackerman with exactly what longed for,
as a swain so smitten with her form divine that he was actually
staggering about in the lovemorn darkness beneath her
bedroom window, and she didn’t even know she had him.

One can almost see Twain’s Huck Finn or Anderson’s George
Willard in the same awkward situation. McClanahan’s highly
romantic language removes any hint of vulgarity from the scene
and makes it absurdly charming.
Harry’s romantic innocence is repeatedly played against
Monk’s more Bohemian demeanor. At one point while in a confes-
sional mood, Monk describes a woman who had come to the or-
phanage ostensibly to adopt him:
Hey, she was a looker, dad! Redhead, see, and had one hell
of a set of jugs! I seen her, I sez Hubba-dubba, baby, I’ll be
your little boy any old time!

Here Monk sounds like a fifteen year old Neal Cassidy. In fact,
Monk, like Cassidy, is quite adept at stealing cars and visiting
bordello’s. (Tales of which never cease to win Harry’s wide-eyed
respect and adoration.) Monk, however, is not without gratitude for
Harry’s literary efforts in his behalf. Upon receiving a C- plus on
one of his papers (his highest grade ever) he says, “Step...you
are a regular William Snakeshit, son!” This is high praise indeed
from Monk McHornig.
McClanahan’s writing, as with any good comic writing, has an
underlying sadness that inevitably creeps into the corners of
scenes and gives them balance. For example, early in the book,
before much of the action even takes place, the reader is taken
years ahead and is introduced to Monk’s demise. Far from being
ignominious, Monk’s death is an honorable one. Harry narrates an
account from the local paper:
Even Monk's sad epitaph, however, is mollified by McClanahan's darkly humorous language. "Smilin'herein is not a word used with heroes. Yet, Monk is a heroic figure in this book. He is a Vergil who leads Harry Eastep to the brink of manhood but, like Hemingway's Nick Adams, Monk finally gets caught up in something even he can't handle, the war in Southeast Asia. McClanahan has a knack for walking the fine line between pathos and sentimentality and between humor and vulgarity. He is a wordsmith who never lets the reader down, more importantly, he knows how to tell a good story and that, of course, is the magic ingredient.

So, whether Ed McClanahan's skill at creating characters and exploiting the foibles of a small community came from his growing up in the "hinterland" of Kentucky or whether his talent sprang from the forehead of a bust of Mark Twain matters very little when one reads his book. However he does what he does, I hope he keeps on doing it. The Natural Man is a good read. It's fun. It's well made. A reader can't really ask for much more than that.
AN ELEGY TO PHILEAS

I had this cat called Phileas
who bought himself a trip out of town
on the tread of a tire.

I found the old guy
who in an effort to supplement his livelihood
ended up perpendicular to a curb.

I buried him in a grocery bag—Phileas
who didn’t have a care in this world—
because he deserved at least that much.

I’ve stopped fretting over Phileas
who was a mangy old cuss and who would’ve
left for good as soon as the weather warmed up, anyway.

DAWDLING IN
THE NATION’S CAPITAL

by Linda White

A stray cat means little to most
people as they walk their ways
up ‘A’ street between the Metro
dugout and the First Baptist Church
next to where I call home. But he—rubbing his speckled,
irradiant fur against my skin
turning up to me, eyes
like dollops of jelly reflecting
my haggard face, beady
from a day of continual
miscalculations—makes
me wish I had a can
of 9-lives tuna in my purse
and that dinner could
be waiting for me
when I get home.
PHOTOGRAPHY I
by Claire McDonald

Taking
pictures, claiming
the image as your own.

Possessing
that sunset, those people,
or that action,
when you like
the way they fit
in your frame.

Captured back-
ward in cells,
or perfect order,
Waiting to be
reversed.

You
are just
a mirror
and a lens.

the divorce
by Carianne Applebaum

small flowers
dying on the vine.
forget-me-nots
sickly fading away.
brown violets
crumpled underfoot,
folded down like
grocery bags
Put away forever.

THE NIGHT
by Paul Tony

Have I held you too close Night?
While in your gathering dusk the roosting birds
ever watchful signs of fate
Worried through the urging of my soul,
I have stared out on life with vacant eyes,
With vacant spirit,
With vacant heart too long
Laughing vindication of earth’s fire will come,
The sweltering shower of weeping days end
In the ever present whisper of the night.
The whispering, longing stillness of my soul.
Have I held thee too close, Night?

David McAleavey
"No, I won't help you with your things," Raymond Klein's father said vehemently. "I'll never forgive myself for driving you over here and now you want me to help you?"

"Dad, we've been over this a hundred times. I'm almost twenty-one years old; I'm a junior in college, what's wrong with wanting to live on my own?" Ray said defensively, staring straight ahead.

"My son, my son, what have I done to deserve this?" Dr. Klein asked in a guilty tone. It made him sound neurotic and Ray did not like it.

"Nothing, Dad, please..." Ray pleaded, leaving the rest of his sentence unsaid. He got out of the car to open the rear door. Sticking his head into the back to empty its contents, he met his father face to face.

"You say please, but I do too, son," Dr. Klein said desperately. Then, with an authoritative tone, he added, "Raymond, I absolutely do not condone living with six boys!"

Ray said nothing. Realizing his son's genuine nonchalance, Dr. Klein used the only tactic which he had left.

"I swear I will never come over here as long as I live, Raymond Klein." Ray continued gathering his things and when he was through, he called from outside the car, "Not boys dad, men." He shut the door with a violent anger, making the car shake. Dr. Klein paused for a moment, his head quivering on the door handle. Griping tenuously in ambivalence, the moment of intensity passed and he put the car into gear and drove off.

Arms loaded with belongings, Ray walked towards the house. As he climbed the porch stairs, Peter came running out of the front door with cheerful greetings. Ray met Peter's smile with reproachful eyes. Unable to accept Peter's warmth, he uncomfortably shuffled his load from one hand to the other. His perception of what was happening around him seemed to revolve around his father's debilitating speech of abandonment.

"Welcome to the shore of Freedom. It's not so bad really, once you get used to the water," Peter said, joining a, sensing Ray's state of mind. Ray smiled deeply, amused by the comment, and grateful for his understanding.

"The shore of Freedom," Ray thought to himself as he walked through the front door, "seems more like the edge of pain." But he crossed that edge nevertheless, accompanied by the strange sensation that he was failing. It felt like the beginning of a dream.

"Total immersion," someone said in the living room. Ray looked up in surprise, convinced that this unknown speaker had somehow read his mind.

"Just stick the whole bag in water until the new fish get used to the temperature of our tank," Bart said excitedly. Ray recognized his voice. Unloading his arms, he walked into the living room. "Total immersion, huh?" He said while laughing to himself.

"Look at the new fish we bought, Ray," Bart said excitedly.

"Two tigers, a tetra, and an angelfish." Ray thought to himself.

"The shovel nose might eat them though," Mark added. "He's done it before. They might not be quick enough to escape him."

"They look like brave swimmers," Ray commented, peering into the tank.

"Let's try letting them go," Bart said.

"Wave a courageous hand towards shore, little fish," Ray said, gesturing himself. He compared himself to the fish, and they provided a strange comfort for him.

That evening, a single strand of smoke rose and bent gently at the roof's incline. A desk lamp, facing the wall, dispensed muted light. Ray lay on his bed staring across his smoke into partial darkness. The simple presence of his body seemed to light the room more than the lamp just a few feet away from his head. His expression offered no clue to his thoughts and Peter lingered on the top stair of the etic, waiting for an invitation.

Although Ray did not move, Peter knew he sensed him. Slowly Ray's right arm flexed towards his head and he took a long drag from his cigarette. He exhaled a thick line of white smoke saying, "I have a lot of reading to do for Literary Perspectives but I just can't seem to get into it."

"No one knows your feelings, Ray, and by locking yourself up here, you are not going to set your life straight."

"I don't want criticism. Our assignment for Tuesday is Eliot, Auden, and Roethke. Do you know how hard it is to read them when your mind refuses to cooperate?"

"No, you don't want rejection," Peter said, disregarding Ray's last two sentences. Ray looked away to hide his expression, reaching to take another drag of his cigarette before realizing it had already burnt out. Feeling foolish, he asked Peter to hand him the Winston's lying on the floor. They weren't so far away that Ray couldn't reach them himself, but he saw this act as a confession to vulnerability.

"Sure." Peter said quietly, throwing the cigarettes with more power than necessary. "Well, let's see where you are," Peter said, picking up the discarded book.


"See, you must be paying some attention if you can remember what page you're on offhand." Peter said encouragingly.

"Yeah, but that's only because while I was daydreaming I noticed that the number was part of my birthday: 6/862. June 6, 1982. Boy, I feel old. Anyway, it was the part about Icarus that really reminded me of my father."
"That sounds really interesting."
Peter said encouragingly.
"Do you mind if I turn the light out?" Ray asked.
"No, do whatever you want."
The light clicked off and silence followed like a preconditioned reaction.
"It's a long way to Tipperary."
"What?"
"Oh just something I heard on a Mary Tyler Moore Show once, that's all. 'Wish I had a candle.'"
"I listen Ray, if you feel this guilty about your parents, maybe you should just go home."
Peter suggested. "I mean if Auden's 'Musee des Beaux Arts' is going to remind you of your father...."
Ray didn't react. "Why don't you try writing him a letter and address it to Daedalus Klein?"
"I'm really not in the mood for jokes Pete, thank you."
"Darkness intervened, except for the tip of the cigarette and the anxious light from the house across the street. The thread of conversation unraveled into thought. Ray took up his notebook and wrote.

November 5
There is a single light on in the house across the street. What does that symbolize? Friendship, Hope, Loneliness? It could mean a number of things. But 'could' ... no, like the cigarette smoke and gets lost at the cating. Somehow, the peak of this roof symbolizes the main stream of life—the living....

---

"Pete, will you drive me to my parents' house so that I can pick up my rocking chair?" Six uncomfortable days had passed for Ray when he asked Peter for this small favor on Saturday morning. "Sure I will," Peter replied. "Do you want to go now?"
"Yeah, now's O.K...." he said apprehensively. "Might as well go..."
"he continued, suddenly stopping short.
"What?"
"Nothing," Ray answered, hearing nothing, but instead reading his lips. He seemed to have entered a fog of trepidation, which paralyzed his senses and consumed his mind. The ride passed in silence, until Peter said, "Why are you bringing that book?"
"This?" Ray seemed astonished, pointing to a simple brown hard cover with motherly protection. "This is my journal." He added, then added. "I thought I might need it on such a momentous occasion."
He couldn't believe he was on his way home. Only a week had passed, yet it could have been months. Each one of those days seemed like painless medals of accomplishment. The minutes were sporadically recorded in his mind through daydreams, yearnings, and memories. Each thought was so fragile and precious that even if it was broken, it would never be forgotten.

Sleep was not something that came easily during those synaptic six days. Out of his childhood came the finest details of simpler days. A small part of him reached out to those recollections but another part pulled himself away. Alice in Wonderland could no longer be a bible and the technique of sucking the candy coating off M&M's before eating the chocolate center, he realized, was an art that he would have to abandon.
Strength was found in symbols: the new fish, the poems. Each one added significance by its simple meaning. He realized the time had come for him to grow up; he had already "grown up."

---

November 11
afternoon
I am afraid of bridges. I don't like disposable cups. My mother tells me she hates me for what I have done to her. What have I done to her? Hemingway killed himself. In Africa, when a lion is wounded, he leaves the pack. They do not come back for him. I am not a lion though. Whenever I hear a car door slam, I am afraid they are coming back to get me.

Hours later, Ray sat crouched on the living room sofa, writing on his knees. Peter entered, breaking Ray's concentration. With the interruption, the gurgling of the fish tank quickly became recognizable.
"I love that painting," Peter said with a sigh. "It really maps the end of one path and the beginning of another."
"No it doesn't," Ray said with unalloyed asurity. "The road leads off into the distance but it's curved so there is no reason to assume that it stops. They both stared at the fireplace, as if it too was going to enter the conversation.
"But it's like a Vivaldi composition," Peter added in his defense.
"No it's not," Ray snapped. "It's just the road."
"The road to where?"
"Why the road to Tipperary of course."

---

November 11
evening
It comes in a sigh. Reproachful glances and ugly stares. Long, slow, agonizing distrust or simple hatred.

The sun sends salvation in clear rays of light. The air promises more than the mind can muster. If my world was acting in symmetry it would be rainy and cold.

What does anything mean? We are collections of impressions. A symbol to one is a mystery to another. It is a miracle that we can communicate at all. Any explanation will do as long as it fits into the basic matrix of one's being. I've come to realize that rationalization is O.K. if it enables you to live with yourself.
“Ray, do you understand life?”
“I could explain the whole world to you in my terms.” He said
with a head shaking sigh. “I could rationalize all existence but it
wouldn’t help you any because my understanding hinges on my
thoughts, my life, my emotions, and my being…”
“Are you going back?” Peter asked, but Ray ignored the
question.
“Some of the new fish have been eaten by the catfish. Have
you noticed?”

On Sunday morning, Peter climbed the stairs to Ray’s room with
fresh bagels and the Sunday Times, intended as a premeditated
trick.
The sunlight collided with Ray’s outline as he sat up in bed.
“How wonderful,” he said as he offered a stretch of greeting.
Before Peter had finished buttering the bagels, Ray had succeed-
ed in demolishing the newspaper.
“There’s nothing better than the Sunday Times and fresh
bagels,” he said in an obsequious tone. “But if you’ll excuse me, I
think I’ll take a shower before I dive into the food.”

As Ray dialed the phone number of his parents’ house, he
noticed that he had never even bothered to find out the phone
number of his new address. His father seemed all too happy to
return to the place where just one week before he had sworn he
would never visit again. This time, Ray welcomed such hypocrisy.

November 12

Nineteen fifty-seven West Brighton Street has vanished from
this realm of meaning as some sort of dream perhaps, a spot in
time carrying sudden confusion and opacity. Careless living has
been swallowed up by an emotional need, the sole reality which I
am forced to adhere to. One thing I am sure of, memories do not
live, so life must continue elsewhere.
I worry too much about where I’ll be living in ten years, what my
status and income will be. I lack that concern for the present
which will dissipate my anxieties towards the future. I watch the
clock until it changes from 1:21 to 1:22 and then I mourn 1:21. And
in mourning 1:21, I waste 1:22 so that when 1:23 appears, I am
both surprised and disillusioned. I am concerned only with the
meaningless and the profound.
I still do not know what I am after. Perhaps it is just the feeling of
closing my eyes without any worry or regret. Is that possible?

After this journal entry, Ray looked up at his father and for a mo-
moment the past and the present merged into one. For one glorious
instant, his father’s profile brought back an entire childhood of
memories in the sort of flashback sequence that happens when
one quickly flips through a deck of cards. This insight brought
panic when he realized that he no longer needed his father. Yet,
when his hand began to scribble this down, time rendered him
unable. Another thought had already arrived. The future con-
verged, causing his loss of the thought from a moment before. So
Raymond Klein wrote nothing, but instead stared at his father’s
profile as he drove down quiet suburbia streets. Like Daedalus
and Icarus, they had somehow escaped.

The dinner table at nineteen fifty-seven West Brighton Street
had one empty chair. Conversation was minimal until Bart ad-
dressed Peter. “If he was going to go back, why did he come here
in the first place?”
Peter put his fork down and said simply, “Because it takes
seven days to travel to Tipperary.”
**REGRESS**

by Nehk Phillips

Like lead-suited swimmers
Riding the sea, or

Saturday memories on
Sundays gone past, or

A wheel with three
Corners, or

Corn ears gone
Steel, or

Hands without fingers, or
Faces without masks, or

Love without pain, or
A damned loser’s luck, We

Search
For the wisdom,
The words, We

Search,
For the meaning,
The ceiling,

The squeal of the
Voice, the Answer
Caught,

Just by chance,

Naked,
As a woman,
In an early
Morning stream.

---

**AFTER HOURS**

by Robert Attanasio

reggae 7 a.m.
fills the room,
basslines bouncing;
roaches dancing.
sun barely present,
cars lighting the road,
people walking, biking;
eighth floor open window:
my head ventures out
and breathes morning air,
watches the city
amazed, almost mesmerized:
what birth must feel like;
or a waterless baptism;
brain registers sensations,
the heart pumps
like the Nile
overflowing,
drenching the land:
my skin sprouts tingling grass.

---

by Bob Flisser

Fleeting, my mind is on the wind
travelling all about
from here to there.

It tried to fill a vacuum
where there might have been something
more substantial.

There was a glimpse or a flash
of a sparkle or shine or radiance
which caught my eye
(or maybe it was you)

I tried to put back the pieces
of a neglected journey
by filling the vacuum
with emptiness
or energy or brilliance or light
(or maybe it was you)

O, Saturn,
how I long for thee,
your icy rings
glistening in pale starlight.
Your yellow skies and purple sunset
your orange plains of rocky soil
all await and hasten
my speedy return.
WAITRESS
by Claire J. McDonald

Another night waiting at Pasta Patch.
Busy? Frantic, hot, frazzled, hassled.
Customers are cranky and I'm
Despondent; they want to
Eat and I want to
Forget this crazy place. "Can I
Get you something from the bar?" Right now I
Hate them all.
I'm going to quit
Just as soon as I can. Don't they
Know it isn't easy? You get
Lecherous convention men.
"May I suggest the manicotti?"
Nervous first-date couples.
"Or the tonnelli?"
Perhaps a bottle of chianti?"
Quick, pick up my food, take
Reservations for a party of
Sixteen—too many.
Tips are lowly, left
Under crumpled napkins.
Various coins, a
Wet dollar bill—or just
Exactly enough cash for the check.
Y'Know I feel sad when I'm left with
Zero.

EVERYONE WAS WAITING
by Linda White

Aborted, erased
Barren. There was no
Chance for that life to
Develop. No
Excusable way
For that little
Guy to survive. Afterwards, it was
Hard to return—to make that
Initial trip back to where
everyone was waiting.
Jolted by
Kindly assistance I made up
Lame excuses to cope with
My guilt. And
Not even I could explain the
Overwhelming fear, the
Painful loneliness or the
Quarreling and silences which
Rendered my decision as the only
Safe one.
Trapped, confused and
Unsure—I tried not to
Violate anyone or myself. And I
Was a failure. I never
Expected that I would hurt
You so much. It revealed a
Zone of pain in me I'll never erase.

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