

305 QUOTATIONS



Jean Stafford

(1915-1979)

Jean Stafford wrote three distinguished Modernist novels and is one of the best American short story writers--with Hawthorne, Hemingway, Faulkner, Porter, Gordon, O'Connor, and Welty. Her first novel *Boston Adventure* was a bestseller, she published over 20 stories in the elite *New Yorker*, she earned an annual O. Henry Award for the best short stories 7 times, and in 1970 she won a Pulitzer Prize for her *Collected Stories*. Compared by critics to Dostoevsky, Twain, Henry James, and Proust, she is known in particular for a versatile witty style, for irony and for insightful fiction about children, adolescents, women, acculturation, alienation, and physical trauma. Stafford was heroic to write so well after a car crash (her first husband the poet Robert Lowell was driving) that smashed her face to pieces and required many painful reconstructive surgeries. For the rest of her creative life she had to overcome severe depression, mental instability, and alcoholism. She had to enter New York Hospital thirty-four times. Her greatest short story, "The Interior Castle," sublimates her suffering in high art.

Though once both a bestseller and a star in the *New Yorker*, Stafford is underrated and neglected today because of the decline in literary analysis since Feminists took over English departments in 1970 and the literary publishing industry in the 1980s. Identity and political beliefs replaced literary merit as criteria of value, devaluing all the best women writers. Stafford is too independent, subtle, complex and deep for Feminist critics, who lack a knowledge of aesthetics and literary history. She is one of the few fiction writers to have written extended realistic allegories of *symbols*--as distinct from *signs*--the most complex and difficult form of fiction to write. Most classic novels are allegorical and all three of Stafford's novels are realistic Christian allegories overlooked by critics. The consensus is that her best short stories, often anthologized, are "The Interior Castle," "In the Zoo," "Children Are Bored on Sunday," "An Influx of Poets," "A Country Love Story," and "Bad Characters," perhaps her funniest.

Boston Adventure (1944)

Stafford's first novel attracted critical praise *and* became a bestseller, a double success rare for literary first novels. On page one the poor girl Sonie Marburg sees Boston as a kind of secular heaven, with its State House gleaming gold. Ironically, however, the descendants of the Mathers and other Puritans have devolved into their opposites, whereas Sonie, a Russian/German immigrant, is the one who most exhibits virtues of the anglo-Puritans. But she has been alienated from God by her horrible fighting parents. Her

insane mother is a satanic figure who exclaims to her father, "Christ God, I hate you." Salvation is the major theme in the novel with the first mention of Miss Pride on page one. Pride was the original sin. Sonie's evolving attitudes toward Miss Pride are allegorical, a spiritual narrative reflecting the state of her soul--a pilgrim's progress. Likewise, her relations with Hopeskill Mather--a false Hope--reflect the state of her mind: her increasing knowledge of the corrupt Boston society, human nature and the world. The allegorical dimension of the novel shows the influence of Hawthorne, who is evoked by Sonie's visits to Concord and by references to *The Old Manse* and the "scarlet letter."

Sonie seeks peace and security by mistakenly choosing the aristocrat Miss Pride as her role model, rather than Jesus. However, at the end of the first section of the first chapter she also identifies herself with Jesus in an image that evokes Moses parting the Red Sea for the escaping Israelites and Jesus walking on water: "I watched the waves part and saw a dry path laid for me between the water's furniture and then I stepped forward off the beach and walked across to the first wharf in Boston Harbor." This imagery alludes to two famous events in the Bible, with Sonie placing herself on a path to imitate Jesus. Identifying Sonie with Christ here in chapter one prefigures her becoming a Christian, as implied at the end by her decision to start attending church. Although Sonie remains among the proud aristocrats in Boston, she becomes one of the "few believers" in "larger things," hence she retains her independence of mind and transcends her literal world. She feels like she has a devil inside her and has promised her soul to the Devil. There is true hope at the end when she decides to fight the Devil in herself and in society.

The Mountain Lion (1947)

They call the mountain lion Goldilocks, the name of the girl in the fairy tale who wants soup to be neither too hot nor too cold and a term in astrobiology referring to balanced conditions ideal for life, as on Earth--the balance of Nature, in contrast to disordered human society. Molly Fawcett runs both too hot and too cold. She is out of balance, a wild child, a rebel who refuses to adapt to society in any form. Adapt or die is a rule of Nature. Her brother Ralph is equipped and willing to adapt. Symbolically apt, as he becomes less rebellious Ralph is able to stop wearing glasses. "Her eyes were much worse than his and without her glasses she was as blind as a mole." Molly is not blonde or beautiful like the mountain lion but she is wild, solitary and dangerous like the lion. From experience she has an unconsciously Christian view of the fallen world as an unjust nasty place ruled by "the devil" who speaks through Ralph in the tunnel, ironic since she rejects Christianity as hypocritical and "bourgeois," she is a passionate advocate of the Spirit and scorns the Flesh--figuratively "fatness" in all its forms--but she is unforgiving and destructive. Belief in Jesus, the supreme incarnation of Spirit, could have helped Molly transcend her misery.

At the end of the novel the coinciding deaths of Molly and the lion clearly associate her with the lion. Both their deaths evoke Jesus Christ by happening on Easter. Jesus sacrificed himself as the "Lamb of God" to gain eternal life for believers, ending the need for animal sacrifices. According to Christian tradition, when Jesus returns to judge humans at the end of time, he will come not as a gentle lamb but as a roaring lion: "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (*Revelation 5.5*). Uncle Claude and Ralph have made an idol out of the gold mountain lion, like a pagan Holy Grail, in effect replacing God. Ralph has "the devil" inside him, as revealed in the tunnel, and he wishes Molly were dead. Poor Molly herself has condemned almost everyone including herself as unforgivable and has become a suicidal killer (drowning the wood mouse). For her, death is merciful. Ralph will no doubt suffer from terrible guilt for the rest of his life, but his remorse may save his soul, thanks to the coming of the lion.

On Easter, the day of the hunt, Ralph "found the skulls of two deer with horns so tightly interlocked that he could not get them apart"--a vivid metaphor that perfectly explains the final relationship of Ralph and Molly: "the two bucks charged one another and then, by lunatic accident, being joined as one, toppling into the water to drown, still struggling to get free." Both Ralph and Uncle Claude are too eager to be the one to kill the lion to take the right precautions. Ralph is to blame for being selfish and taking the shot rather than waiting for Uncle Claude, Molly is at fault for being such a rebel she disregards all warnings and goes out wandering around unarmed in a forest where a mountain lion has been sighted.

The Catherine Wheel (1952)

Most critics have failed to recognize that Stafford is an allegorist like Hawthorne, despite the obvious governing religious symbol of the Catherine wheel. That is why she named her setting Hawthorne and repeated the name as a motif in the novel, in order to orient readers to her aesthetics. Katherine Congreve and her young nephew Andrew Shipley both suffer from secret guilt and each becomes the conscience of the other, like Pearl to Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*. The basic elements of the plot are the same in both novels: two secret sinners go on sinning while their suffering from guilt increases to the point of becoming suicidal until a fatal climax in which one dies redeemed and the other lives on to implicit redemption.

Of course, Katharine Congreve is very different from St. Catherine. Most obviously, unlike the saint, she is wealthy and popular rather than poor and persecuted. She is also proud like Miss Pride in *Boston Adventure*, more imperious and dominant, but also more virtuous and in the end even heroic. She is basically a very charitable person, giving much to her neighbors, and she is eligible for Christian salvation despite her wealth, vanity and self-absorption. When she sees that John Shipley has fallen in love with Maeve, Katharine identifies herself with the torture wheel: "She had been fixed upon her own Catherine wheel." One of the most resonant of archetypal symbols, rich in implications since ancient times, the wheel becomes a symbol of her life and of the universe: "She was wheeled outward"... "in a widening circle." The wheel is monadic like the ancient symbol of the universe as a snake swallowing its own tail, though most people are like Mrs. Wainright-Lowe, so superficial in spirit she is comical: She points "to the Catherine wheel with the handle of her butterfly net."

Katharine's role model is her deceased father, a humanist who honored the pagan goddess Minerva more than he honored God. Minerva is the Roman goddess of wisdom. Eventually, Katharine finds that the humanism of her father is inadequate to ease her suffering over the loss of John. Also, pagan humanism offers no way to cope with guilt as does Christianity. At times, in their guilt, both Katharine and Andrew wish they were dead. Andrew's belief that Mercy the cat killed one of her litter--"I think it was a mercy killing"--implicitly parallels the death of Katharine by accident and hints that her death may have been a mercy killing by a loving God. She redeems herself by asking Andrew to burn her red diary in a repudiation of her vanity and a sign of her repentance for the sins she has committed against Maeve and John; she asks Andrew to "forgive me my trespasses if you love me," using the word "trespasses" widely known to be part of The Lord's Prayer, casting Andrew in the role of a savior; she repents over pursuing John because "He was not worth it," which is exactly what Andrew says of *his* sin, his desire that Charles die; she saves Andrew by example, prompting him to repent as well, making her a Christ-evoking figure; and she leads him to redemption when he burns her diary without reading it. The expanded consciousnesses and salvation of both Katharine and Andrew are evoked by the final image of the expanding universe: "Wheels wheeled within the wheels..." Katharine earlier echoed the famous Christian hymn with the line, "Swing low sweet chariot": "I heard the Catherine wheel swinging low to get me."

All three of Stafford's novels are realistic Christian allegories of salvation, all ending with the deaths of tragic females--one adolescent, one young and one older: the suicidal Hopestill Mather dies unredeemed, Katherine Congreve redeems herself in an act of self-sacrificial charity, and poor Molly Fawcett is a child very likely to be forgiven by a merciful God. Some of Stafford's short stories also are religious allegories, including "The Interior Castle," "Between the Porch and the Altar," "Life Is No Abyss," and "A Reading Problem." Most critics, especially the Feminists, have missed virtually all of the religious implications that constitute the vision of Stafford. None have explicated the allegories.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, education, language, writers, writing, change in styles, consciousness emotions, evocative description, clothes, humor, Impressionism, Expressionism, gender, sex, love, beauty, Boston, society, race, feminism, morality, religion, anesthesia, surgery, psychiatry, alcoholism, summation, aging, death, salvation, glory:

YOUTH

We had been reared in the Depression.

I am really just a he-waif, what never had no mammy.

I [was] hired as a maid-of-all-works the summer I was twelve.

I do not remember a time, after I learned the alphabet, when I did not want to write.

I began my first novel in the seventh grade, a thriller set in the British Museum.

I am not at all sure that I was not my own discoverer.

I came from a family of readers--I was read to as a child and, like all pre-television children, as soon as I could read myself, there was very little else I wanted to do.

When I could not get a human member of my family to listen to me read aloud my plays and ballads and my short, short stories, I read them to our patient dog who loved me.

My roots remain in the semi-fictitious town of Adams, Colorado, although the rest of me may abide in the South or the Midwest or New England or New York.

I could not wait to quit my tamed-down native grounds. As soon as I could, I hotfooted it across the Rocky Mountains and across the Atlantic Ocean.

[I'd] be gone from this charmless town on the singed plains where the cottonwoods were dusty and the lawns were straw.

In returning to Boulder [Colorado] after many years, I have returned to scenes and landmarks that are more familiar to me than any later ones can ever be, more acutely meaningful since it was amongst them that, for all practical purposes, my history had its beginning.

EDUCATION

A person can be intellectual and not be intelligent.

There was no stratum of society not reeking with the effluvium of fraud and pettifoggery. And the school system was almost the worst of all: if we could not understand fractions, was that not our teacher's fault? And therefore, what right had she to give us F?

My education is abysmally defective for I could never learn to do a single thing but read and write, partly, I suppose, because it never occurred to me that anything else was of the slightest consequence.... Against almost all other branches of learning, I had a pathogenic and ineradicable phobia.

In terms of present day curricula, I am barely literate: for I have never read sociology nor have I had academic courses in sex or in the psychology of revolution or in the ethics and economics of the women's liberation movement. And, above all, I have never studied *education*. I have read very little science, and all through my schooling, I was so adroit at weaseling out of physical training that corporeally I have worn a dunce cap all my life.

Bedazzled by Thomas Aquinas and Eleanor of Aquitaine, I didn't rightly know who Hitler was or what he had in mind beyond offering me a fellowship...to Heidelberg where the greatest living authority on Beowulf...was lecturing.

The skin-deep college education...had paled like the tan of a winter holiday and the mind was left to rust and blunt like a knife left out in the rain and instinct and reflex replaced imagination.

The greenhorn intellect is...tactless and unequivocal and cannot...recognize ambiguity or nuance or paradox or overtone or continuity.

The crying, thirsting, burning need of my life when I was a student was to get to Europe.

LANGUAGE

It was my aim to become a philologist.

[But] I did not have the makings of a scholar.

Language is and has always been my principal interest, my principal concern, and my principle delight.

It is upon the knowledge of language that knowledge itself depends. And the proper teaching of language should be of prime concern from the kindergarten through the graduate school.

I learned far more of English grammar in Latin classes than I did in English classes and it was *entirely* through the study of Latin that I learned the origins and evolution of English words. In my ideal curriculum, I would demand at least four years of Latin.

But if the student will have nothing to do with Latin, then, let him study French or Spanish, Italian or German and he will begin to see, to his delight, the formation and the principles common to the family of Indo-Germanic languages of which English is the richest and the most flexible of modern specimens.

Anybody who has spent many hours of his youth translating into and out of two languages so syntactically and rhetorically different from his own, learns something about his mother tongue which I do not think can be learned in any other way. For instance, it inculcates the habit, whenever one uses a word, of automatically asking, "What is its exact meaning?"

Besides the neologisms that are splashed all over the body of the American language like the daubings of a chimpanzee turned loose with finger paints, the poor thing has had its parts of speech broken to smithereens...and upon its stooped and aching back it carries an astounding burden of lumber piled on by the sociologists and the psychologists and the sociopsychologists and the psychosociologists, the Pentagon, the admen... The prognosis for the ailing language is not good. I predict that it will not die in my lifetime, but I fear that it will be assailed by countless cerebral accidents and massive strokes and gross insults to the brain and finally will no longer be able to sit up in bed and take nourishment by mouth.

WRITERS

If I had not read Joyce I would never have written.

In my last year at the university, I was a member of a small group who wrote and hoped eventually *really* to write and who, making no bones about it, called ourselves "the intelligentsia."

Occasionally we read aloud from our own work, but for the most part we read from the writers we had just discovered: Joyce, Proust, Eliot, Lawrence, Gide, Hemingway, Faulkner.

Pound has written some lovely lines that are his own, but to me he is the high-priest of parlor esotericism--not an artist, but a would-be Brahmin.... He has a mean little ego that has been sustained by its semi-devouring of other talents--a devouring camouflaged as selfless dedication to perfectionism. I know half a dozen he has flattered into bondage for years; first learn the mumbo-jumbo of Poundism and he will support you thereafter as a worthy, but necessarily inferior, Pound.

The man revealed [in the letters of Thomas Wolfe] is infuriating and pathetic, so deformed by self-absorption and self-indulgence, so macerated by his warm bath of self-pity, so worshipful of the physical appetites he deified that he was incapable of deep friendship or deep love.

I read *Huckleberry Finn* again when I was at the ranch. It is the best book that ever came out of America

"They," a grubby and deserving species [artists], sounded like prisoners serving a term for a felony they had not committed.

A poet...laid his very heart at her feet, tracing upon it as upon a contour map, his unbridled passions.

[Robert Lowell] saw nothing of the natural world--*nothing!*

Ascent is so easy when we are lifted up by the wings of our dreams.

WRITING

Writing is agony but it also is life itself.

Writing is about five hundred times harder work than studying what's already been written.

Take with a grain of salt the cliché that it is possible to rid oneself of a grief or a guilt or an ugly memory by writing of it.

Writing is a private, an almost secret enterprise carried on within the heart and mind in a room whose doors are closed; the shock is staggering when the doors are flung open and the eyes of strangers are trained on the naked and newborn.

My theory about children is my theory about writing. The most important thing in writing is irony, and we find irony most clearly in children. The very innocence of a child is irony. Irony, I feel, is a very high form of morality.

Luckily my first book [*Boston Adventure*] came out in 1944, a halcyon year for the purveyors of anything and everything since the whole nation was on a spending spree, buying everything that was on sale, including novels. In comparison to other books that came out at that time, mine had a feeble career, but from the periphery, I could see the workings of the "book business."

Once at a cocktail party I met a literary agent who maintained a stable of impressively thriving novelists and who had been told by our host that I had been published in a few magazines that operated on budgets that were modest almost to the vanishing point. He looked coldly at me and coldly said, "A writer has to make a lot of money to interest an agent."

Gradually I became Molly [*The Mountain Lion*]. I was so much Molly that finally I had to write her book (in which it was my brother, you will note, that destroyed me--the guilt was still operating so strongly that I left the father out. In almost all my stories the father is either dead or is cruelly driven away; only in that little story 'Reunion' is there a blameworthy father and even he is exonerated by detesting his daughter because she caused her mother's death). All the self-mutilations came back; for I had mutilated myself constantly when I was a little girl in order to gain pity and love. My father was too cold and awkward to give me affection; my brother soon resented me because I tagged along everywhere; my mother was too busy; my sisters found me too young; is it any wonder that I wanted to marry Laddy [the Stafford's dog]? And on one of those last nights in Maine, you will remember that I ground out a cigarette on the back of my hand: I was then completely Molly. I had gone all the way back. I was an angry, wounded child again....

In your letter [Lowell] you say that you hope I will be recognized as the best novelist of my generation. I want you to know now and know completely that that would mean to me absolutely *nothing*.... I shall be grateful for whatever praise I get, but I shall never be so confused as to think that this is life or that, if one looks closely, it bears any resemblance to life.

The tunes one sings for one's supper must be neither sour nor stale; the news in the gossip columns is short-lived and must therefore continually be replenished and this necessitates ever widening one's social orbit, continually revealing just enough and not too much of what is significant in one or what is original and appealing.

My royalty statement from Houghton Mifflin in 1951 for a story appearing in one of the O'Brien collections [Best Short Stories of the Year] was one fifteenth of a cent.

I had been tricked into my pomposity by the corpulent silver inkwell as though its original owner had left his nineteenth-century clichés behind to mingle with the ink.

The better one knows one's *dramatis personae*, the harder it is to limn them in fiction because there is too much material, there are too many facets to tell the truth about.

I'm quite sure [grant applications] will never work in a million years. It might if I were still married to Cal [Lowell] and were still best friends with the Tates but now there's scarcely a prayer.

While autobiography is inevitable, we must winnow carefully and add a good portion of lies, the bigger the better.

Writers should write and their books should be read, but on the whole they should not be seen.

I find it awfully heartening that a writer as traditional as I can be recognized.

I agree, too, that stream-of-consciousness is dying a probably justifiable death.

It is not the business of the writer to judge--that is the business of the reader.

Write for yourself and God and a few close friends.

CHANGE IN STYLES

I worked 7 months on the suicide story and it, I was very proud of, but although the style was sustained and the rhythm carried, it lacked, still, much precision and all imagery. But the present one--you remember my queer room daydream--is almost successful, though it is awkward. It is obscure, *allegorical*, and the prose is loaded. [Italics added.]

There wasn't any basic change in me; the material was so different in each and required different treatment ... The first one is leisurely, a good deal more embroidered. It's contemplative. I think *Boston Adventure* is old-fashioned; it's filled with digressions, for example. *The Mountain Lion* is a more symbolic book. The symbols are apparent, though I didn't know what they meant at the time I wrote.

Digression is integral to my style. Parenthesis is my middle name. I have been assiduously at work on my style for a great many years. Style is the morality of language, and I look upon myself as a moral writer.

I'm trying to purge my writing as much as possible of Joyce.

CONSCIOUSNESS

My heart pranced in surprise.

Even my boredom was curiously exuberant.

My bounded brain was as unalterable as a ball.

My self-consciousness dyed everything to match its own color.

Memory is a sort of *entrepot* [warehouse] serving the busy traffic of the unreflective mind.

It is the essential that recollection values. Severe in its gleanings, it seeks to preserve our continuity.

There was something she had meant to remember or to think about that was troubling her aged mind like a rat in a wall.

I was awakening for a long time, climbing the waves of my sleep and relapsing, dreaming and knowing that I dreamed.

Because the sun was in my eyes and I could not close my mouth for I had a cold in the head, my face drooped with stupidity.

I halted, suddenly trembling, like a person armed to defend himself against wild animals, but on meeting one face to face is immediately turned to stone.

Like the hypodermic injection of adrenalin that instantaneously relieves the asthmatic, the Countess' hospitality at once made me forget my annoyance and my hunger.

The evening lay in ruins. My disappointments, my humiliations, and my scorn bustled through the branches of my nerves, created a tic here and a tingling there, an ache in my skull and fever in my eyeballs.

Something in the external world upon which I could not lay my finger had by accident dislodged it from the populous, diffuse, chimerical mazes of my subconscious mind.

His mind, fumbling and prehensile like a baby's hand, groped, then wearied, but even when he fell heavily into his familiar lassitude and seemed actually to sink into the springy sod, his loneliness stayed like a bone in his heart.

Anticipating something; there was that sense of an impending storm which is a kind of taut quiescence or a sort of premonition of disclosure as if, at any moment, the firmament will be slashed open by the lances of lightning to reveal, if one's eyes are quick enough, the angels and the thrones of heaven.

EMOTIONS

Tears boiled over my eyelids.

Feeling a convulsion of panic grind in her throat like a hard sob.

The warm tears welled up as freely as water from a drinking fountain.

His shyness sealed him up again into an envelope he could not tear open.

I heard the sobbing of my mother in the other room, like the sad cries of certain birds or the collision of breakers with the sand.

I had as my traveling companions not only shame, jealousy, and despair, but in addition a headache that pounded and reverberated through each convolution of my brain and stretched to bursting each tunnel and cove of my skull, a tidal nausea, a chill as dry and plunging as a winter wind.

She shrieked again, quivering pitiably like a baffled mole dislodged from his safe tunnel.

EVOCATIVE DESCRIPTION

an obtuse nose

manacled envy

cataleptic tranquility

as spiritless as city light

A noise caused me to fling back my eyelids.

the vegetative softness and fragrance of her person

The [inner] voice began again and Andrew lurched backward into a shadow.

[She had] the beauty of a saint which flowers through the perpetual renewal of mercy.

I unbolted the door and met her greedy face which nosed into mine, seeking my feelings.

Her pudgy fingers were always quarreling in a box of chocolate creams, trying to find one "fit to eat."

She argued hotly, although the German did not oppose her, and sometimes she threatened him with her spoon.

An aging, florid German whose face was as scarred as the moon, and who wore his monocle like a reprimand.

All five toes [were] the same length, flexing and straightening as though a jungle vine to swing on were just outside their reach.

Not a one of you knows the sensation of having a red Indian arrow whiz by your sunbonnet with wind enough to make the ribbons wave.

When she was not speaking, she pursed her lips in permanent displeasure, and when she did speak, it was in a high, nasal key, not loud, but like a distant scream.

She loitered a little in the streets--yet seemed to skip when she stood still--to gossip in a voice as high and unrelenting as a whistle with a single note.

Miss Pickens was young but she already bore the marks of spinsterhood. Her fine chestnut hair was sparse at the temples and she vainly tried to hide her baldness with an absurd pompadour, bolstered up with a transformation, or, as we preferred, in our beastly way, to call it, a "rat" which sometimes became dislodged and hung spiritlessly down her cheek until she could repair herself in the teachers' rest-room.

The red light glowed on her face and hair with a softness and subtlety that made it seem a property of her own being, an interior light which, passing through the many filters of her body, the tissues, bones, and muscles, was revealed, at its mellowest, upon her skin so that her face did not reflect the sunset but resembled it.

The doctor was bent forward, his hands palm upward lying on the counterpane. Their skin was even darker than his face and the nails were a corpse-white. The fingers were short and swollen, the skin stretched so tight it seemed about to split like the skin of a sausage as it is being cooked. These clean, brassy hands played the supernumeraries in the drama of the eyes and lips, and as I watched, they curled into cups as slowly as a flower closes.

They were the tallest men I had ever seen and, though they must have been no less than twenty-five years old, were still unused to their height, as if they had shot up overnight and had not learned how to steer themselves.

As soft and fat as the gelded white Persian cat who dozed at her side, his scornful head erect, as if he were arrested not so much by sleep as by a coma of boredom and disgust.

The Countess [had] a sort of childlike poise which made one feel that she was not so much vain as honestly amazed at her endowments,

Hopetill Mather...paused at the door like an actress overdoing her entrance in the fear that the audience would not applaud.

Her long hair hung as straight as rain, an angelic, downburning fire that parted for her small, perfect face.

Her eyes were...small and nacreous like painted ornaments.

Miss Pride's room was utterly bare...like a fowl plucked clean.

CLOTHES

The sleeves were so long that the unfilled portions of them flapped like seals' flippers.

She wore everything to match exactly, including her stockings and gloves, even if she had to dye them, with the result that she resembled a caterpillar whose cocoon matches the leaf on which it is spun.

Our hostess, immense and blazing in a diamond tiara and a cloth-of-gold gown which sheathed her ample flesh like hide and of which the central interest was a green orchid growing out of her mountainy bust.

No one had ever liked her, for she was a fool and had not worn stockings to her wedding.

HUMOR

"A pretty pickle of fish."

As independent as a hog on ice.

They often killed each other because they had nothing else to do.

He had always thought that the song was "O Beautiful for Spacious Guys."

He paused once to point his spoon at Mme. Floquet as if he were going to shoot her.

The parrot, eyeing Rose in the twilight of the hall, gave forth a glottal giggle full of wisdom.

She believed that her mother was going to a hospital to buy a baby from the supply kept there in a large ice-chest.

Our family was leaving San Diego for that land of adventure, that storied country where life and death hung in the balance, where college professors wore chaps, and where barbers were unnecessary because of the abundance of Indians who scalped you gratis, namely, Colorado.

There was one place where the mud dried and cracked into wedges like pieces of pie and when Molly was very small, she thought that this was where the sandwiches lived.

Her voice fell upon the word "German" in such a way that the emphasis was ambiguous: either a German was infamous beyond pardon or pitiable beyond hope.

Ashamed, disconcerted by the erudition of the college women who had been discussing Hegel's antinomies, the *Faerie Queen*, and *La Grande Jatte*, I went up to my room to drug myself with typewriter practice.

Women, on first confronting Angelica Early, took a backward step in alarm and instinctively diverted the attention of their husbands or lovers to something at the opposite end of the room.

Raoul St. Denis came, bringing his house-guest, a brash seventeen-year-old dandy from Mobile named James Partridge, who had a mandolin and, inhaling, smoked Lucky Strikes, and who so swept Honor and Harriet off their feet that for days afterward they mooned and could not eat and when they were not writing in their diaries, stood looking at themselves in mirrors, stunned with foolishness. They wanted to fly a Confederate flag from the barn.

If she ever got fat, she thought, or ever said anything fat, she would lock herself in a bathroom and stay there until she died. Often she thought how comfortably you could live in a bathroom. You could put a piece of beaver board on top of the tub and use it as a bed. In the daytime you could have a cretonne spread on it so that it would look like a divan. You could use the you-know-what as a chair and the lavatory as a table. You wouldn't have to have anything else but some canned corn and marshmallows, and if you got tired of those, you could let a basket out of the window with a slip of paper saying, "Send up some hot tamales" or some hard-boiled eggs or whatever you particularly wanted at the time."

"Floorwalker! Mr. Bellamy! I've caught a thief!" Momentarily there was a violent hush--then such a clamor as you have never heard. Bells rang, babies howled, crockery crashed to the floor as people stumbled in their rush to the arena. Mr. Bellamy, nineteen years old but broad of shoulder and jaw, was instantly standing beside Lottie, holding her arm with one hand while with the other he removed her hat to reveal to the overjoyed audience that incredible array of merchandise. Her hair was wild, her face a mask of innocent bewilderment, Lottie Jump, the scurvy thing, pretended to be deaf and dumb... I tried to defend myself, but it was useless. The manager, Mr. Bellamy, the clerk, and my father patted Lottie on the shoulder, and the clerk said, "Poor, afflicted child." For being a poor afflicted child, they gave her a bag of hard candy, and she gave them the most fraudulent smile of gratitude, and slobbered a little, and shuffled out, holding her empty hat in front of her like a beggar-man. I hate Lottie Jump to this day, but I have to hand it to her--she was a genius.

He and Opal simultaneously bowed their heads in silent prayer. Both of them thoughtfully chewed gum.... Evangelist Gerlash, having cranked the car, making a noise like a collision, climbed into the driver's seat, and grinned at the sight of the dollar.... The car shook as if it were shaking itself to death... "It isn't every girl of ten years of age who brushes up against some moonshiners with a record as long as your arm in the very same day that a couple of hillbilly fakers try to take her for a ride."

I had to give up the library altogether after one unlucky occasion when Reddie stood on his hind legs and put his paws on top of her high desk. She had had her back to him, and, thinking she heard a customer, she turned, saying in her library whisper, "Good afternoon, and what may I do for you this afternoon?" and faced the grinning countenance of my dog. That time, in her wrath and dismay, she clutched her head in her hands and dislodged her hat and then her wig, so that a wide expanse of baldness showed, and everyone in the children's section dived into the stacks and went all to pieces.

The dog was tangibly in the room with us, shedding his hair, scratching his fleas, shaking rain off himself to splatter the walls, dragging some dreadful carcass across the floor, chewing up slippers, knocking over chairs with his tail, gobbling the chops from the platter, barking, biting, fathering, fighting, smelling to high heaven of carrion, staining the rug with his muddy feet, scratching the floor with his claws. He developed rabies; he bit a child, two children! Three! Everyone in town! And Gran and her poor darlings went to jail for harboring this murderous, odiferous, drunk, Roman Catholic dog.

The black bear on the polar bear's left..is a rough-and-tumble, brawling blowhard, thundering continually as he paces back and forth, or pauses to face his audience of children and mothers and release from his great, gray-tongued mouth a perfectly Vesuvian roar. If he were to be reincarnated in human form, he would be a man of action, possibly a football coach, probably a politician. One expects to see his black hat hanging from a branch of one of his trees; at any moment he will light a cigar.

He was at times as frantic as his cousin's cat who, believing herself to be two cats, boxed her reflection in a mirror and hunted for herself behind it.

The French Canadian game warden of great age and rumored lunacy (he sometimes thought he was General Pershing and tried to drill the trustees when they were working on the highway)...

She had come drifting like a hobo up from New York and finally had settled here, an eyesore when she was abroad, a burden to the taxpayers when she stayed put.

He watched the deliberate approach of old Mr. Barker who laughed continuously (some said because he was happy and others, because he had nothing else to do)...

Mr. Barker who knew a smattering of law said, parenthetically, that in ancient Greece, rocks that had fallen on people's heads and killed them had been tried and sentenced and executed although he was not just sure how.

The whole of Miss Duff's mind was seldom in attendance when there was a gathering of more than three.

I, so far from being embourgeoised, could find pleasure only in the society of the dog, Kurt.

If I'd rooted out all the badness in me, there wouldn't have been anything left of me.

IMPRESSIONISM

I was a burst balloon.

Eva gurgled like a stomach.

I had stood like a stalagmite.

My brains buzzed like a bee.

He was asleep among his chins.

She danced like a bundle of sticks.

A trout leaped like a silver tongue.

His smile went off like a street light.

My heart was plucked quickly like a taut gut.

They mouthed their sweet cliches like caramels.

The meadow swam like fishes under the high sun.

The snows at timberline shone like sun-struck mirrors.

We could hear the bee-like flurry of the sewing machine.

The sweating sand at Chichester [was] pawed by the surf.

The chauffeur shot past me like someone on a surf-board.

I hear their reedy voices splintering like glass in the streets.

Augusta Shephard came into the room like a garden on wings.

The snow fell in swift spirals, floating like gulls into the tree branches.

When he went out the door the heat came at him like a slapping hand.

A parrot in a cage...regarded her with wicked eyes like a patient maniac.

Caesar flung himself full-length upon the screen and it sprang open like a jaw.

The paint on the depot was so bright you could read the newspaper by it in the dark.

Strands of his brown hair lie like scattered rags on the cement in a parody of a halo.

I heard the steady, three-legged walk of old ladies with sticks over the wet gravel road.

Dark cafes, sunk like black eyes into the walls, advertised with winking, blood-red lights.

The train...throbbed and jerked and hissed like an old dog too feeble to get out of the sun.

The sun seemed slowly to fade rather than to sink, like a light-globe with weakening filaments.

Uncle Claude laughed so that his belt buckle hopped up and down on his stomach like a jumping bean.

The trees on the horizon looked like some eccentric vascular system meticulously drawn on colored paper.

I was mad as anything to be hemmed in by this phalanx of giggling old geezers who looked like a flock of turkey gobblers.

She drew on her gloves and went out, shocked by a biting gust of wind which passed her by like a big rapid bird.

Dogs came to play in the dunes of fallen leaves and the geese came over across the faultless sky; in the river fog at dusk the deer drank at the lake, watched by the red foxes from their lairs in the meadow.

The only light came from two small, high windows through which I saw a steady parade of legs marching briskly past as if they had been amputated but had retained their power of locomotion.

The delicate china clock on the mantel...after it had made a sound like the last quiet purr of a cat before it goes to sleep, gave forth a single, bell-like chime, sustained and questioning.

Watching the mellowing, pillowing, billowing snow as it whorled down to meet the high tips of the pine trees that bordered the frozen formal garden.

Miss Pride did not share his pleasure but glared straight through his head as if the gimlets of her eyes could puncture the optic nerve.

Mr. Morgan's rejected paw faltered uncertainly to his side.

EXPRESSIONISM

Conversation moved on stilts.

The alarm clock ticked smugly.

He's got a sand dune for a soul.

Something inside him twitched like a cat's tail.

Some hibernating bees buzzed peevishly in their insomnia.

The smell of night-blooming cereus was so arrogant in her memory; it had clung and cloyed since the evening before, like a mouthful of bad candy.

Far off, I saw her hair, sharp as a scream and sudden as a flame, fling up along the ridge and for a space it flew, bodiless and horseless like a burning bird.

The doctor wiped his shining lips with a purple handkerchief...as if he had been eating the face before him and its flavor had been so delicious that in his gorging he had been too enthusiastic to mind his lips.

The pain was a pyramid made of a diamond; it was an intense light; it was the hottest fire, the coldest chill, the highest peak, the fastest force, the furthest reach, the newest time.

She saw then that he intended to lift her up and carry her to a couch, set in a vast bowl of water through which swam goldfish with enormous human eyes that devilishly winked at her. In shame and fear she begged to be released, and as he laughed at her protest and lifted her up, she screamed and wakened.

He had had horrifying nightmares in which the kidnapers and the psychiatrists pursued him in gyroscopes.

Do we really need a poem about a banana that is set in type to form the shape of a banana?

GENDER

"The curse of being female, Andrew, is that we must pretend to be quite incapable of grasping the self-evident."

Neither of the men could have sensed the source of his charm since it required the intuitive simplicity with which a woman perceives in a man the very embodiment of temptation. This is one of the mysteries of their sex by which men are infuriated for, being unable to solve it, they believe it to be a hoax.

His self-sufficiency...could not but rouse in any woman the desire to conquer him.

If I fought back with anger, it only made things worse; yet my submissiveness maddened him. I apologized for everything; I had no center and therefore I had no self and therefore I did not lead a real life. His vanity and passionate self-devotion fascinated me evilly.

[He] never left his wife but studied her as the rapt jeweler studies a rare stone through the little magnifying glass enfolded in his eye.

SEX

His mouth waspishly raged over my face with kisses.

From the points where his lips had touched, sensation rayed out until my whole face throbbed.

His eyes, pillowed by their pendulous sacs, had ambled sensually over me while his addled brain danced in bewilderment.

She wanted them to go together to some hopelessly disreputable bar and to console one another in the most maudlin fashion over a lengthy succession of powerful drinks of whisky, to compare their illnesses, to marry their invalid souls for these few hours of painful communion, and to babble with rapture that they were at last, for a little while, no longer alone. Only thus, as sick people, could they marry...for rubes and intellectuals must stick to their own class. If only it could take place--this honeymoon of the cripples, this nuptial consummation of the abandoned--while drinking the delicious amber whisky in a joint with a jukebox, a stout barkeep, and a handful of tottering derelicts.

He would declare that she was not a harlot because she had been in love with each of her bedfellows.

The force inspiring me was one of fleshly love, akin to the passion that had undone Hopestill.

I imprinted on his mouth a lightening-paced and pastoral kiss.

LOVE

I must complement, not equal, Rod.

My heart had been skinned by his silence.

My ailment is that I cannot be overtly loved.

Far from conquering all, love lazily sidestepped practical problems.

Love is a child at language, speaks nonsense, asks stupid questions, makes insipid replies.

My heart was the Orient, and the sun rose from it; I could have picked the stars from the sky.

The blood had defecated its black humors and had left only love but love as an envelope that was as yet empty.

Oliver [second husband] was worshipful and I was scornful.... Now at the moment of release for which I longed, I see the loss of what I needed.

There is an aesthetic principle that says beauty is the objectification of love. To be loved is to be beautiful, but to be beautiful is not necessarily to be loved. Go and find a lover and obfuscate his senses.

The phantom he had been pursuing all his life, and which he believed was at last entrapped in this girl whom he had loved intermittently for many years, had escaped him and the love with which he thought to imprison her had dematerialized, leaving him without love and without an object to try to love.

I know that my friends have persuaded themselves that I once had a love affair that turned out badly--upon this universal hypothesis rests perhaps as much as half the appeal of unmarried women who show no signs of discontent, and there is no fact more beautifying than that which protects a grief that is never discussed.

To her own heart, which was shaped exactly like a valentine, there came a winglike palpitation, a delicate exigency, and all the fragrance of all the flowery springtime love affairs that ever were seemed waiting for them in the whisky bottle.

I cannot give you the kind of help that a wife should give a husband.... A woman so isolated by nature as I am, so terrified of possessiveness, cheats when she marries and I shall not soon forgive myself even though I did not mean to cheat.

The dew in her eyes as a bride gave way nearly at once to a glaze when she was a wife.

BEAUTY

Beauty is the objectification of love.

I looked upon my mother with sheer fright. It was as if I looked upon naked evil in the person of that woman whose beauty had so far surpassed any other I had ever seen that it was almost divine.

If by saying "she is beautiful," we mean something more (as I must have meant even as a child), we mean this as a commentary on our relationship with her, we have actually said, "my gaze is freighted with feeling and my love has urged this face to resemble my sweet memory of it." And that "feeling," like the catalyst which remains stable, must remedy, through its unchanging agency, the imperfections of what we see. Conversely, when we hate, our hearts can deceive our senses so that we find hideous what has beauty inseparably in it.

There was a sweet flamboyance to the music; it was like a plump and tender hug into which I burrowed luxuriously.

BOSTON

Just as one believed in God and invoked Him but trafficked only with the minister, so one believed in Shakespeare but depended on *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Between those two astronomies, the young man's whose earth was plural, and Miss Pride's whose solitary world was Boston, round which the trifling planets revolved at a respectful distance, I could not choose, for both were true.

Boston was something in the days when hell was immediate, altruism was ruthless, and justice was Mosaic. Now, cured of its chills and fevers, its blood watered down, it was no longer exciting. Still puritanical, it tried to imitate Sodom and Gomorrah in their decenter fashions, but the result was only dowdiness.

There had been a time, the Countess declared, when New England had not been so naive, when sin was looked for in every stratum and duly punished.

"I never read *The Atlantic*. I just skim it the way I do the Bible."

SOCIETY

I do not believe in bourgeois etiquette.

Etiquette [is] the guardian angel of people in society.

She held up her manners like the emblem of a secret cult.

The portrait [was] pompous with the self-importance of the ruling class.

I'm miserable...being stuck in this wretched filthy Babbitt-ridden country.

People whose civilization had pruned down their impulses to a set of manners which imperfectly concealed a dead indifference.

The amenities of society, arbitrary and often absurd, beset us at every turn and it is only in larger things that one's will is really free.

Had I not known that the authors of these praises actually despised the Countess, I should have thought them a cult convening to eulogize a high priestess.

"American society! The nobility is made up of 'cattle kings' and 'wool barons' and 'merchant princes'... I confess a great weakness for New England, but try as I may I cannot take any stock in its society. Why, my people, when they are calculating time reckon in centuries, not in decades."

The direct appeal to youth for youth's sake will always be the making of just so many little Hitlers. They love nobody but themselves and their cry is *I want mine!*... If I find a switch-blade at my jugular, if my ears are assailed by rude language, if, in short, I find myself in the eye of a storm irrelevant to education, to writing, to civilization, and to my life and my work, then I shall have no choice but to quit the premises. [Teaching at Columbia University during rebellious 1968]

I believe any society is decadent in which the family is not the basic unit--the basic moral, social, economic unit.... In opposition to this idea is that of individual freedom. The rights of the individual must be put before everything else! But the family is just as organic as the individual, say I--more so--and its rights should be put first. How can one speak of the brotherhood of man if one does not really know what a brother is? Of course families cause us great pain, but unless we are decadent we must be willing to suffer

for principles. Today more than ever before, we can know what a permanent relationship is only through our families.

The structure of the family, of whom the woman is the architect, has been weakened to the point of debility.

In myself, I am not a bad woman, but my appearance in people's lives is usually a disastrous accident.

RACE

There were towns in Oklahoma where only Negroes lived and at the outskirts there were signs saying "White man, get out of this town before sundown."

It was a grand, operatic, declamatory display. There were the army goosestepping better than the Rockettes, the masses of Storm Troopers in brown, the elite guard in black. There were thousands upon thousands of devout Germans singing "Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles"...

FEMINISM

There is no thing worse for a woman than to be deprived of her womanliness.

The girls, students for the most part from Radcliffe, had sublimated their natural longings for dress and parties into a defiant intellectuality, terrifying to someone like myself.

The guest rooms had been occupied by...feminist friends of her mother whom the men had controlled by turning upon them a bland, deaf ear.

"My friends and I have managed my life with the best of taste and all that is lacking at this banquet where the appointments are so elegant is something to eat." [fiction]

I find *no* advantage in not being married, not one. I think it is infinitely *more* complicated besides being the most miserable lonely nightmare I've ever known.

The Amazons went out to war for principles and rights while the men stayed indoors in their ivory tower.

Mrs. Fowler hated men so passionately that no one could dream why she married so many of them.

I think it's shameful that women with the same credentials and the same ability get smaller wages.

I don't think that I've ever suffered from discrimination by being a woman.

It's not right for a girl to be alone in the mountains with a lion loose.

MORALITY

Nothing can more totally subdue the passions than familial piety.

Suicide, though it is often understandable, is almost never moral.

When we try to hurt other people we are much more likely to get hurt ourself.

[If I were a mother] I would dress my daughter in sack cloth and ashes and compel her to read *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Tippy's word of honor proved to be no longer than a nonsense syllable.

Irony, I feel, is a very high form of morality.

RELIGION

Unitarianism had been out of style for more than half a century.

"I really enjoy church, you know. But Sunday is such a lovely time to exercise my dog."

The descendants of believers and a few believers gathered sociably before Emmanuel and Trinity.

Salvation for one soul is perdition for another and what might send me to hell would give you grace.

Miss Pride thought of God as a big man who had, in misty times, drawn up the Ten Commandments, and about Whom it was in bad taste as well as half sacrilegious to talk.

Although it was fitting for one to have an acquaintance with God and with Milton, it was not proper to display more than the merest courtesy towards them.

I said that the red room [imaginary] would be my refuge, that when the time came I would resume the battle on the condition that I might always return to it, as a warrior pauses to pray. The milder, though not sovereign, wardens of my being, granted me permission.

She informed me that I had missed half my life by not becoming acquainted with the supernatural. She told me that she had not only heard spirit voices imparting news of the other world, but had also been witness to the unaided peregrinations of chairs and tables and vases of flowers and, on one occasion, to the levitation by will alone of one of the sitters.

I tried again in different churches of different towns at different seasons of the year and different hours of the day and night. But I was God-forsaken; the shepherd could not hear my bleating, for I was miles astray in the cold and the dark and the desert. And at last I vanished without a trace; with a faint shiver and a faint sigh, I gave up the Ghost.

Order obviously cannot be set up in an individual's life without some higher authority. I know that Cal is doing the sound thing by going into the Church and going the whole way, but it is the perverseness of my nature to fight against any therapy advocated for me without my first having discovered it. I may come around in time.

Cal is becoming a Catholic.... It sickens me down to my soul to hear him talking piously and to see in him none of the common Christian virtues [such] as pity and kindness but only the fire-breathing righteousness that belongs, not to an unbaptized lay brother, but to a priest.

I *must* stick to my own knitting until I have finished some of the work that I was set upon this earth to do, for otherwise, I won't go to heaven and as the intimations of my mortality daily grow more pointed, this is a matter that concerns me.

"There's probably a devil in me, one straight from hell like those in the Salem witches my ancestors used to burn." [Hopewell Mather]

I attempted to make a sign to the attendant but I was hampered by the fixed gaze of my mother as if she were waiting for the devil inside me to make me cough again so that she might pounce on him.

I must find the [red] room in the real world before the real world intruded...and confused me to the point of madness.

[The red room] was a sanctuary and its tenant was my spirit.

I had felt presences in my room.

ANESTHESIA

Time was passing slowly. It was like ether coming down, coming spicy blue in a downward surge, and the anaesthetists saying, don't struggle, don't struggle, don't trouble yourself and the roaring drunken sleepiness. Or it was like half awake dreaming when the conscious mind almost meets the unconscious on its threshold, that sort of sixth sense that can discover the essence of things. The awake mind can name the mystery of the naked thing only in terms of what its five senses behold: darker than darkness, lighter than light. But the other mind sees, understands, knows what is inside. Now some people describe this mystery by such terms as no-thing, Nirvana. Heaven is the Christian word.

SURGERY

A great Being or Power was traveling through the sky, his foot was on a kind of lightning as a wheel is on a rail, it was his pathway.... I seemed to be directly under the foot of God, and I thought he was grinding his own life up out of my pain.... He bended me, turning his corner by means of my hurt, hurting me more than I had ever been hurt in my life, and at the acutest point of this, as he passed, I *saw*. I understood for a moment things that I have now forgotten, things that no one could remember while retaining sanity.

PSYCHIATRY

[My new psychiatrist] is so much more articulate than any of the others I've ever seen, and it's a new and extremely good and astringent experience for me to be with a man.... I think I am in love with him.... I don't know his status, whether single or married, but I want him to adopt me.... On the whole, I'm more for adoption than marriage.... I think he thinks I'm losing my mind and I'm with him there.

There are times when I feel that it is psychiatry that has destroyed my gift, but perhaps the gift isn't gone yet, I don't know. If it has, God knows what will become of me because that is the only thing in the world I have.

ALCOHOLISM

I use booze as insulation against boredom and impatience, or to exalt my feeling of camaraderie to the point of mania.

One of the principal reasons I have become so reclusive is that I don't want to drink, and I find that I can't not drink when I'm with people.

The dipsomaniac wrests himself from the fear of his desire by changing the name of it to "need," thus to tolerate his destruction as if it were no fault of his own.

Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes.... It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core.

If she stays away from John Barleycorn, she is, in our opinion, an OK kid.... We wouldn't mind...if she and Barleycorn stole a few kisses from time to time. It's this going all the way that causes so much trouble.

I am almost altogether to blame for my life being the ruin it is.

SUMMATIONS

I'm too much a chameleon.

The psychiatrists have told me that this is just what I did, married my father, just as the same perverseness made Cal marry his mother.... I disobeyed him as I disobeyed my father; he was cold as my father had always been and he was economically and domestically irresponsible as my father had always been. And he read his poems aloud to me as my father had read his stories for the pulp magazines. And his manners were courtly or they were uncouth and he was slovenly, as my father was. My father didn't have his wit nor his

brilliance. They were both violent men in every way. This pattern terrifies me. All the patterns of my life terrify me and this is why, in the constant torment of my fear, I have had to seek someone who really *can* be my father and can protect me.

Cal [Lowell] is in a sanitarium now, very ill, and while I grieve for him, I feel a kind of liberation at last in knowing we were both such emotional wrecks when we married we didn't have a prayer.

He is an altogether magnificent creature and I am so glad I never have to see him again that I could dance.

I so desperately long for the orderliness and the security of marriage and the end of my intolerable loneliness.

I am living the life I was destined for: I am a single woman with a cat and when I am not writing crabbed stories of frustration, I am hard at work on needlepoint.

Well, what I'd like to call myself is not a conservative, but a conservationist. I want to preserve everything that is good, dignified, and that is an adornment to the country, including the language.

I'm now getting very snippy reviews--I'm not 'relevant,' I'm not involved with issues, I'm not a Jew and I'm not a Negro, I deal only with the human heart and that has been transplanted.

AGING

Things grow grimmer and grimmer. Anger alone keeps me alive.

When one is very old and fleshless, one is like a thermometer, registering the least change in temperature.

The experience of unhappiness for the first time when one is growing old is one of the most malignant diseases of the heart.

DEATH

Molly thought of herself as a long wooden box with a mind inside.

She was dressed in her wedding gown; she looked pinked and cooked like a frivolous cake.

She had lain dead on the counter, swollen like a fat fish, and like the fish, white, shapeless as if the bones themselves had been worn thin by the water and were no stronger than those of a halibut.

The death for which she had made so wild a preparation, no longer shocked me but seemed a languid petering out, like the expiring fire from which there comes a final flare and hiss of resin and then is ash.

I must hand myself over to a policeman and tell him I am no longer responsible, that the state must now take care of me.... And then I did a pitiful thing.... I had not been able to read anything for weeks and so, in the station, when I still had some hours to wait, I bought a dollar edition of *Boston Adventure* and I tried to read it. I went into the women's room and tried to read it in there and when I could not, the tears poured out and in a perfect rage I threw it in the trash container. It was, in its way, a little suicide.

SALVATION

The unmolested oyster creates no pearl.

For each of the crucifixions of life there is a solace.

The only hope I had lay in the verdict handed down to myself by myself.

I granted the possibility that a soul might continue to operate in some imponderable place.

She knew that she could never again love anything as ecstatically as she loved the spirit.

I told Miss Pride that henceforth I should be free on Sundays to accompany her to church.

GLORY

They had emerged into the light which streamed like glory through the dirty window panes.

There was a swishing, sibilant swirl and the eyes in his mind saw four bright Catherine wheels perishing in glory. Wheels wheeled within the wheels and Cousin Katharine wheeled with them.

Michael Hollister (2020)

