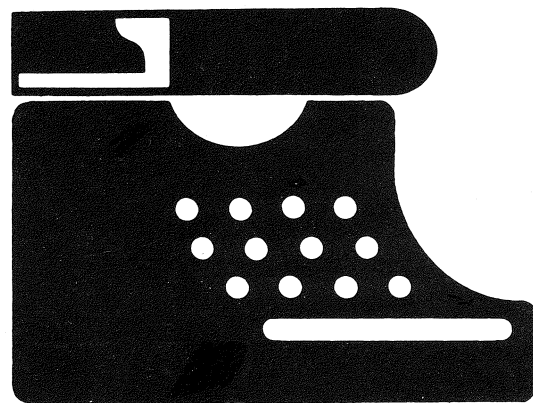


# Teachers & Writers



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## Writing With Family Album Photos

by Harry Greenberg

I'M ALWAYS IN THE "CROW'S NEST," ALERT FOR ways to add more appeal to my poetry lessons. I believe strongly in packaging. Perhaps a year at N.Y.U. majoring in advertising has something to do with it. I strive to make my teaching a touch out of the ordinary so that I can entertain and motivate in fresh ways. When I prepare for a class I decide what poetic point I want to work on and then how I can sell it to the class in a relaxed yet riveting manner. Oh, shades of a frustrated copywriter!

Several years ago I came across a fine poem by Jon Anderson called "The Photograph of Myself" (in *Death and Friends*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970). The moment I finished it a lesson began forming in my mind. In the poem, Anderson (the man) is talking to the photo of Anderson (the boy), envying the simplicities of that time, while also reassuring the lad of the kind of man he will grow to be.

### The Photograph of Myself

Surely in my eyes that light is now lost,  
or has deepened; and my hand, which  
in the photograph seems tense  
and strong, is less sure.

Is it  
the right hand? Yes, it is still  
lean, and larger now;

enough to hold this small, boy's hand  
within it, like a son's,

perhaps to reassure him, as I do not  
my own sons, who are not yet born.  
Across the grey garden

stand some men; I do not know them.

HARRY GREENBERG has worked in the T&W program for five years. He is coeditor of *Some* magazine and Release Press books. His poems have been widely published.

Nor, I think, does he. But they stand firm,  
a terrible simplicity  
which will disappear. So, too, the other,  
unknown, as far from him

as my living self, who again  
clicks the shutter.  
He did not know it would reach this far.

But it's not real, the boy,  
myself, looking out at me but not seeing,

and the garden, which never grows.  
Good friend, believe me,  
here I am, perhaps your best intention;

my hand can hold now your entirely small body.  
I can love you;  
you are the friend's son, myself,

to whom I speak and listen.

The honesty of the poem pulled me in. I began thinking of pictures of me as a child, captioned, dated, and held snugly in albums: Harry not at all happy in the basinette, 1950; Harry's first shaky steps alone at nine months; Marty holds Harry atop merry-go-round pony, 1952. Here were frozen bits of time begging to be thawed and relived again. I recalled Kodak's catchy slogan "We're America's Storyteller" and it

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### Writing With Family Album Photos

by Harry Greenberg

#### Atlas: New Cartoons

by Glen Baxter

#### New Ways to Use Your Head

by Barbara Siegel

#### With & From Sarah Greys

by Howard Norman

#### The View in Winter

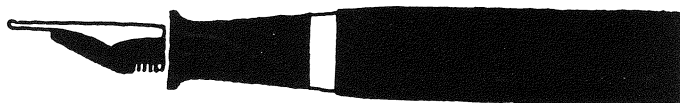
Review by Arthur Tobier

#### Writing Fiction

Review by Meredith Sue Willis

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really hit home. My students had a wealth of memories tucked inside family photo albums that they could explore with their writing.



I was concerned about full class participation. The true heart of the lesson was going to be left up to the children. At first they reacted skittishly to it, but when they realized that they'd get a chance to sneak a peek at their friends as they had never seen them before, their excitement grew. I added to the camaraderie by telling the class that they weren't alone in this adventure. I'd write a poem inspired by a baby picture of me and bring both in to show them.

Many students had questions. Did they all have to be baby pictures? Should more than one be brought in? There were so many at home, what kinds were best? What if their parents didn't allow them to bring in very old pictures?

They didn't *all* have to be baby pictures. Photos taken five or six years ago would be fine. I wanted enough time to have elapsed to make these captured moments fresh again. I was afraid that recent snapshots would elicit in their writing a tone bordering on dull, composition-like chatter. Three or four shots should be brought in for a variety of themes to choose from. I urged them to spend a fair amount of time making the selections. A posed shot where they're smiling for the camera might offer a very limited idea for a poem. They should be on the lookout for a picture with something going on. A humorous shot their parents set up. An unexpected photograph catching them being natural. A cherished picture with a favorite relative. If they ran into trouble getting permission from their parents, that didn't mean they were automatically off the hook. They were to select the shots they wanted to work with, set them aside, and then look at them again right before coming to school.

When I walked into class the following week a bunch of students rushed up in a frenzy to show off their photographs. Other students in the back of the room were eagerly exchanging shots as if they were baseball cards. Out of all the classes I worked with, only a handful of children didn't come prepared. Most of the credit goes to their teachers who reminded them every day of their "homework for Mr. Greenberg."

I passed out copies of Jon Anderson's poem. It's vital to see what a poet does with his linebreaks as well as to listen to his poem. One student, commenting on the poem, said it made him think of photography in a new way. He never gave much thought before to the idea that when you view a photograph, you are actually taking the place where the camera was positioned. Another student, holding up her picture, said she found it "weird" gazing back all those years, staring at her own eyes looking up at her out of a playpen.

"You think that's weird, take a gander at my picture!" I held up a shot of me at eight months, sitting on my mother's lap in front of a round bureau mirror. Our backs are to the camera, but our faces are captured in the reflection. I told the class that when I spotted this picture in an album, it brought back memories of how my father often maneuvered for the slightly offbeat shot, and those were the thoughts I based my poem on:

### The Bureau of Growing Faces

The offbeat shot!  
My father's handiwork.  
So what if we bewilder the kid  
into thinking his mother knows more  
about being in two places at once  
than Scotty beaming Captain Kirk  
aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise.

The way I remember, it was always:

Hang from the tree limb with one hand, wave.  
Wear that funny shirt with the clouds,  
then go outside and turn on the garden hose, wave.  
Stand on your hands, in the corner, with your back to me,  
wave.

When I sat on what I thought was my mother's lap  
and stared into the mirror at my mother  
cuddling some strange kid I was intensely jealous of,  
the bureau stood in Brooklyn  
on Ocean Parkway.  
Now it stands in Northport, Long Island  
on Royal Lane.  
From the shattering city to the singing country  
without a single crack!  
Sometimes when I'm home visiting  
I sit before the mirror,  
open my eyes wide,  
and slip soft contact lenses in.

I've inherited the compulsion for the offbeat shot.  
Several months ago I spent a pleasant day  
at the Bronx Zoo with a friend.  
For an hour we roamed through the collection of nocturnal  
animals.  
Later, in the daylight, something clicked.  
I wanted her to lean against the huge HOUSE OF DARKNESS  
sign,  
hold a flickering match, wave.

Everyone was in the mood to start writing, but still needed a little guidance. I wanted the push to be gentle, just enough to nudge them into motion so they could decide for themselves the direction to take in their writing. I offered these three possible approaches:

- 1) They could recreate the events of the time and supply thoughts they might have had as babies reacting to the situation.
- 2) They could let the photographs trigger other memories, as I had done in my poem, and use those as material for their writing.
- 3) They could look at an interesting photograph, let it fuel their imaginations, and use that as a runway to a flight of fancy.

The final results amazed me. The photographs added a mixture of confidence and honesty to everyone's work—the flavor of writing when the writer feels secure with his material.



Julie Yankowitz, a slender fifth grader, risked classroom teasing by using a photograph revealing she was quite chubby a number of years ago:

### So Heavy I Can't Slide

I'm on this slide.  
So tight I feel.  
Are the walls coming in?  
Is the floor slanting?

My mother screams out,  
"Hey, Julie, stop eating those  
cookies all night!"  
Everybody laughs.

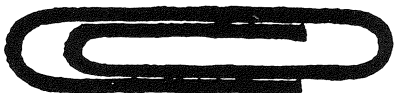
I don't think it's funny.  
What does she mean?  
I can't live without cookies!  
Why can't I go down this thing.  
Perhaps I'll stay on forever.  
"No, I can't!" I yell.

My mother came over.  
I felt like a prisoner.  
I knew I'd get slapped.

I was wrong.  
All she did was pick me up  
and say, "Hey, fatso!"

I didn't know what to do.  
I just had a feeling  
I shouldn't go on this thing  
ever again.

Maybe I'll get bread and water  
next time.



John Rosselli worked with a cute picture that had him looking as if he were wearing a mudpack:

### Eat, Little Baby, Eat!

I was one year old,  
but I was very important!  
I was the one who kept the baby food  
from rotting. I didn't like it,  
but I ate it.  
My duck and kangaroo  
didn't eat, you know,  
the ones around my neck.  
My mother always said,  
"Eat, little baby, eat!"  
I did. One day I had  
a banana. It tasted good.  
I had two.  
I fed my duck and kangaroo.  
My mother was mad.  
I wanted to cheer her up,  
so I threw the food  
on the floor.

Michele Ierardi (6th grade) used a shadowy shot of herself wrapped in a blanket as an infant and pulled out this mood piece:

### My Baby

I am wrapped up in a shell  
and thrust into the world—  
deserted, abandoned,  
lonely,  
I hear someone scream  
"My baby!"  
The two words fill my ears.  
My brain shatters like glass.

Something hovers over me—  
neither man nor beast.  
I want to run but my  
bones feel like oatmeal.

It picks me up and  
throws me into the sky.

Gravity should pull me  
down,  
but it's gone—  
everything's gone.

Blackness shrouds me.



Doug Kurtz (5th grade, P.S. 187) worked with a kindergarten photo showing his class being led around the room in a train game:

### A Reluctant Game of Choo Choo

Bringing the  
kids to their senses  
almost  
forcing them  
to use their imagination  
The human  
train  
being conducted  
by Mrs. Hamburg  
I am  
the  
locomotive  
being guided  
by the conductor  
into the  
deepest  
depths  
of  
my  
imagination  
at  
the  
same  
time  
struggling to  
pull  
the  
other  
cars . . .

Ayelet Yoles (7th grade, I.S. 187) gathered memories from a baby picture of her clutching a favorite doll:

### What an Obedient Little Girl

Oh my,  
what an obedient little girl  
I was.  
My mommy told me  
what to do  
and I did it.  
In this case, I had to go  
to the bathroom.  
Mommy said  
she'll be there in a moment.  
She was!  
Here I am,  
on my journey to the bathroom  
with my bottle in one hand.  
In the other  
I had my beautiful, lovable . . .  
Oh, no!  
I forgot him!  
I forgot my Wimpy doll.  
I need him to keep me company,  
or else I get bored.  
Where is he?  
Where can he be?  
Oh! there he is.  
Trying to hide from me?  
He knows he can't do that.  
I'll always find him.  
Now, I walk to the bathroom,  
me,  
my bottle,  
and my naughty Wimpy.  
All of us feeling  
content  
in our own  
special way.

Francoise Schmitt (7th grade, I.S. 187) wrote a poignant poem based on a photograph of herself sitting at the breakfast table with her grandfather:

### My Grandpa

A lonely man  
unaware of life.  
Quiet,  
but is there.  
90 years old.  
His wife died  
before I came along.  
I don't know him  
as well as I'd like.  
Works hard,  
raking leaves,  
painting the house,  
and shopping for him  
and his sister  
whom he lives with.  
A lonely man  
unaware of life.  
February 18th, 1981  
late at night  
my grandfather died.  
Now I'll never,  
ever

get to know him.  
I cried and cried  
when I heard  
the news,  
even though I didn't  
know him.  
I think of my  
father's father  
dead  
and I cry.  
My grandfather,  
a lonely man  
unaware of life.



Gina Torres (7th grade, I.S. 187) brought in a picture of herself taken just hours after her birth:

### A New-Born Baby

1  
"What a baby!"  
Who am I?  
What is this place?  
Do those strange people know me?  
What are they saying?  
They sure look weird!  
I'm scared.  
I feel alone.  
My backside hurts.  
Where will I go from here?

2  
So innocent.  
So small and simple to the eye.  
And yet so complex.  
How she feels is a mystery  
to those around her.  
And a mystery to her also.  
Is she aware of what's around her?  
She will never recall this moment.  
If she does, she won't understand.  
But are you really supposed to?  
She's a miracle.

# Atlas: New Cartoons

by Glen Baxter

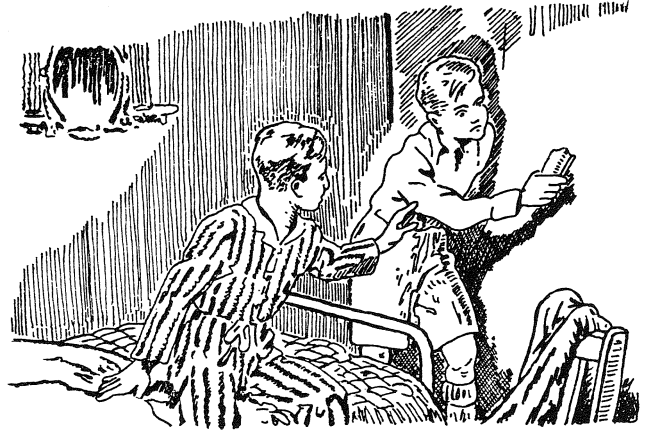


"ANOTHER SLIM VOLUME OF MODERN ENGLISH POETRY!" SHRIEKED JACOBSEN



"QUITE GOOD, RUNNING ELK—YOUR WORK ON THE APOSTROPHE IS COMING ALONG—BUT THERE IS STILL MUCH TO LEARN..." COMMENTED MR. THUNEGRENCH

GLEN BAXTER's most recent book is *Atlas* (Knopf), from which the above cartoons are taken. His work appears regularly in *Vanity Fair*. T&W distributes *Atlas*, as well as his previous *The Impending Gleam*.



AFTER LIGHTS OUT, SMYTHE WOULD TAP OUT A CHAPTER OF 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE' IN MORSE CODE FOR THE LADS IN DORMITORY 'K'.....



"WE'LL HAVE NO ALLITERATION IN THIS HERE BUNKHOUSE" SWORTED M<sup>C</sup> CULLOCH

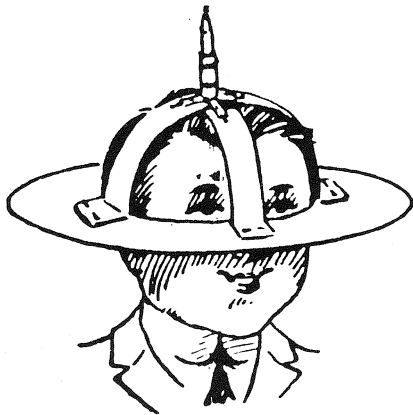
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# New Ways to Use Your Bean

by Barbara Siegel

ARTISTS AND TEACHERS ARE IDEA SCAVENGERS out of necessity. The pressure of constantly having to present new ideas or represent old ones in new ways forces us to search unrelentingly for new sources. The longer one does this, the more apparent it becomes that the sources are everywhere and that one must simply be ready and willing to appropriate them as they present themselves.

Recently, I glanced at the cover of the 1982-83 Teachers & Writers Collaborative book catalogue and saw a drawing by George Schneeman that intrigued me, a drawing of a fellow with a very unusual device on his head and a caption that read, "Teach your students to write with their heads."



The humor of the juxtaposition of an idiomatic phrase and its absurdly literal visual translation appealed to me, and in my typically pack-rat fashion I immediately began thinking of how I could translate this find into an interesting three-dimensional design project for my freshman students at Parsons School of Design.

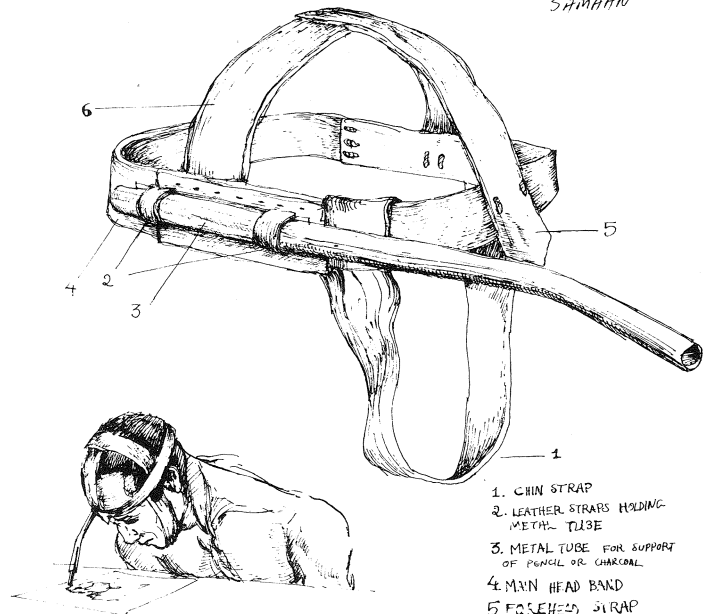
Inspired by George's idea, I asked my class to design and construct devices which would enable them to literally draw (rather than write) with their heads. I intentionally did not show them George's original. Their devices—which had to be functional—would then be demonstrated in class. I also asked each student to draw both a diagram of the contraption, illustrating its function, and a diagram of an alternate version of it. Since the creative process involves choosing certain possibilities while rejecting others, the purpose of the alternate diagram was to make my students more aware of the choices they were making. For background material I assigned a wonderful book of zany but actual, patented inventions called *Absolutely Mad Inventions* by A.E. Brown and H.A. Jeffcott, Jr. (Dover Books).

BARBARA SIEGEL shows her paintings at the Marilyn Pearl Gallery in New York and teaches at Parsons School of Design. Her works are in the permanent collections of the Albright-Knox Museum and the Newark Museum. She has worked in the T&W program for eight years.

Illustrated here are some particularly successful examples of my students' work. In addition to its humor and playfulness, this project offered a perfect context in which the class could explore the relationship between form and function in three-dimensional design.

## SELF CONTAINED HEAD-DRAWING GEAR

SIMON SAMAN



1. CHIN STRAP
2. LEATHER STRAPS HOLDING METAL TUBE
3. METAL TUBE FOR SUPPORT OF PENCIL OR CHARCOAL
4. MAIN HEAD BAND
5. FOREHEAD STRAP
6. OVERHEAD STRAP

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS DRAWING APPARATUS IS BOTH SIMPLE. IT CONSISTS OF (4) A MAIN HEAD BAND WHICH GOES AROUND THE HEAD AT THE LEVEL OF THE FOREHEAD. TO THIS LEATHER STRAP ARE ATTACHED THE (1) CHIN STRAP THE (5) FOREHEAD STRAP AND (6) THE OVERHEAD STRAP WHICH SERVES TO STABILIZE (3) THE METAL TUBE IN ORDER FOR THE USER TO DRAW. ALL OF THESE STRAPS ARE LEATHER AND THEY HAVE BEEN SEWN TOGETHER WITH PLAIN WHITE STRING. THE METAL TUBE IS CONNECTED

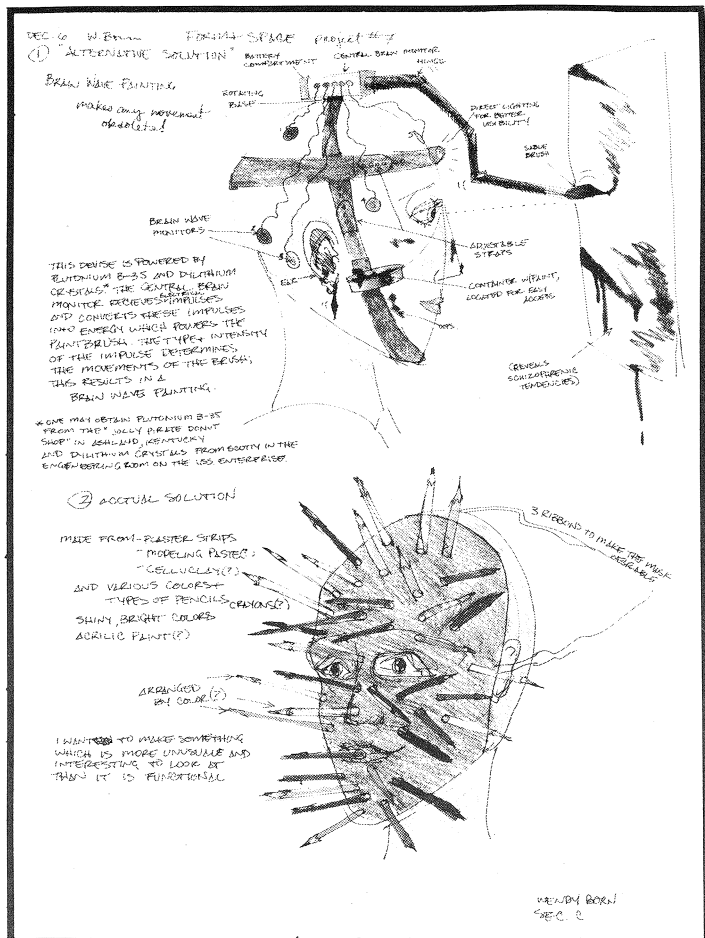
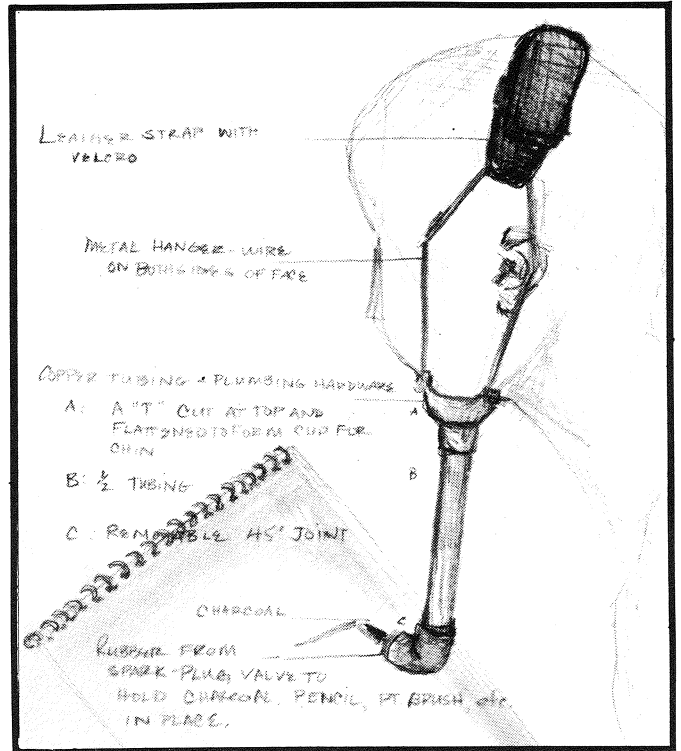
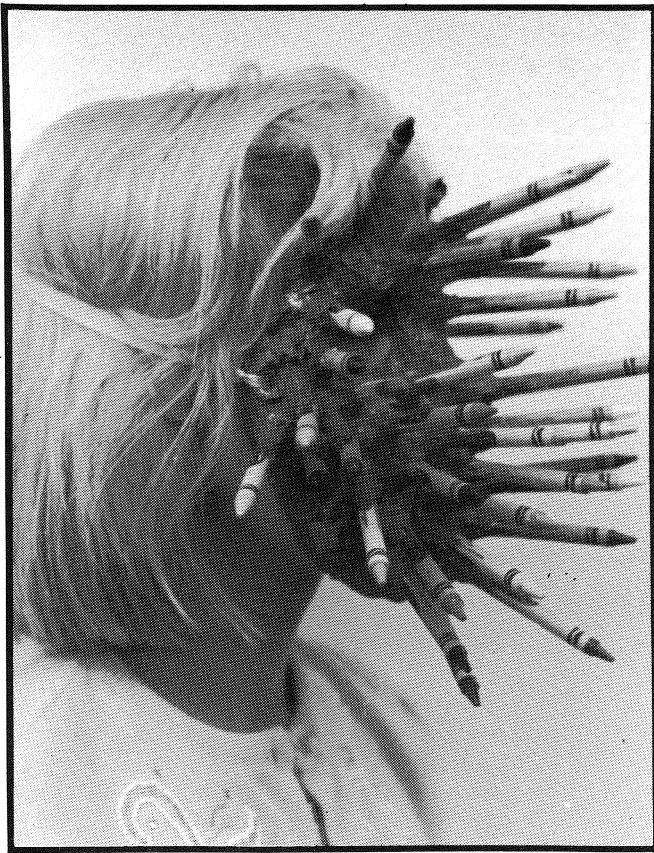
BY TWO STRAPS (2) AND CRAZY GLUE ONTO (4).

Above: Simon Saman's design. Below: Simon wearing the finished product.





Left: Wendy Born and her spooky drawing mask. Below: Kelley Shields and her invention, stylish as Chanel.



# With & From Sarah Greys

by Howard Norman

Writer, translator, and ethnologist Howard Norman spent much of his childhood among the Swampy Cree Indians, in the northern Canadian area known to the Crees as "The Region of Many Delays." Fluent in Cree and English, he began an oral history project about 11 years ago with Sarah Greys, a Swampy Cree friend who died in January at the age of 94. Using her private tapes, taped conversations with him, and his notes made in passing, Mr. Norman has compiled an invaluable record of a life that reflects a culture that is, unfortunately, quickly disappearing, obliterated by progress.

—Editor

## With Sarah Greys

**JOURNAL: MAY 30**

Twelve early mornings in a row now I have met Sarah in the market to hand down melons to her from high crates. She watches my feet work their balance. I remembered today a childhood tag game in this market; I had run a corner and taken flush to my face an entire hung seal. I felt its whiskers and hard, dead mouth. Much of her time in the market this day was concerned with a particular melon; she smelled it four times, worried her fingers over it. Finally it was refused. I noticed that for some reason all this put consternation on her face, not simply the look of indecision. She has a game here: she gets attracted to the face of someone browsing the market corridors—Norwegian, French Canadian, faces of mixed Indian or Eskimo origins—and tries to locate its twin among the pinched "faces" at the ends of melons or coconuts from one Asian ship. Satisfied with her pairing, she gives me a kind of hiss-whistle, holds the fruit up for my view, points the person out. Then I must scrutinize her choices, and agree or not. "Look closer. . . . Maybe you should squint," I hear, should I disagree. Anyway, she has settled on various melons and, each with our carrying satchels full, we walked from the market on a dirt and pebble road soon branching into three roads, each ending on the steep cliff overlooking the Bay. Taking the road furthest north, she said, "I did not taste melons until I was old." Our road ended at the seals. We could not see them through the fog, though we heard their barking through muffled distances. I must tell here that Sarah keeps superstitions, seeming both to invent them for the moment and drawing them up from her childhood woodland villages to the East. This morning she determined the belief if we lingered too long near salt water our feet would barnacle and we would forever walk club-footed. She spoke directly to my face, and while knowing I heard this belief (quite

HOWARD NORMAN's translation of Swampy Cree oral narratives, *The Wishing Bone Cycle*, won the Harold Morton Landon Award for Translation from the Academy of American Poets and is currently distributed by T&W.

unexpectedly, for we had stood at this cliff eleven times before without it taking effect) for the first time, she still held an expression which said, *Your intuition is vague at such perils. You should pay closer attention.* She decided it safe to stay until the fog cleared. I saw her shiver. In the cold her breath, barely a different color from the fog, clouded out like the shape of a pond floating on a lake. Instead of lifting, the fog seemed cut by the knife-cries of gulls who careened off with the pieces. Winds swept the rest away. In the new, clear day we saw below a wooden dock we had forgotten, which stretched out some yards from the gray rocks shore. We immediately began noticing out loud to each other how winter ice had again warped the dock's slats and buckled its stilt legs, and how repairs would be made. Sarah said the carpenters would tune their hammers to the sound of the remaining thaw ice breaking and sectioning off to floes, the cause of the distant surface thunder we have heard some weeks now. But our talk was designed evasion from what we both saw clearly on the dock: a corpse, a Cree man curled to himself, his clothes stiff. He looked to be floating on wooden waves because of how the slats were warped in undulations. We could hear thin voices rising from back where the dock met the land, though we could not see these people who had probably lifted a man from ice water. We stood a long time. The dock would not be cured of him by our staring. Then Sarah exclaimed, "Look! . . . at that! That seal . . . jumped from the water. To sun . . . on the dock. I have never seen one do that before. . . ." Her face held a bondage of seriousness I longed for, broken even by nervous laughter, but she went silent. Some minutes passed. Finally I said, "Sarah . . . that's no seal." "I do not want to hear nonsense any more," she said. Taking my arm tightly she led me back to the road.

"Sarah, listen . . .," but she began speaking an intense almost tearful concern about this particular melon she had left in the market, saying her fingers and nose knew it was an excellent choice but some fear in her head talked her out of it. And how she greatly disliked believing things that way. Two years later I learned it was her half-brother on the dock.

(From *The Poetry Reading*, Momo's Press, San Francisco)

## From Sarah Greys

My first husband went blind. But I did not feel sorry for him, in that he still saw birds. He could describe . . . his descriptions of birds went on, to me, and others as well. He talked about them clearly, as if he had been out walking among them that morning. So, you see, it was not as if he saw nothing in his eyes. He often had summer birds in them . . . even during winter. They stayed all year in his eyes . . . and on days of much snow and cold he could talk easily about summer birds.

Samuel Kenit always used the word *torn-place*. He knew about that word. He knew this: when you lose someone (who dies) a torn-place arrives in you. It travels around. It stops sometimes. When it does that, there is difficulty. He meant this: if it stops in your hands, they get crowded. They drop

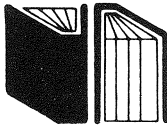


things. You can't sew. Or, if it stops in your legs, they get clumsy. You stumble over nothing. Or you stumble more than once over a rock. Your legs fall asleep right while you are walking, things such as this happen. It goes on, all over, inside you. Until it reaches the heart. If—in between—it disappears, don't trust it. It is like a promise made at dusk, you can't trust it. It is still somewhere inside you. Then it gets into your heart, and there is no doubt then that the person is truly gone. Kenit used the word torn-place; I heard it many times. He said, in him, it always stayed in his forehead the longest, which was the cause of his bad headaches.

One early spring Mary Kimikos slipped on some rocks. They tripped her earlier. Then she slipped on them. She was broken in her foot. The doctor said in four places. She walked up-and-down (limped heavily) and sat down every few steps. She said, "Will you catch some pickerel for me?" I set out to do this. I went with her young son. We set out for pickerel. To a pickerel place. And there we saw a fish-wedding. Which is

when pickerel get together under the ice and breathe it open. They melt it that way. The ice is between the pickerel and their wives-husbands, the air. The pickerel don't like that. So they breathe the ice apart, and knock it open, too, from underneath. Of course pickerel mate with each other, but every spring, early, they break through the ice to marry the air as well. Kimikos's son and I watched this awhile. We went somewhere else to get the fish we needed. A few days later—after they were done with the fish-wedding—we caught some of those pickerel too. But Kimikos was broken a long time, and had difficulty getting around. I caught fish for her. It wasn't like catching twice as many fish, no, it was catching what we needed with one less person doing the fishing. All that time she was broken that way. Men brought in fish for us to clean too; whitefish, pickerel, trout. But we caught them, closer to home. On my walking and fishing-walks, Kimikos liked to hear—in even more detail than before—what happened. What happened along the way.

# BOOKS



*The View in Winter: Reflections on Old Age* by Ronald Blythe  
(Penguin Books, 1980)  
\$4.95 paperback, 267 pp.

## Review by Arthur Tobier

IN 1978, I SPENT EVERY THURSDAY AFTERNOON for three months in a cluttered studio apartment looking out over a sea of tenements, taping the reminiscences of an 80-year-old woman who, in her youth, had lived through the Russian Revolution and then, in the 1920s, had immigrated to the U.S., where she became a militant activist in the industrial labor movement. To her friends, she was famous; by their standards—and by mine—the life she had lived was exemplary. But if you looked for some reference to her in written history, whether of the Russian Revolution, the American labor movement, or radical politics in the 1930s, you would have looked in vain. The small book we made from her story\*—from recorded talk to transcript to edited manuscript to printed page—made her *visible* in a way that

\**Full-Time Active* by Sara Plotkin, distributed by T&W.

ARTHUR TOBIER is director of the Community Documentation Workshop at St. Mark's Church in New York. He coedited *The Roots of Open Education* (City College Workshop Center) and recently completed a study for the National Institute of Education on changes in the New York schools, 1967–1982. This term he also taught local history to elementary school students. His CDW oral history series is distributed by T&W.

she hadn't been before, by saving this woman's history from the obscurity that History has relegated all but the highest and the mightiest.

It also made it easier for many of the people who read it, particularly school children, to grasp the meaning of what otherwise were distant and complex experiences. An English teacher at the High School for Performing Arts in New York City paired this modest "oral history" with a reading of Orwell's *1984* (because he wanted his students to consider what prompted an *ordinary* person to become a revolutionary), and found that it gave his students a *feel* for history better than anything on the prescribed syllabus. The story, along with several others, was also adapted for the theater and performed.

Puffed up by such positive feedback, and trying to consolidate my (self-styled) position as the lower East Side's answer to Studs Terkel, I approached another Russian immigrant, the 80-year-old mother of a friend, as my next subject. Her experience of the Russian Revolution had an entirely different outcome from that of the first woman I had taped, and I was interested in exploring the differences. Her father had been a Russian revolutionary and a social democrat who had fled to Paris with his family when Lenin took power. She grew up poor in Paris, studied at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, practiced law, married, had children, watched the rise of fascism in Europe, came to New York when France fell to the Nazis, and, for a second time, put together a new life. What a rich history to record!

When I asked her, she turned me down. But in doing so, she also gave me an insight into what I was doing—collecting personal stories that carried with them a sense of historical development, in a context in which histories make sense in everyday life. She said, "What people talk about is on the level of baby talk. What really matters is never discussed." And then, after a long pause for thought, she added, "That's why fiction is necessary." It was like being hit with an illumination from a Zen master. And then, sensing my disappointment at her refusal, she said consolingly that, even at the level of baby talk, bringing ordinary people's stories to the surface was what a healthy culture needed to

do, "as long as what you went after was not so much truth as moral understanding." Such an activity might be described as the production of insurrectionary knowledges—insurrectionary against the systems of power that denied the stories in the first place.

Storytelling is basic to human existence. In the last century or so, however, the values of storytelling and the knowledge embedded in stories tended to get pushed further and further out to the margins of daily living. Whereas there was room for storytelling in the lives of farmers and craftsmen, there was no room for it in the industrial world, where mechanization, efficiency, and profit were the dominant values. It is not simply a coincidence that in the insurrectionary 1960s a movement emerged, particularly in Europe, to collect and publish the stories of ordinary people, people whom traditional historiography had passed over in silence because they had left no written record or were thought not to have even figured in any record. With the help of new technology (inexpensive tape recorders, xerographic materials, and paper-plate offset lithography) a literature was created that was local in its references, enabling people to speak for themselves about their experiences, and which, when it was done well, left intact the poetic quality of their language and the context in which they made sense of their experience. Since then I've seen "oral histories" of just about every kind of experience, from being President to being a pimp, some of which trivialize the experiences that were meant to be enlarged upon by immediacy of language but that were mere transcriptions of talk. On the other hand, enough has been produced to identify the genre with what is humanly important, a genre that pushes back at the arrogance of the power of established authorities that try to restrict what people know—like schools that require children to spend their time taking in knowledge that no longer means anything.

*The View in Winter* is situated in this development. The people who speak in this book are about to be sucked, like wind, from history; by now some undoubtedly have. They are mostly working people, born early in the 20th century. Mostly they are people who had little say in their work—where it was done, when it was done, how much of it was done, and how it was done; in short, the pattern of their lives was determined by someone else's sense of need for profit. The people are similar to those farmers, small-holders, farm mechanics, pigmen, roadworkers, grave diggers, odd-jobbers, publicans, van drivers, shopkeepers, insurance agents, tractor drivers, poets, school teachers, craftsmen, housekeepers, widows, etc. that Ronald Blythe gave meaning to in his earlier book *Akenfield*, which has become a classic in the literature of oral history.

*Akenfield* was, as Blythe wrote, the quest for the voice of a rural village in the flat farmland of Suffolk, England, as it sounded during the summer and autumn of 1967. The voices spoke about many things—god, school, bellringing, the law, what it was like to be a farmer's boy or work in a forge, or as a wheelright; what it was like to be an officer and a gentleman, a student, a woman, a young man, a minister—in that place. It began with the memories of men who were children towards the end of the 19th century, and it went on through the young of the village. Undergirding all the talk were sensibilities shaped on one end by half a century of farming slump and the beginning of the second agricultural revolution,

and on the other end by the movement for trade unionism. Some were women whose men worked the mines. Others had survived Gallipoli.

A minister who had come to the village after World War II thought the old there were hard people to know:

Their lives at the higher level—and make no mistake, there is a higher level: I have seen it, a fugitive glimpse into a country where I cannot belong—present an imponderable. It is the only word I have for it. Fatalism is the real controlling force, this and the nature gods, the spirits of the trees and water and sky and plants. These beliefs seem to have no language, but they rule.

He thought the young people in the village were different in that they communicated with the world around them, whereas the old looked inward "at things we cannot see." *The View in Winter* unpacks what the old are looking at through the framework of this particular part of the world, of this particular part of England (Suffolk County), of particular sets of relationships:

I often think of the army and our Empire. They got us all about. Travelling on troop ships across the wide world to everywhere British. You see, I was different. When I was in the army, I liked it. I liked it all the time. I didn't mind it a mite, I enjoyed it. I always wanted to do everything they said right. And so I got on. I liked it and so it was easy for me. Some disliked it and it was hard for them. But I liked it. It's a long time away now, but I can't stop thinking about India. Not now.

It was because of women like my mother that so many people tried to conceal their class. It was a waste of time, of course. Mother, being not quite middle-class, was a genius on class and even when she couldn't quite "place" someone, she'd patiently listen and watch, knowing that eventually she would. A movement, a vowel, the way a cake was taken off the plate, a reference would suddenly reveal ALL, and her guest would be ticketed "common." Or worse than common, because they'd had the cheek to try and hide their commonness.

I [a Montessori teacher] had a father who brought his son to the school each day, and the boy would be running up with joy when he would be called back in a furious voice and to a finger pointing to a place on the man's face where a kiss was demanded, and I soon showed him that he couldn't go on doing things like that. The little one knew that it was the time to hurry towards his work and not the time for kisses. I used to go for the parents and not for the children. The children, I always told the parents, were people to live with, not creatures they owned. Most parents had no idea what they had got. When they got to the school, I would tell them that it was their children's "office" and that when you go in, don't disturb anything. They were never allowed to interfere or talk to them. They were treading on holy ground.

The Duke of Hamilton's estate was a very large one, taking in Brandeston, Kettleburgh, Hoo, Monewden, Charsfield, Letheringham, Hacheston, Parham, Great Glenham and other villages. The seat of the Duke was Easton Mansion. There were nine underkeepers and one head keeper. In those days the estate was teeming with game, pheasant, partridge, mallard, snipe and woodcock. There were also thousands of rabbits which were fed on Easton Park. The Duke insisted that they should be fed in sharp weather. These rabbits were of different colors. A man was detailed off with a Suffolk horse and tumbrel to feed them with turnips, swedes and other root vegetables. The Duke

had two rabbit shoots each year. My uncle told me that on one occasion they shot a thousand rabbits before lunch. The pockmarks of the shot are still to be seen today on the crinkle-crinkle wall which surrounds the park near the Grove. After the shoot the rabbits were taken in a tumbril to the Model Farm, where a pit had previously been dug, and they were buried. These rabbits were unfit for human consumption as they were so badly peppered with shot, and anyway there were these signs of disease in them owing to interbreeding.

Sometimes the Lady would come out to me towards nightfall and say, "There's a play on at the Haymarket. Can we make it, Maurice?" Then off we'd go a hundred miles in the Wolsey to London, and very little on the roads. The Lady went into the theater, and then I'd find a place to park and sit in the motor. They never gave you anything. I used to find a bun and wait. They never thought anything of you at all. You were the servant. I tell myself I'm pleased those days are gone and then, when I look back on them, I see that they were good days really. Life is very contradictory. Anyway, back to Suffolk we'd come after the late theater, with no heating and no windscreen. The Lady slept in the back like a kitten in silk. Before we started, my job was cushions here and cushions there. In bed she was behind me, fast asleep. I was 19.

Some o' the ol' blacksmiths were ignorant fellers and they wouldn't know about the anatomy o' the hoss's foot, which is important. A lot of people reckon that a hoss's foot is like a block o' wood and that you can shove a nail in anywhere. But you can't. Inside the foot there is bones and flesh, and the wall of the hoof is only about three-eighths inch thick, accordin' to the size o' the hoss, and to drive a nail you must be expert not to lame the animal. When I was a boy, my father he taught me like this. He heard of a lovely Suffolk hoss that had bruk a leg in a field over there and that had to be destroyed. "See if you can git they two front legs," said Father. "From the knees, mind." I saw the man and he cut 'em off for me. My father, he told me what he wanted me to do. "I want you to saw that right through, hoof an' all, so as you can see inside the proper structure o' the leg." Then he rigged up an old copper across the road, on that very spot, and he boiled the other leg until all the bones were free. That's how Father larnt me all he knew.

I can spell better now than I could in years gone by. Nouns and pronouns, I used to think they were silly, now I think they are very interesting.

If you were interested in things like art, you kept it quiet. If you were sensitive, you took good care not to let it show. Once something unusual about you "got out," you'd never hear the last of it.

Growing old and suffering the loss of settled communities, the old person, without desiring it, requiring it, or understanding it has also come increasingly to stand alone. Whereas those of us who are not yet old can and usually do conspire with one another not to deal with this loss of place, the old who speak here have been made all the more vulnerable because of it:

When the hooter would go, the women would run to the mine, and the miners would come out carrying the stretcher, and the women would look at the boots of the man on the stretcher as they stuck out from the blanket and wonder if he was their man, and if he was just injured or dead. . . . But give me them days. We were more together then.

What I miss is our view. They have built all those houses in front of us, see. It was all empty and I used to sit at the table

and watch the birds fly along the side of the mountain, and now they've taken this sight away.

I sometimes think about death, I think about it to myself. I don't say anything. And then I tell myself I mustn't go far in this thinking.

They suffer, too, from the fact that younger people dislike the notion that the old are vital still. The old have been compartmentalized and made into an abstraction:

I'm perfectly fit, but all of my senses are a little bit down. I don't think about being in my eighties—I don't think about it ever. I might say, "Good God, 83!" but I don't feel what this is supposed to mean. How do you feel 83? What do they mean by "feeling" your age? I feel nothing.

To the young the old are just a problem. "I don't feel anything about the subject," one young boy tells Blythe. "I know I should after all that's been said, but I don't. It's because I can't."

Aside from being pulled at by ancient memories, the old have immediate practical concerns. These are members, as Blythe points out, of the first generation of "the fulltimers," men and women for whom living to be old has come to be quite ordinary. And because the ordinariness of it is still quite novel, they have been made to feel like "lifers," for whom the state has to provide, experimentally, uncertainly, grudgingly:

What I dread isn't death but all the nuisance I shall be at the end. I've always hated being a nuisance.

I care less now. I feel now that I am tempted to hand everything over to God and to leave it at that. I don't really care two hoots about lots of things now.

There is one thing about old age and that is, you are likely to find yourself spending a lot of time on yourself. You see, you're slower. Slower and slower. It is surprising when you have been quick by nature.

I've known what it is to be really tired, like everybody else, but never a tiredness like this. If I tell you that it is too important a tiredness simply to sleep through, you'll know what I mean. It keeps me awake so that I can feel every bit of it. I wouldn't mind if I could just doze off and wake up and find it gone, but I can't. That's not its little game. Let's be serious. This weariness is death.

After my stroke, dressing was hard, but wonderful therapy. It takes so long.

We are ashamed of being old.

As History, *The View in Winter* probably would not pass an academic muster. To have done that, Blythe would have had to make intelligible the interaction of everyday events and the minds of the speakers as their lives changed in time. As insurrectionary knowledge it does very well. It's hard to think of a people in the industrialized world with a richer heritage of language or with more to say about change, which is what growing old is about, than the English working class. Not only do they need to be able to speak for themselves—as they have always been ready to do when given the space—we need to hear their fictions.



*Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* by Janet Burroway  
(Little, Brown, and Company, 1982)  
\$12.95 paperback, 402 pp.

### Review by Meredith Sue Willis

**W**RITING FICTION IS A USEFUL RESOURCE BOOK for teachers and students of writing. It includes lucid explanations of terms like objective correlative, Freitag's pyramid, and the pathetic fallacy; some excellent discussions of point of view, the function of symbol in fiction, the merging of theme and idea to give form; and—above all—an anthology of post-World War II prose that ranges from John Cheever's beautiful "Bella Lingua" to John Barth's classic metafiction "Lost in the Funhouse," along with good samples of work by Ralph Ellison, Renata Adler, Hortense Calisher, James Purdy, Vladimir Nabokov and Flannery O'Connor. To some extent, however, *Writing Fiction* strikes me more as an introduction to the study of modern fiction than as a plan for learning to write. I have always imagined that the best way to teach literature would be through extensive reading followed by the writing of short imitations or responses in the same style, to understand literature through practice rather than through analysis. Likewise, doing the assignments in this book in the order in which they are presented would give a student a sense of how fiction works, but it would not be quite the same experience as writing fiction.

Burroway sometimes creates a disturbing image of the writer as a consumer exercising good old American freedom of choice among an array of writing techniques. My own experience tells me that writing fiction is not analogous to a man twirling a rack of ties and selecting one, but rather to a madwoman in a fabric shop overturning bolts of cloth until she wraps herself in the one silk that precisely expresses her obsession. My metaphor is exaggerated: the writer does in fact reach a point of calm consideration and choosing. Much of the rest of fiction writing is a ponderous, slow struggle. But the slow times and the serene choosing are both in the service of discovering and expressing something passionate.

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The ideal of the writer of fiction is to come to the moment when the final chapter, then the final scene, paragraph and ultimately the final word of a whole book will be absolutely inevitable given everything that came before it. Janet Burroway's exercises and assignments are not unproductive, but alone they would not further the attainment of this ideal. They would miss the essential enterprise of fiction writing, which is to discover one's own passionate themes, and to work them over and over, deeper and deeper, until they take on their true form and proper words.

I must say that Burroway believes this too; it is quite apparent in her admirable final chapter on the merging of theme and idea. I should also say that in my own teaching I use plenty of exercises and assignments similar to hers. My contention is not that what is in this book is not valuable, but that it is a reference work, a resource, not a guide for learning to write.

While a book like this one is not essential, it would be a nice addition to a teacher's resources. It offers terms for discussing actual work, and it treats many important issues. If the teacher is not a writer, then some of Burroway's discussions become even more useful. There is, for example, an interesting passage in which she talks about a character from her own novel: "I was faced with the problem of introducing [the protagonist's ex-husband] Boyd Soole. I had voluminous notes on this character, and I knew that he was almost totally unlike me. A man, to begin with, and a huge man, a theater director with a natural air of power and authority and very little interest in domestic affairs. I sat at my desk for several days unable to make him move convincingly. My desk oppressed me, and I felt trapped and uncomfortable, my work thwarted, it seemed, by the very chair and typewriter. Then it occurred to me that Boyd was also sitting at a desk trying to work. . . ." Notice the problem: the author has a character she can see but not penetrate. This is one of the nodes of meaning that a writer is fascinated by and wants to explode. She struggles for several days and finally breaks through into an imaginative understanding of this more or less alien character. She does this by giving Boyd Soole a task she understands—working at a desk—and by using her own feelings of being thwarted to capture the feelings of a large man at a small desk. Her precise technique here is less important than the fact that she does it by experimentation over time—not smoothly, either, and not in a linear progression. We are here in the realm of learning to write. And all the best parts of Janet Burroway's book are solidly in that realm of sharing something about the process of writing fiction.

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