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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains the proceedings of a seminar in which poets demonstrated through readings and analysis of their works how poetry, combining appeals to both reason and emotion, can develop and refine individual awareness of the world and nature around us. The primary participants in the program were Bruce Cutler, Dolores Kendrick, and May Miller Sullivan. These poets attempted to demonstrate through their readings ethnic distinctions and qualities which can be introduced into the classroom through poetry. The second section of the booklet contains questions and comments from the audience as well as the poets' responses. And in the third section, several poems by Dolores Kendrick are printed. (TS)

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## Report II

# Developing Awareness Through Poetry

Edited by  
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The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee  
College of Letters and Science  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201

This report summarizes a seminar, open to the public, which was held at The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee on August 4, 1971 as part of the summer program of the Center for Twentieth Century Studies.

1971-2008

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DEVELOPING AWARENESS  
THROUGH POETRY.

June, 1972

*A Public Seminar*

**DEVELOPING AWARENESS THROUGH POETRY**

**Center for Twentieth Century Studies**

**August 4, 1971**

**Kenwood Conference Center  
The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee**

**Participants**

**BRUCE CUTLER**, *Professor of English, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas*

**DOLORES KENDRICK**, *Humanities Coordinator of The School Without Walls of the Washington, D. C. public schools*

**MAY MILLER**, *former teacher of speech and drama in the Baltimore, Maryland high schools*

**ROBERT F. ROEMING**, *Director, Center for Twentieth Century Studies, Professor of French and Italian, The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee (MODERATOR)*

## THE GUEST PARTICIPANTS

BRUCE CUTLER has published several volumes of poetry, including *A West Wind Rises*, *Sun City*, and *A Voyage to America*. He has written and presented a fifteen week series for educational television entitled "Approaching Poetry." He has edited *Arts at the Grass Roots* and has been a staff contributor for *The Texas Observer*. He was Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature at the National University of Paraguay in 1965 and Visiting Professor of English at the University of Zaragoza, Spain in 1968-1969. He has also been visiting lecturer in universities in Ecuador under the Fulbright Exchange Program.

DOLORES KENDRICK designed the humanities curriculum for THE SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS and has designed and taught courses in poetry at the Phillips Exeter Academy and Iolani School, Honolulu, Hawaii. In 1963 she was a recipient of a Fulbright exchange in Belfast, Northern Ireland. She has also been a participant in the Annual Conferences of The National Council of Teachers of English and recently, she conducted a seminar in poetry at the Conference on the Humanities in New Orleans. Currently she is a consultant to the Smithsonian Institution where she helped to design a gallery oriented to children's poetry and painting for the National Collection of Fine Arts. Her narrative poem, *Freddie*, won the Deep South Writers Award in 1965 and a rare article on the poetry of Aztec Indians appeared in *Books Abroad* in the same year. Her articles on methodology have been published in *The English Journal* and *Modern Haihu*. In 1970 her poems appeared in the anthology, *To Gwen, With Love*.

MAY MILLER SULLIVAN has recently served as lecturer and poet-in residence at Monmouth College, Monmouth, Illinois. She has been coordinator for performing poets for the public schools of the District of Columbia and as present is a member of the Commission on the Arts of the District of Columbia. Her publications include two volumes of verse, *Into the Clearing* and *Poems*. Her poetry is included in *Lyrics of Three Women* and her poetry has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The Nation*, and *Poetry*. She is most recently represented in two of the Singer/Random House Literature Series.

ROEMING: Unrelenting in the concerns expressed in the introductory remarks of the 1970 summer seminar on *Generating Literary Appreciation*, the participants in this seminar will as poets demonstrate through readings and analysis of their works how poetry, combining both appeals to reason and emotion, can develop and refine individual awareness of the world of man and nature around us. We will not be concerned with poetic criticism or criticism of poetry, but rather with the demonstration of how each individual, in fulfilling his life-role as a human being, has the responsibility to listen to poetry, especially with the "inner ear." By our presence all of us gathered here will, I trust, experience individually a unique but intimate contact with each poet.

In the long perspective of human experience the maintenance of a delicate balance between reason and emotion in the motivation of behavior has been sought as the ideal. More often than not, this quest has been regarded as the responsibility of the individual to himself. Consistent attention to this process of developing dual control of conduct contributed to identifiable character and personality which in itself could be evaluated as good or bad in terms of social standards. The interplay of all these facets and the validity of social judgments could not be pragmatically analyzed, but it was assumed that freedom from negative criticism sufficiently indicated the presence of individual virtue. However, in most examples, culled from human experience, the suppression of emotion — perhaps equatable with the free but affirmative spirit of the individual to transcend external limitations — has been implicit while reason is revered at least as the apology for emotion.



In the brief span of this seminar our guests will indicate how the balance between reason and emotion in motivating human conduct can be effectively gained through poetry. Each poet will illustrate how imagination can be sharpened and stimulated through poetry and our capacities for seeing, hearing, and listening be thus expanded. Because of their varied experiences, these poets will also demonstrate through their readings ethnic distinctions and qualities which can be introduced into the classroom through poetry. Ultimately, the child or older student will thus necessarily gain greater awareness of his own individuality.

May Miller Sullivan — known through her poetry and literary works as May Miller — will begin, reading first her poem *Procession*, assisted by Dolores Kendrick.

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MILLER: I thought probably it would be interesting to tell you how the poem was written. I had the good fortune to go to Florence and visit the museums, as many of you have done. There I was tremendously impressed with the Gorrizi *Journey of the Magi*. Later I had occasion back in the United States to visit a tenement. The walls were grey; the furnishings mottled with filth; the woman who answered the door, barefoot. But on the wall hung the *Journey of the Magi* cut from a magazine, and the magazine of all magazines: *Life*. On this soiled wall a glittering procession of the Magi. It was then I thought: these walls are singing with old spirituals, the old fundamental beliefs are ringing out from these colorful reproductions. Guilty I faced myself. "Here I come into this place and what am I thinking? Am I thinking the rotting cities; am I thinking this filthy house; am I giving the proper perspective to the faith that rises above the filth and decorates walls with a Renaissance representation?" This is the birth of *Procession*.

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KENDRICK: The reason that May and I are reading this together is not only because we thought it would be great fun but also because she has written a counterpoint poem. In one part you will hear the writer, the poet himself speaking, in the other, you will hear dialect, a Black dialect, so to speak. Therefore you really are supposed to see two things at one time, so try to think double. I don't know how successful we will be at this but try to think double simultaneously as we go along. At least you will get an appreciation for anyone who has two things going on in his head at one time and who tries to make sense out of it.

## Procession

(Gozzoli's *Journey of the Magi* hangs on a tenement wall)

Ring, hammer, ring!  
Time is today, yesterday, and time to come,  
In which man, depending on hereafter,  
Hangs his hope on a distant star.

Low ceiling under high sky.  
Boards for feet to tread the solid way.  
Avoiding paths  
Tracked by the image-haunted.

Gonna heist mah wings  
An' gonna fly high,  
New Jerusalem.

Where gray twilight falls away  
Hangs the miracle in which wax-curled kings,  
Ermined, brocaded, travel to Bethlehem.  
White steeds poise to the trumpet.  
Immobile figures of grandeur burn a mark  
Golden at the crossroads to a dream.

An' they nailed Him to a tree,  
To a tall, black tree.  
How the hammer do ring!

Down the ages, moving and motionless,  
Birth is the great mystery:  
A name on Bible page,  
The cry from castle walls,  
Man's dream of renewal,  
The miracle recorded of God in man,

Jest ready me a body, Father,  
'An' Ah'll go down an' die.

From this miracle comes another:  
The infinite takes familiar form:  
God is friend with whom the lowly  
Walk hand in hand  
Through the quiet byways.

Please, Suh, forgive us, Lawd,  
We didn't know 'twas You.

Stream flowing to single birth —  
Croon of the infinite  
Fed at the personal breast.

~~Sweet little Jesus Boy,~~  
They made You be born  
In a manger.

The lit journey, the magi bearing gifts,  
And the final stable — a tenement wall.  
Is it that man and art must end  
Beneath the crumbling cities?  
We who travel the way from innocence  
Cry out for direction beyond the journey.  
Hours revolving in an iron schedule —  
Sun to moon; birth to death —  
Turn in the dust of our passage,  
Desperate, we seek conviction  
More than child nursed in a narrow corner.

The next poem — go back with me, if you will, to the wonder of childhood. We stand out and look at that unbelievable moon and think the unbelievable things that are happening. Necessarily you turn back to your own childhood when the stars were a world of wonder and the moon was the spot where the Creator placed the old man who dared burn brush on the Seventh Day. That is a familiar tale that I heard from the South. I am glad to see you smile, Bruce, because I didn't know that anybody here knew. All the people that I have read this to have asked "Why was the man burning brush put on the moon?" And I said that this was what I was told when I was a child. Here I have tried to trace the joy we children had in tracing constellations when we were stretched on the lawn and learned to recognize them. This is for the little girl present, because this is a child's poem.

### Sky Writing

Let's stretch side by side  
Upon the lawn  
Tracing constellations  
Close and clear as birthday gifts.  
We lie flat on our backs  
The soft summer night curled  
In wonder of planets and stars —  
Venus, Jupiter, the war-monger Mars,  
And the lonely Polar Guide.  
We tip the little Dipper  
Fresh with dew;  
Bathe an upturned world  
In magic from the Larger Cup;

Bold with power of distance shrunk  
Create for ourselves an icy zoo —  
Crazy elephants with cork-screw trunks,  
Blue monkeys and leopards with comet tails;  
Cage the Big and Little Bears;  
Then in brimming haze  
Caren along the Milky Way  
To sit in Cassiopeia's Chair  
While far out on the edge of night,  
He who scorched the Seventh Day  
Laughs silver down from doom.

*Lyrics of Three Women*

I am going to read one more poem. This I have chosen because in the morning paper I read that a man had paid some thousands of dollars for the elimination of the great eagles in his district. I read further that young men today are very eager to try a new type of plane in which they can actually feel the rush of air. They don't want to be enclosed. They want to experience the swift movement. In this poem called *Wings* I have combined my regret for the mechanized threat to wildlife, and the tragic invasion of its territory. In the last decade several airplanes crashed without explanation. The only clue was bird feathers in the fuselage. Yes, we ride the 'other wings, but birds' wings, too, are important.

### Wings

Swan songs move the wildest dreams.  
One can almost hear that bird  
Through the high cloud blanket  
Whistling in the night  
To the mate beside him  
As they turned in easy flight  
From the Arctic's flowering snow.  
Perhaps they wished the feel of earth.  
And time for warmth beyond the mating  
Beside a bay less bound in ice.

They knew the water way and land  
Here where soft tides run free  
And shoreward to the ripened sedges,  
With odds unnumbered in mild concept  
And crash set neat as by compass point,  
The male swooped  
His brightness dazzled the blind airplane  
To die in cold metal thundering.  
And all who rode the other wings  
Went incommunicable to doom.

Details slip quietly, a thing forgotten  
Who had explained that night and why,  
Who will tomorrow beat their ribs  
Against the rigid hours.  
Yet none who runs the wind  
Can be read or be thinking  
That for all their skill and overly symmetry  
Man and bird streaked to one appointment  
Where high above he barged muck and wrack,  
A mate circled and circled without completion.

The Literature of America Anthology  
Singer-Random House 1969

KENNEDY: I want us to concern ourselves a bit with the idea of the extent to which we are sensitive to what goes on around us. You know the whole business of poetry is really a sense of awareness, but I suppose in this day and time in which awareness is either becoming computerized or discouraged we need to do something to save it. Nowadays it becomes more and more difficult to communicate what poetry really is, so you must really start with the wee children, then move on from there. I am going to read three poems to you, possibly three and a half, offering sense awarenesses in different situations in regard to people, in regard to incidents that actually happened and how I found something there that I felt was poetry. The first one is entitled *We are the Writing on the Wall*. I read not too long ago of a group of English kids who found an old empty house, one of the Georgian houses in London abandoned, and occupied it. The police came eventually and arrested them. But the whole concept, the whole idea of what they were trying to do is interesting. They had written on the wall of this house, "We were here." Now this may be a cry for help. It may be a cry to say I exist; I am; don't you hear me, don't you know I'm here?

### ***We are the Writing on the Wall***

words written on the wall of a deserted Georgian  
House in London in which a few young people had squatted  
and were afterwards arrested

We are the writing on the wall  
our liquid dynasties of ink  
running into stone

the young alphabet of our grief  
stronger than the whines of citizenry  
stalking us alone

with nostrils wide like pumas  
pacing their impatient properties.  
We are the bone

of that daylight squatting in dark  
sealed in the absolution of tombs:  
the hieroglyphic home.

(Revision of October, 1969)

The other poem is inspired by something that happened to my brother and our family. My brother's son had a bicycle stolen from him and my brother of course became very indignant and vowed to have the youngster arrested. At first we all agreed. We decided to find out who the boy was who pinched the bike and track him down. Well, the rest of us gave up after awhile, but my brother was very determined. He finally found the boy, where he lived, who his mother was. At the end of that experience when my brother realized where the boy came from and how the boy lived, how his mother lived, we wound up taking groceries to the home. We never got the bike back but we experienced sharing what we had with the family: Yet this was a means to something more meaningful, something that "grabbed us," as the kids say, and thus this poem. I am not so sure it is a finished poem, I think it still has to be finished really.

### Inquiry

- I. In the room a quarrel held among the pickings of afternoon  
run into the woman's throat, her hat upon her love  
like crust upon a well-kept fire  
the cold grease of her son's lies now to melt with all  
hot questioning and interrogation of ninety-degree law.  
She the thirteenth year mother of a thief.

*Is this your boy?*

Yes.

To the boy:

*You stole the bike?*

*He made me.*

*Who?*

Jo-Jo.

and the fallen tears  
smashed into the apple of his eye  
a saucy survival of stillborn cops.

- II. She bowed her head. A kitchen day without pay moved  
In her wonderful hands. She bowed her head and said:  
*Daniel you know I brung you up right. I did I do  
I try. Why you do this?* His thirteenth lie gave no answer.

My brother sat a salary away, an inch, a foot,  
a success, a justice. His son without a bike,  
struck down by force: a theft a report a pick-up an Inquiry  
a presecution, perhaps.

Inquire of her how she manages on fifty dollars a week  
and hers, seven children, why her eyes keep bowed  
what give holiness to her house  
why her hollow jaw holds within a fist.  
Inquire about the escape of her man  
the penance of her unwanted bed  
the woman of her that dares speak right  
before the civil Unbelievers

Inquire . . . I wants to do right. I got to punish him.  
Cain't let him be no thief. They's right. I been taught it,  
so will he.

III. Later in her cement rooms, the theft of them already assured  
by the State, the theft of the woman herself left dark  
and undetected in a white woman's kitchen that was as alien  
as it was familiar  
as strange as her neat public housing flat  
as secure as losing carfare on a bad day,  
my brother stood inquiring of her kind  
who would grist him without a plan  
without a definition, without a mighty will  
dismiss the charge (oh how his court chair squeeked!)  
and bring mothers home to question  
and thieves home to sing.

And next day he and all our Black House  
riding unnoticed on a stolen bike butchered for pennies  
and worthless, we who had forgot made peace with whole Black dreams,  
brought bags of food without cause  
and knew why her kitchen blood ran so to life in ours.

*I must do right, she said and handed my brother  
a ten dollar bill.*

*For the bicycle. Ain't enough I know but it'll help.  
It's only right. You don't have to bring me no food,  
But thanks.*

*You lost a good day's work, my brother said  
and left.*

IV. Going, her smile that locked us out with latches of her lowered lids  
remembering my brother for days to come  
and he would say: *why did she do this thing? Give me money?*  
*I didn't want money. To Hell with the bike!*  
and all his grief remembered hers  
and they both kept well the dignity of their only inheritance.

Beyond that  
there was nothing to be asked.

Some time ago somebody told me about a wee boy who lived somewhere in the Midwest, in the twenties or thirties. In those days if you stole something in a school they arrested you. That was very long ago. Apparently this wee boy had gone to the music room and stolen a horn. He then went to the auditorium and blew the horn. That is a fabulous thing to do really because the horn blowing in the middle of the day is a chaotic gesture. Yet it's also a cry for help. Suddenly everybody says, "What's happening?" But the horn still sounds. This is a metaphor. The police did come and arrest him. I asked my friend if they really arrested the boy for taking a horn. She said, "Yes, yes." The whole idea stayed with me for so long that I felt like a mother who had to bring the baby forth or else! All this came to life in a fifty-page poem. Now don't get worried. I'm not going to read the entire poem. But an introduction to the part I'll read is in order. Freddie has just blown the horn and he has explained why. The horn is a call for help. Now I will read the dialogue of his mother because she is a very interesting person. Consider the dramatic monologues of perhaps Browning. You must read the character through what she says. The character of this mother is based on a mother who came to my school one day and said to me, incidently, "Why did my son get a C in English?" I said, "Well, he was just C in English." She said, "But I have a Master's degree from (anonymous) university and he couldn't have gotten C in English!" What she simply was saying to me was, "I could not produce a child who could get C in English." It was the first time in my life that I had ever met pure vanity head on. I had never known vanity of that type before and she really hit me with it.

**Excerpt from Freddie:**

I gave him life  
In the shadow of my soul,  
And the tenderness of my sin  
Which lies about me in the night  
He cringed in my womb  
Like a knife running through mold,  
Held by the hand that shook in terror  
No, he didn't cringe:  
He lay still.  
He never moved, not once,  
And in that I knew his secret body  
That warmed mine,  
His secret life that lifted mine.



Yes, I mothered him and fathered him, too;  
In the lean and hungry blanket of my body  
I loved him and cherished him and wanted him  
And gave him food and found him home  
And warmed him from wasteful winds  
And sucking suns  
I breathed fire for him  
Before the sun could burn  
And I souped the seas for his milk.  
I am his mother.  
I am Miracle.  
And God sends me secrets.  
When my flesh dies,  
The boy's dies;  
When my breath gives out,  
His will go.  
I am His Mother.  
I am Miracle.  
I live in the boy  
And he in me  
And though he was cut from me by the hand  
Of terror a thousand years ago  
I live in him and he in me  
And we need not reach for each other  
By the sound of the scissored clock,  
But what man knows this?  
How can men know the terrors of women?  
It is they who hold the knife,  
I know this now.  
I knew it as I lay wet  
In the noon's nerve  
And felt the break of the man's passion  
That drained the wetness of my life  
Into another life.  
Now I am dry.  
I have no others.  
One is enough.  
I am dry  
And sometimes I think it is he  
Who shrivels.  
Yet I have loved him,  
I have given him everything,  
He wants for nothing,  
I have seen to it.

He has the good things —  
All the good things.  
He has time,  
He has pleasure,  
He has friends,  
Many, many friends,  
Different friends,  
Never the same faces.  
He has a good father  
Who loves him  
And a good home  
That loves him  
And a good life  
And all the good things . . .  
*He has me.*  
He wants for nothing,  
I am always there,  
I know no business  
That would stay me from the dinner table  
I fix his meals,  
I wash his clothes,  
I make his bed,  
I keep him from the cold;  
I still the sun  
To keep him from burning.  
I watch the winds  
And hold them until his coat is buttoned.  
And he is content.  
He never rages or cries  
Like other children.  
In fact I have never seen him  
Really cry.  
Tears, yes  
But anguish  
Is not like him,  
Not this boy I have birthed  
In the weeping of my body.  
He doesn't know how  
To weep or be afraid.  
He always stands straight  
(Though sometimes his head droops a little)  
But he is at an awkward stage,  
All boys go through that  
And some not well.

He is considerate and punctual,  
Never late for dinner.  
He remembers my birthdays  
And his father's too  
And he always does his schoolwork  
With care.  
I know,  
Because he spends hours  
In his room  
Every evening.  
I never interfere  
Because I know that he is about his schoolwork.  
He is a good boy,  
I don't know trouble from him  
And there is so much trouble these days!  
He runs the errands  
And speaks to the neighbors  
And washes the world  
With his kindness.  
Everyone says that I have birthed a good boy.....

As for this horn.....

I have no answer  
But answers are not necessary  
They get in the way.  
I am willing to buy a horn for him  
If he wants one.  
He has never asked for one.  
I know he likes music.  
Sometimes when we are at dinner  
He and I, (his father is often late)  
We keep the phonograph on  
And listen to music.  
Perhaps he has a deep feeling for music  
Deeper than I realize  
Because I often notice  
That he forgets to eat  
While the stereo plays  
But that is our play and pick hour.  
How he loves to pick at his food!  
Which I don't like  
Because it is wasteful.  
But I see that he is keen to music,  
Sensitive children are always  
Keen to everything.....

He is good  
And will grow into a strong good man,  
He will house his life with happy things,  
He will father the good and strong  
And sensitive  
And women who breed suns!  
I had so much fear for him  
As he wound in my flesh  
I feared for his living  
And the limb of his manhood  
Yet I birthed him free  
In miracle  
Out of dark  
And now he is free  
To strength a dynasty of miracles!  
I sweep the stars for his path  
So that he might see angels!  
I fought him-angels,  
I showed him creatures of light  
And loveliness and passed their images  
To him for his wonder.  
He knows no dark, no death.  
He sees no ugliness,  
I have borne this for him  
Whatever there is of it  
To be seen.  
In his deepest dreams  
He has always slept with the light on.  
Now as to this horn  
It is nothing  
He will forget it  
We will all forget it.  
The School will forget it.  
Memory will forget too,  
Everything forgets.  
I have found in the sin of my night  
A marriage of forget  
What is a horn?

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CUTLER: I want to read a recently published poem called *Older than Happiness*. It is a poem that looks back on a period twenty years ago when my wife and I were living in Central America.

## Older Than Happiness

That was the year we lived in the other  
America, in a house we called a hut  
in a field of sugar cane we found  
surrounded by more and greener fields  
of cane climbing to the lips of an old  
volcano. It was a boat embedded in a hissing,  
sweet sargasso, and the cane-brakes  
boiled with the light of fireflies.

Under the skin of years, a storm  
is running gullywashers down the red  
beds of the roof. The thunder trembles  
through us, with us. Somewhere my eye  
is reading month-old mail in the long  
corridor, and the distant monologue of rain  
is as warm as light — I can feel a shiver  
of content run from under eaves.

In my nights on city streets I seem-  
sometimes to come to it: rising higher,  
darker than the darkest cane, as I approach  
it seems to grow against the arms of stars,  
enclosing light, a single lamp —  
glow worm in the grasses of the night! And a nerve  
older than happiness seems to tighten  
turning inwards with the word alone.

I want to begin my remarks with the last word in the first line. The word is *other*, and it seems to me as I look back to the time I wrote this poem, and through this poem to what lies behind it, the word *other* is very important. This is a poem in which the sense of *otherness* is really the crucial factor. I spent a portion of my life outside the United States, beginning in El Salvador in Central America twenty years ago, and that was the overwhelming sensation I had — this sense of otherness, that there should be so much to life, as I began to experience it, which didn't have anything to do with anything I had ever known or heard of. I kept thinking to myself that is a peculiar circumstance that we who are Americans, who call ourselves Americans and think of ourselves as being so new in the world, should suddenly discover that there exists not only our America as we know it, but another America which is even bigger, more complex. In fact, everything about it is unusual from the moment you wake up to its existence.

I cannot, of course, reproduce exactly for you what it was that was going on when I had my first such experience. But I will let you have a look at some slides\* that were taken at that time. For example, this a

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\*Copies of these slides are available at cost on request.

community in El Salvador in which my wife and I worked. We helped build it; it was located in the United Nations demonstration area in that country. As you look ~~At~~ these projections, you are looking at a poem *and* looking back through the window of my eye here onto this screen to what really lies at the origin of the poem. There is a timegap of about twenty years between the picture, which was taken in 1951, and this particular poem, which was written in 1970.

As we built the houses and moved people into them, we called them jokingly "our huts" — they weren't huts, of course, but they seemed so to us because there is something about a hut that is different from a house. If you've ever built a hut when you were young, you remember that a hut was always what you *made* — one room, one door, one table, one chair, for one person other than yourself. There is a sense of immediacy and closeness about "huts," and this particular group of houses that we helped build was located:

in a field of sugar cane we found  
surrounded by more and greener fields  
of cane climbing to the lips of an old  
volcano: . . .

We are all aware of the sense that somehow if you live in a place that is new and is located in a context that is very green and very lush, it helps to fix in your mind a sense of closeness, a sense of intimacy. Your fantasy, I think, takes over under these circumstances, and in the poem I liken it to a boat:

. . . It was a boat embedded in a hissing,  
sweet sargasso, and the can-brakes  
boiled with the light of fireflies.

I had the sense that whatever it was that was new in this experience was located so securely in terms of the geography of a place and so inextricably bound up with the sense of that place, that I never would really lose it. Part, of course, of what was involved was the fact that I helped build something there, that I had something *in* it. There is something about the fact that you put something into a place that makes you feel it is permanently left behind.

So, in the poem as I look back from the present to that point in the past, I have in the second stanza:

Under the skin of years, a storm  
is running gullywashers down the red  
beds of the roof.

In a lush green tropical setting a red tile roof presents a lot of red. The vividness of this particular kind of image coupled with impressions of a big storm reinforces lasting memories of people with whom you work under such circumstances. Thus the accidental coincident arrival of the mailman becomes inextricably woven into the fabric of memory. And then:

. . . Somewhere my eye  
is reading month-old mail in the long  
corridor, and the distant monologue of rain  
is as warm as light. I can feel a shiver  
of content run from under eaves.

Now the experience and my awareness of it is combined not only with these details, but also with the *otherness* of the situation, as in the moment-to-moment experience of life in this "other America." This slide shows a very common situation when women make dinner and they convert the ground corn or *masa* into tortillas. I had written down in my journal in 1951:

*Faces and events and it all a mix and a muddle and then, after a certain date, begins to resolve. The highschool teacher from Muscatine who walked to our hut from the Pan American Highway with her hard, dry face and she was going somewhere else after she walked back out to the highway. Always moving. Grippe and dysentery. The increasing realization that I am taking out more than I give here. A chair made of sticks. The outlines of the mountains of Honduras. The increasing realization that I love this country and am exasperated with its people. The couple playing with their child in the most innocent way, after which L. told me that they had let their last baby starve to death. Blood-covered drunks on the road, weaving from one side to the other. What I could only call the calm roar of the sea yesterday as the waves rolled and broke. A ball of lava at the volcano, Izalco, that shot into the air and broke on the side of the crater, sending out a web of rivulets of lava until the slope looked like a peacock's tail.*

*You get the feeling that you are paying some kind of a debt after a while, although you are never really sure whether there might not be another payment later, sometime. Or that the unfortunate things that happen are in a sense the preparation for being able to understand or receive other, better things. But still, the feeling of the perhaps of another disaster. It is like a storm, when it moves away from here, but you are still likely to get the lightning.*

Well, that storm brings us back to the rain which I was working with in the second stanza of the poem. Somehow it seems to be all bound up together as I look back through the poem into the experiences I was having at that time. The last stanza of the poem reads:

In my nights on city streets I seem  
sometimes to come to it: rising higher,  
darker than the darkest cane, as I approach  
it seems to grow against the arms of stars,  
enclosing light, a single lamp —  
glow worm in the grasses of the night! And a nerve  
older than happiness seems to tighten  
turning inwards with the word *alone*.

It seems to me that my awareness of the poem and what it arose from, along time ago, is involved with the sense of something that you first experience as being very different, completely *other*, something that you never had any conception of, and it then becomes a part of you, and after about twenty years you suddenly realize that the *other* is really now you, and it isn't something *other* at all. It is really what you are; it is like a thread that you have picked up somewhere and have followed out in your own life. And twenty years later, there it is, turned into a

poem, something like a labyrinth, through which you have found your way, one way or another. And that experience leaves you alone, and something other.

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ROEMING: Since this discussion of poetry is centered on developing awareness our major concern now is whether this audience is experiencing a quickening of observation through these readings just concluded. Even more important have they created emotional responses which personalize and thus firmly establish new or broader insights? Your questions and comments will now give us evidence of the extent of our achievement.

## QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

*Question:* Do you always use pictures and photographs, as you did today?

CUTLER: No; this is the first time. Part of the interest I had in coming here was because the theme of this panel was going to be "developing awareness through poetry," and it seemed to me, as I thought about this particular poem, that I discovered I had all kinds of notes connected with its writing. More than I had realized. I had these slides, my notes and journals, and somehow I hadn't really looked at them before. So when I compared the finished product — the poem written in 1971 — against the original experience of 1951 — I found that it was really fascinating, the kind of artistic introspection you get involved with.

KENDRICK: We look like two battlefields, you are on that side, we are on this side. May I ask, is there anyone in here who has ever tried to write poetry? I say *tried*, because I am still trying myself. Is there anybody here who has ever tried to write it?

*Answer:* I have, but I thought poetry was supposed to rhyme.

KENDRICK: Did somebody teach you that?



*Answer:* I guess so.

**KENDRICK:** Did you give up when you found out it had to rhyme or are you still doing it?

*Answer:* Well, once in awhile.

**KENDRICK:** Some people say you have verse and you have poetry. I am just saying that because you do have some good poems that rhyme; but you do have something called verse that is involved with rhyme without reason. The trick is to make both rhyme and reason work.

*Question:* I teach creative writing to high-school students and find it most difficult to have them realize that poetry does not have to rhyme. I have used other devices to teach them poetic rhythms, which are independent of rhyme. Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to break them of the desire to write only rhymed poetry.

**KENDRICK:** I don't know what causes that. I've noticed for instance that I have great difficulty rhyming, great difficulty doing it and have it make sense and go together. But most people can rhyme. Listen to Mohammed Ali; he rhymes beautifully. It seems to be a gift that most people have, but I don't know how we got into the idea that poems had to rhyme.

**MILLER:** Don't you think, Dolores, that it might be a hangover from the childhood Mother Goose rhymes, that we never have cleared our notion of poetry from that. I feel the great gap comes somewhere between the fourth and the sixth grade. By the time the children reach junior high school they are introduced to something a little different, but the great dirth of material does remain between the fourth and the sixth grade. I think it is then we ought to introduce them to a little freer form. It seems to me to have worked with the people that I have dealt with in those grades. Do you think there is anything to that?

*Audience:* But blank verse is construed as any old thing, and lacks the comfort that form offers them. Form to the students is something one reverts to automatically with assurance that the product is a poem.

**MILLER:** If they say something, can you talk to them so that they *may* reconsider the quality of rhythm in the sound of their own words?

**KENDRICK:** I think your notion is really quite interesting I never thought of that, the fact that rhyme may be some kind of security and that basically students are asking for form. So you have to find, or we have to find, some way of moving into that need positively. But I would like to know if there is anybody here who after experiencing something emotional has put it down on paper and said, "I have written a poem?"

*Audience:* The young people try to order their experiences which stifles their emotions. When I write a poem I do so at a time when I cannot organize the experience so that the impression can be recorded as it was sensed rather than analyzed. In this manner the substance of the poem can more freely be associated with the form or lack of form it requires.

**CUTLER:** One of the interesting questions you can pose to people who are thinking about poetry is what happens when you translate from one language to another, and particularly, when you translate from a language where there is no convention of rhyme, like the Hebrew or the Chinese? Now, if you are to translate what is known as a poem in those languages

into English, then are you under the obligation to equip it with all the standard features of English poetry, such as rhyme-- you know, regular syllable counts and all the rest -- or are you not? Because in the Hebrew and in the Chinese they aren't there. You have to wrestle with that for a while, and it isn't an easy question. I think you have to begin by recognizing that every language has different conventions; in English, we have a set of conventions that is not necessarily found in other languages. But we have to go deeper than the conventions to find the substance of art. The art and the conventions may exist together, but art doesn't have to be seen only in the conventions.

*Audience:* Doesn't the art of poetry rest on a number of elements besides rhyme and meter? Isn't it related somehow to music?

UTLER: If you are a person who doesn't write poetry but simply likes it, I think you are aware that your likings come from certain kinds of sources. I mean you like Browning because his characters are interesting, or because the way they express themselves is a particular feature. And if you read Shakespeare you realize that the same qualities may be there, but there are others too. If you are a poet you have a sense that poetry is as much as anything else a kind of process of discovery. You may think you know a great deal about the art. But then you sit down, and in writing the next poem you find you don't know anything about it at all. Whatever we think is true about poetry, is inadequate, because it really is a very complex activity which very few of us understand at all well.

MILLER: Don't you think it is probably as important that many students be exposed to these forms that we are talking about so that they may appreciate. Was it Harriet Monroe who said that in order to have great poets we have to have great audiences? They, the students, have to bring something to a reading. If we familiarize them with certain requirements and traditions of the form, they can appreciate more and be prepared to read further. If you have the creative writers, they too will respond and be the better for analysis and interpretation of poetry other than their own.

UTLER: You can put it this way: that most people study sonnets, but they fail to realize that the sonnet was *developed*. Someone sat down one day and said, "I've had it with all the other forms, I need a new one." It was an invented form; it does a certain kind of thing and it does it pretty well. But the sonnet isn't the only form, and new forms are continually being created. You have to study forms in order to understand what they do. The sonnet did for a while something no other form could do, just as open forms today are doing things which the so-called closed forms couldn't do before. And I am sure in the next twenty-five to thirty-years there will be something else because what you are looking for in a form is a particular *way* to achieve structure and a form is only a particular way to do so.

*Audience:* Isn't there some kind of prose that is really poetry?

UTLER: I think there is no satisfactory theory yet as to what is prose and what is poetry; however I think you can set them up not so much as A and B but rather as two ends of a scale whereby you seem to go from one to the other through a series of gradations. There isn't any hard and fast division between prose and poetry, such that we can say, "We are now leaving the territory of prose. Get your passport out to enter the territory of poetry." There is no such definite division.

KENDRICK: Let us go back to this young man's statement. Really when you talk about poetry making music what you are really talking about is language, and you know language makes music and the poet's art is to be able to take that language and form it into something called a poem. Meredith Willson does something fantastic with language in the opening song of *The Music Man*. He creates a train and he knows how to do that with language, not with poetry, not with prose, but with language, knowing how to put the right accents on the right syllables. I think this is essentially, when we get to unrhymed poetry, what the poet is trying to do. Dylan Thomas does this magnificently, because he has the Welsh feeling for language and this is essentially what the poet is dealing with, those sounds, if you are talking about form. Now, of course, the great poet is able to take those sounds and give them sense, too and this is what Meredith did really. You know he took the sounds, he created a moving train, but he was also talking about Professor Harold Hill.

ROEMING: You have made an extremely interesting point here when you mention as examples the Welsh and consider Petrarch and the Italians. Almost invariably English people feel that English is too prosaic in itself to be poetic and therefore seem to be looking either for something that is couched in poetic language which is different from every day language or then not finding that they want to put the poem in some kind of form that would make it different. What is passing through my mind during this discussion is that in hearing these three poets reading their works we may suspect that they weren't reading poetry definable in traditional terms of form. And yet when the poetry comes through on its sound, it carries much of its own music with it, doesn't it?

MILLER: Bob, did you ever hear Dylan Thomas? What music! If you had put your hands over your ears, not pressing the drum too closely, you could get that sway, that rhythm that breaks through even without the words. It was a charming experience. Somebody advised me to try it while Thomas was reading. I did when listening to *Fern Hill*. I went right through the poem with him with my ears almost closed to words as such but with the music beating through. Another said, "Well, that's only the Welsh."

*Audience:* I have an observation to make about the reactions of people in the audience while poetry is being read. The appeal of your own poems was primarily emotional. If one were singing a song or playing an instrument there would definitely be some form of emotional response. However, while listening to poetry the listeners sit impassive as if they were hearing a sermon or participating in something awfully sacred. Nobody chuckles. Nobody responds.

KENDRICK: That has something to do with the nature of the audience. There are times when you get no response as in the case of Lincoln's Gettysburg address — nobody said anything. You feel that you just don't get through. But I never felt an audience response so much as when I went to Chicago to do a reading in a theater to a group of people who were highly involved. I was reading poems that meant something to them and as I finished the first three lines somebody said "Right on!" I looked up, *where am I, where am I going?* What happened there was such a tremendous emotion that I converged with it all feeling much like an actor on-stage. You feel your audience, or if you're a comedian, you tell your jokes, and suddenly know. It's that nuance between audience and per-

former that is so marvelous. Quite often in reading poems you don't get this reaction but I think it has somethings to do with the audience itself, the kind of audience you are addressing. Dylan Thomas used to talk about the tea people that he had to read before or Robert Frost talked about the women who asked "Mr. Frost, what about that horse that was in the field. Where was he going?" and of course poor Frost got upset about it. But I think this business of response is a very strong point. I would like it if somebody responded to me, even if such response indicated mixed emotions.

MILLER: It doesn't have to be a vocal response. If I look into a face while I am reading a poem and if there is that change of expression, its encouragement to me. When I see an eye just light up the least bit, or hear "uh-ha," one gets the feeling and I'm satisfied. I don't think it has to be vocal. I don't think I need applause. You go into a theater and there is a great moment; the audience is quiet; they are too affected to applaud. Applause isn't the means of demonstrating the way it is going through them.

KENDRICK: Then you are saying that the communication can be silent.

MILLER: Yes, I think so.

Audience: But how can you not express your emotion as a listener?

MILLER: Oh, I don't object to it, but I am saying that there can be the reaction without the sound. No, I didn't say that there is anything against applause.

KENDRICK: I noticed when I was reading the poem about that mother, there were a couple of people here who really knew her and I think, but for their reserve, wanted to say "mm-m" or "yeah." I have met people like this, I know people like this. It is an American thing somewhat. We are sort of hemmed in and we just don't respond emotionally. It isn't done. This is a poetry audience, and it isn't done. One should never dance in the streets during a poem!

CUTLER: Many time the American schools are called upon to do things which they really would not be obliged to do in other countries. That is to say that every school system in the world teaches poetry, I suppose, but not all school systems feel called on to teach it as if it were necessary to convince the students that it ought to be part of the national heritage and that they should be eager to "understand" it. I have taught in several other countries, and it was a function of their cultures to create in everybody an awareness and a real sense, not just of appreciation, but of *participation* in language arts. In Spain, for example, there is the institution known as the *piropo*. It is what you say to a girl when she walks by and you think that she is something special. It is susceptible to all kinds of variations and the Spanish come up with the most extraordinary, bizarre kinds of compliments. But *language* is part of what it is to be a man in Spain. To be a man is to be able to say and saying something is the important thing, getting it out. Language is really at the heart of what it is to be a man. So by the time you get to school you are already convinced of that. You see that the love men have in other cultures for language is already established. But we don't seem to have this same kind of attitude, and a lot of the building of awareness for literature in American schools is just to build an awareness of the value of language.

*Audience:* Are there some poems which do not depend on word sounds for their effect?

CUTLER: Yes, that is right. The grasshopper poem by e. e. cummings cannot be read aloud. And there is no question that more and more poetry is written to be read with the eye, on the page, as opposed to being read out loud. But even then, you are relying on the fact that somebody will invest his time and his effort in the activity, and he must love the language, even if he is silently reading the poem.

English is a great language, and you never realize how great a language it is until you leave it behind and you try to write in another. A number of my Paraguayan friends who are poets and write in Spanish are very conscious of this, because the official dictionary of the Spanish Academy is really very small when compared, say, to the *New English Dictionary*. Spanish is a language which is not very rich in words, but in that respect, English is a tremendous language. There are almost 500,000 words in Webster's Third New International Dictionary, which demonstrates that English is absolutely unsurpassable. There isn't a language in the world that has the lexical riches that English has, but you would never know it by the way many people behave with it. They act as if it were a national patrimony to be locked up in Fort Knox, and the only two words you can withdraw at one time are "like" and "I mean." And all those other millions of words sitting in there, gathering dust.

MILLER: Well, Bruce, isn't it a little odd to you then that there is really not a perfect translation from a language that is sparse in vocabulary to English, which is so full?

CUTLER: True, but you feel it more acutely when you go from English into Spanish. There might easily be three or four perfectly acceptable standard English words, each of which has a separate meaning, but they all come out as one word in Spanish.

ROEMING: I would like now, if this were agreeable to you, to hear a few more poems, so that we can learn whether a session such as this has brought us into closer communication with one another. Do you have one, May, that you would read? You know what some of my favorites are. I shall be specific and ask you to read *Bigot*.

MILLER:

### Bigot

Rider, turn away in the wind.  
You of the frozen face  
And cruel hands,  
It is a vengeful steed  
You mount.  
His hooves beat hard  
Upon the stones;  
The stones lie hard  
Upon the seed,  
And grasses cannot bloom  
This year.  
O rider, away.

There is one that I want to read because I have used again an old folk interpretation: This is called *Pond Lament*, and is a throwback to childhood. It is true that we used to croak behind the frogs. We lived on a college campus, right at the foot of a hill where there was a little pond. Frogs were there and my father interpreted this rhythm that the frogs were croaking:

"Who'll pay my debts when I die."

Then we repeated this after him which years later I put into a poem. Now hear *Pond Lament*.

### Pond Lament

We leaped in a wind  
No freer than we  
Over hills tangled  
With weeds and tall grasses,  
Squatted like gargoyles,  
Slid the incline rump-scalded  
To wade in the pond below,  
Where a frog sat  
On a pad, blinking.  
The dark warm about us,  
We traced patterns for stars  
In the sky  
While stars within us burst free,  
Listened to the pond lament,  
Gave meaning to the croaking:  
    Who'll dig my grave when I die?  
    Who'll dig my grave when I die?  
    Not I. Not I.  
Not for us the deeper wisdom  
Pulsing in grotesque body;  
Even in frolic, seeds of tomorrow sprout  
Toward the hour of apprehension.  
    Who'll pay my debts when I die?  
    Not I.

ROEMING: I am extremely struck by this poem because it presents a scene of nature which then is related closely to a social attitude. The French poet, Bosquet, was visiting me and wrote a short story and the setting of the story is our home and we have a pond with frogs. He reproduced the sound of the frog, which is glup, glup, as the hand on a lock when the door is opened and the lock is turned and then let go. The sound of the click is akin to that of the frog. Here is a completely different picture of the same thing that doesn't turn out to be a lament. In fact, he always laughed and said he thought somebody was at the door.

MILLER: When I do this with young children I use a little different arrangement. They have fun out of it because I start:

I heard this from my father  
Who heard it from his father  
Who heard it from his father  
Who heard it from the frogs:

Whoo'll dig my grave when I die  
Whoo'll dig my grave when I die  
Not I. Not I.

Whoo'll pay my debts when I die.  
Whoo'll pay my debts when I die.  
Not I. Not I.

Whoo'll take my wife when I die  
Whoo'll take my wife when I die  
Me, me. Me, me. Me! Me, me!

**KENDRICK:** After that I don't know. That is such a great poem.

**ROEMING:** You have a more somber view of life.

**KENDRICK:** I don't know. This is a poem about aloneness. Do you think there is a difference between aloneness and loneliness? (Miller: Oh, yes! Oh, yes!) Does anybody want to tell me what you think about that, the difference?

**Audience:** Sometimes you want to be alone.

**KENDRICK:** That's luxury.

**Audience:** Aloneness is a necessity; loneliness is a tragedy. There also seems to be a choice involved.

**KENDRICK:** Suppose you tell me; now we will get some kind of reaction. Suppose you tell me after I read this if this is aloneness or loneliness. It is called *Good Friday*. I am dealing with sounds a great deal in this poem. There is no rhyme but I am dealing with sound structure.

### **Good Friday**

White-shored the island sits bird-palmed  
In the green oasis of the sun,  
the shore-bound sea-bound sands  
twinkle white and thread the earthen air  
to the watery sounds of liquid ghosts  
while the free-flow ghosts scramble like dust  
for a heaven.

Down in the sea-deep island  
I lie, the naked stranger calling for God.  
A thousand gods watch me,  
but none can answer: my voice drips  
in the pale sound of a star  
dropping in the slipping air  
and the gods wrap me to their shrouds

and press me to their hollow breasts.  
I shiver. The gods are cold.  
My mouth aches for the unsung word,  
the deathless cry . . . I thirst.  
Above me melts day and night  
one both, fierce, gentle  
striking the searching gulls who never stop,

cradling the wisp-loined wind in the lap of my  
outstretched hand; time reaches  
for the gull's wing and gives him  
instead a little tender wave-washed hour  
then spurs him to the rock-blue coast:  
Unpeopled seconds find me lonely,  
but I am beyond their coming.

They are around me now these gods  
waiting for my life;  
the island oceaned presses the hope  
of heaven to my burning body  
and the city-sea blesses my flesh  
in chorused benediction  
and I live love and cry no more.  
Though my mind is still with the living black  
I sleep in the arms of angels.

Is it aloneness or is it loneliness?

*Audience:* I think it is both. The title is *Good Friday*, isn't it? Christ was alone and also suffering loneliness. He could only, I suppose, do the suffering by being alone. In this case one compliments the other.

*KENDRICK:* As Ray said it is a choice, it is a necessity also. You are right, it is a necessity and it does move in between both, I think. It isn't that the poet couldn't make up her mind. It's because the poem is working with both aspects of people. But we come back to sensitivity. I notice that people use these words interchangeably and I never quite know what they are talking about; I never know if they are talking about loneliness when they mean aloneness, or whether they are talking about aloneness when they mean loneliness.

*MILLER:* Isn't one really a mood and the other a state or condition? Isn't there that distinction in the two?

*KENDRICK:* Possibly, you are saying loneliness is a state.

*MILLER:* No, the other way around. Loneliness is a mood and I think that aloneness is the state or condition. One would partake a little more of the physical than the other in my word connotation. I'm not sure that I am right on that. When I think that a poet shifts connotations for the material he is bringing forth, I know it is his privilege to do so and I think really you will have to grant your reader that same privilege of



making the connotation that fits his interpretation at the time he is reading it. It might not always be the same. It could change.

CUTLER: Somebody said something about the poet and his writing habits. I suppose that all of life is a discovery of what your illusions are. One is that poets write in solitude. I don't, because I have a wife, three kids, and a dog. If you can't write while they are playing baseball, or running around the dining room table, you just never will. Around our house, it is not possible to hope for a quiet day, so I have learned to adapt. You kind of "extract" your personality while the ironing is being done and the kids are fighting.

I want to read just two poems. One is written in that Central American setting I referred to earlier. The name of the poem is *Tona* and it is the name of an eight-year old girl who lived in our village.

### Tona

Poppa said that sister lost  
her honor. I went to sister  
and asked where it got lost.  
She cried, and said along the river  
where the guiscoyal is green and sweet.  
I looked all morning.

I found

a little mirror farther down  
where the women wash. It had  
a slender silver frame and made  
the guiscoyal like dew-fern.

Poppa, I said,  
*is it like this?*

And Poppa cried too.

This is a poem I like, not just because I wrote it, but because it seems to me that it is almost impossible to describe such a situation in any other way than *Tona* described it.

The second poem I want to read is not set in Central America; rather, it is a poem that I wrote to my wife before we went to Italy. My wife is Italian, but I had not yet met her family and I didn't know what it was going to be like. All I knew was that we were going to go and I had formed an idea of what it might be like, so I was "betting," in a sense, in this poem that in the future the experience would work out to be this way.

### Letter to My Italian Wife

How could I go with you to Naples?  
Even snapshots show how bright  
the sun would burn, brighter than sulphur.  
Your eyes have, sometime seen  
Abruzzi shepherds; you know their songs  
better than Handel did.

How could I comprehend those yellow clouds  
or ride on the Salerno road,  
on the yellow rock, in a time  
of poppies?

And you wonder  
how long, how long will I have to live  
jealous of the old thoughts,  
the taste of wafer, vertical olive groves,  
the black garland of newborn bees,  
*tutto il vecchio scarpone* —  
the sun rising on the road  
to Avellino, and your face  
full of the thoughts of home.

One thing about an Italian: he is very different from an American in that no matter where he goes, whether to Australia, South Africa, or Argentine, if you ask "Where are you from?" he will tell you the city, the street, the number, the floor and the room in which he was born in Italy, and it never occurs to him to be vague.

## POSTSCRIPT

Joined by Father Dennis Kendrick of Chicago the participants continued the discussion into the late afternoon and evening. Ultimately, Father Kendrick observed that there are crises in human relations of such stupendous proportions that only a distillation of emotion expressed in poetry can describe them. He cited the Cabrini-Green incident as a specific model. He expressed the conviction that the poems of Dolores Kendrick inspired by the Cabrini-Green social shock could alone make us aware of the nature and extent of the suffering it encompassed and offer a summary of the purpose of this seminar.

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From the *New York Times Index*, 1970, p. 1306.

*Patrolmen J. Severin and A. Rozzato killed by sniper fire, apparently directed from all-Negro Mother Cabrini Homes project, North Sedgwick Street; other patrolmen who came to their aid are pinned down by renewed fire; police later seal off area, search project, July 18. . . . S. Bennett, C. Knight and unnamed 14-year-old youth charged with murder in sniper slayings; police also seek 4th youth; report all youths are Negroes; police official hails cooperation of project residents in probe; says search for weapons uncovered several handguns and rifles; 2 rifles used in slayings, found in project incinerator, July 19. . . . J. Veal, 18, 4th suspect in killings of 2 Chicago policemen, surrenders 2 days after murder warrant had been issued; July 21. . . . Cook County state attorney's office says witness to slaying are being held in protective custody outside Chicago, July 22. . . . Editorial scores murders; notes crime has had encouraging aftermath in light of aid given police by outraged project residents, July 23. . . . article says policemen have now become almost daily targets for bottles, bricks and shootings in city's ghettos; describes several incidents in which patrolmen have been attacked and in some incidents murdered; says some observers believe black youths now moved beyond readiness for riot to beginning of urban guerrilla warfare against police; black leaders link violence to city's political and social structure; blacks also charge police with brutality and corruption in their law-enforcement practices in ghetto; August 9. . . . article notes Sgt. Severin's hopes of bridging gap between police and black community, which he discussed with reporter 6 weeks before his death; Severin's mother invites Rev. J. Jackson, city's best known black representative, to funeral; urges others to pray for mothers of 4 black youths charged with murders, August 9. . . .*

## CABRINI-GREEN

and

## RITE FOR THE CITY

Poems by Dolores Kendrick

with *Introductions* by Dennis Kendrick, osb

### Introduction to *Cabrini-Green*

Cabrini-Green, a vast public housing high-rise complex on Chicago's Near North Side, is familiar with suffering — high infant mortality, severe unemployment, few opportunities for young adults, significant drug addiction, and a dramatic rise of crime and gang rivalry which resulted in the violent death of seven young black men and culminated in the death of two policemen in July of 1970.

A black poet, Dolores Kendrick, captured the hope and strength of the residents of Cabrini-Green who contiguously rise above the forces of destruction and express the spirit which makes the city holy.

## Cabrini-Green (Easter 1969)

Old stones  
like stalks of grief  
stone light  
with height

demigod to smashed  
and smothered stars.  
Wall to wall hell  
designed in stone to sell

for thirty pieces of dreams  
Walk there and know  
great demons stretching  
legs between pot-stained rooms, etching

patterns of dry doom  
with ribs of urine-soaked stairways  
standing golgotha from death  
of sun nailed yesterday and left.

Walk Black there  
(if you dare)  
and see a green  
never seen

by righteous men who shape the name.  
Take your clean eyes with you  
to sweep the holocaust of unswept stone  
spat by an unknown

assailant who first named  
the place, not knowing the  
hopes of men dead and Black  
whole and pure come raging back.

Follow Black there  
(if you dare)  
and see a green  
never seen

in city or suburb  
only deep groin deep and hot  
green grime of stone unclear exposed  
to which He descended and rose.

Chicago, 1969

## Introduction to *Rite for the City*.

The harsh drizzle of a November evening was streaked by the flashing blue lights of 18 District Police cars. I, a parish priest of the neighborhood, drawn to their point of alarm, found myself kneeling beside a young black man, lying upright under the El tracks, red staining his chest.

Red berets crowning youthful heads spoke the presence of the newly formed Cobra Stone street gang, friends of the dying one. Fresh from a boastful, truce-making meeting with a rival gang, the stick-up of a grocery store across from the El was to be a sign of their superior status. Larry, whose shocked open eyes stared up into the dark, had taken the worst in a shoot-out with a determined store owner.

Policemen from the beat car hesitated to place the wounded man on the stretcher because a gang leader nervously demanded that they wait for Larry's mother to arrive. I calmed the red berets, directed the stretcher into the paddy wagon and off to the hospital, waited for Larry's mother, and took her to her son. Three hours later he was dead.

I was down. For me the death was meaningless, absurd. The destructive forces shaping Larry's life-environment were absurd, inhuman. Twenty thousand human beings, mostly juvenile, poured into 20, 16, 10, 8 story high-rise buildings, stark steel and concrete, packed into six square city blocks, low-incomes, few resources, surrounded by the affluence of the Lake Shore and the Loop.

Cabrini-Green, a small community created by the fears of the larger community and ignored by them except in time of trauma and tragedy.

How would we be redeemed?

## Rite For The City

### Kyrie

Lord Have Mercy

(The Blues — Sung By Choir)

I get up early with a roller in my hair  
wash my face come down the lonely stair

I get up early with a roller in my hair  
wash my face come down the lonely stair

leave a note so the children will get their bread  
climb the bus with an aching in my head

Leave on Monday with Sunday in my hand.

Lord have mercy!

II

Princes and Dominions  
shall have rule  
over us  
But none shall sway  
none shall conquer.

In the black land where dry birds lift wings  
into alleys of conduct they flying liltily over dark streets  
draining their error and their sorrow upon wind that chastises them,  
I see hope dangling on rooftops, sprawling on pavements,  
the land's touching on windowsills. And though the sun is barred  
from all the businesses of daylight, and must cope with concrete  
like a midget in a Midas dance, and the solemn birds  
landed to their own reflections in glass break break in falling flight,  
I know my city is sacred.

Christ have mercyl

III

(The Blues — Refrain)

I get up early with a roller in my hair  
wash my face come down the lonely stair  
I get up early with a roller in my hair  
wash my face come down the lonely stair  
leave a note so the children will get their bread  
climb the bus with an aching in my head

Leave on Monday with Sunday in my hand.

Lord have mercyl

**Gloria**

**Morning**

Down in the morning

Down! Down!

Up in the morning

Up! Up!

Which way? Which way?

Which?

Up and around, through in and out?

*Go down Moses way down in Egypt Land  
Tell Ole Pharaoh: Let my people go!*

Down is the street  
up, up, up is the sky  
up, up, up is the sun.  
Which way? Which way?  
Doom! Doom!  
Up to God!  
Glory!  
Glory to God in the Highest!

(Refrain)

Go down Moses way down in Egypt Land  
Tell O the Pharaoh: Let my people go!

II

" . . . . You who take away the sins of the world have mercy on us . . . . "

I have broken my fast  
in the belly of the sun's yawn,  
and gone out beyond the hungry dawn  
beyond the wrestling freeways;  
and stars starving in the old flesh of lamplights  
beyond mumbling skies  
and buildings that doubly rise  
to ruin in a morning cloud;  
beyond the end of night  
beyond the beginning of day  
calling for his pay  
the worker to his whistle;  
beyond the blindness of a street's horn  
and the itching laughter of a telephone  
beyond gritty beds of stone  
and the whimpers of unrested children;  
and I wrap myself  
in all the mystery of a city's start  
and find upon my coming part  
of a sabbath of sackcloth and ashes.

Glory to God in the Highest! Peace!

III

The new city . . . . the new paper  
news that is today's  
not tomorrow's or yesterday's  
laid at your door  
waiting . . . .  
Don't step on it  
or your feet will burn.

Cash in on communication  
Neighbor — what is your name?  
Do you have a chair to sit in?  
A bed to lie in?  
A stove to cook on?  
A clock to run by?  
Do you have a grief?

Good morning!

(Refrain)

Go down Moses way down in Egypt Land  
Tell Ole Pharaoh: Let my people go!

"... You who have taken away the sins of the world have mercy on us ..."

We praise you

Rise City! in the sunlight of your scaffolds

We bless you

Bow City! in the midnight of your silence.

We give you thanks for your great glory

Come

on the wailing of sirens

to the birthbeds of buildings

and deliver us from evil

The womb of morning is soft  
and toughly we rip through it.

Let my people go!

**Credo**

**Afternoon**

I believe . . . . . I seek . . . . .

The city afternoon has an identity of scars  
pitched upon streets bleeding steel;  
crumbs of glass left over from the day's collision  
with the universe;  
old men in parks, their beards curled dry in sun  
their hands shaking;  
the death of birds and the slaughter of slums  
in the swagger of a group of black children  
tasting the dust of their dreams;  
the weather report that says 55 degrees in neon;  
and the time (in neon too)  
that changes from one sip of coffee to another;  
the blood of clocks and steel and slums and old men  
shed in shadows and the howl of the sun.



squatting atop the public library  
where just down the street  
greasy stairways lead to no light.

II

In the school  
drowned children  
sing their song  
in sunlight.

(Refrain)

*I believe . . . . . I seek . . . . .*

Their visions are nailed  
to a bulletin board  
displaying ways  
of their education  
and with cold memories  
of second sight  
they wrest them cruelly  
from thumb and nail  
with their indifference.

III

In shops  
the people  
stare,  
at one another  
and ask  
prices.

(Refrain)

*I believe . . . . . I seek . . . . .*

Afternoon birds  
cancel out  
the city's height  
with lonely wings!  
a fraction  
is enough.

IV

Nearest the Noon  
are the sliding boards of children

Nearest the Noon  
is the slum's stairway

Nearest the Noon  
is the school's brick womb

Nearest the Noon  
is the smoke of cremated mornings

Nearest the Noon  
is the howl of the young sun

Nearest the Noon  
are the nightmares of old men

After the noon  
is God.

V

Outside the restaurant called Table and Chairs  
a small man with white stubble cheeks for a face  
and blue aggies for eyes  
dumps his grief upon his violin and plays to steamy manholes  
and winddriven streets captured in bigger echoes  
than his tender song. As furred people pass by, their hot breath, escaping  
like phantoms before them, one lone young Black man wearing a bush  
and Joycian specks stands and listens. And when the musician  
finishes his piece, a bit of sweat sweetening the poise of his brow,  
dancing over his colorless fleshless mouth, there to drop onto the wet cuffs  
of his coat, the young man opens his Black hands to the icy air  
and applauds.

The young people,  
their bodies like October,  
their eyes like sweat,  
crowding the parks and corners  
into perishable nights,  
and pushing chilly neon  
into their smiles.

VI

Little Johnny Green  
(He isn't even clean)

What has he seen?  
Fighting and cursing

Babies needing nursing  
Mama's lung's bursting —  
that's what Johnny's seen.

Little Suzy Soul  
(Beautiful and Bold)

What is her goal?  
Plane rides and carousels  
pussy cats and wishing wells  
peppermint and church bells  
that's Suzy's goal.

Big Paul and Ted  
Dead Man Dead  
Gunfight at the OK Corral  
corner drugstore  
hit between a dream  
and dead.

**Sanctus and Benedictus**

**Evening**

I

**Communion (Sanctus)**

Oh Lord it rained today  
and everything got holy.  
The sky was bare,  
against it sparrows rubbed their backs softly,  
trees turned clean in loneliness,  
washed streets dissolved the tracks  
of daytime shadows,  
Everything got holy.

Down to the last star,  
up for the evening,  
down to me and the terror  
of my unmarked house,  
caught in the town's memory.

Here in the cement of my city's gift  
where I am moulded with my neighbor  
into an unetched urn,  
and my ashes spewn upon pavement grass,  
here lies what I am and what I hope to be,  
and death has nothing to do with it.

Oh Lord it rained today  
and that's forgiveness!

II

**Communion (Benedictus)**

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts . . . . .*

What is whole is holy.  
Part of the city's body  
ripped to bone  
lies under rain;  
steel and rocks half standing  
half holy, half gone, half itself,  
awaiting its whole doom  
from the execution of the bulldozer.

Now

rain spreads from open wounds  
like puss draining poison;  
for when the judgment of steel  
slips into city scabs of Hard Hat Area  
(where men protect themselves  
against the dooms they build)  
another wholeness will begin.

Lord God . . . . I . . . .

III

*Blessed is he . . . . who comes . . . .*

The city's sight darkens for a second coming  
so that wizards on rooftops wrangling with stars will not know their mortality  
and the blindness of their dreams fallen in elevators.

You are my fellow my friend my hope and my disaster  
my joy that slips to me in the night my grief that walks by my side  
in the risen day. You are another human being.

and your coming is my salvation . . . .

Rain lifts evening  
from the sky  
and puts it down  
upon streets carefully.  
Like an infant  
with breath just slapped  
into him,  
the slow rage of afternoons  
disappears in flourished traffic  
and people run run  
to be caught by  
the right traffic light:  
Caution Stop Go!

IV

Businessmen with your evening drink clutched in your throat;  
slumlord with your evening purse pinched to your thighs;  
Black man with your swollen vision bursting in your brain  
and to whom the city is left like a warmed-over meal;  
mothers fathers brothers sons  
all the city raging in separateness in the unicorn of uncommunion,  
in fragmented suffering of unlifted evenings  
crouched in dark alleys of your hope,  
raise your city by the fingertips of your lamplights,  
lean on the elbows of your light avenues and look into night,  
remembering that communion is but the price of grief,

born out of the flesh of blind men tapping sticks against stone for sight,  
who come in the name of the Lord.

## **Agnus Dei**

### **Night**

*Lamb of God . . . have mercy on us . . . !*

I am the black city  
the city of black  
where night struggles  
in the soil of sun  
and the uprooted star  
drains its light  
upon black dreams.

I am soily in the eyes  
of children  
I am the black disaster  
of daylight  
and the Messiah  
of midnights.

I am fifty percent  
sixty percent seventy percent  
anonymous  
and am left by my brothers  
who spin their white cities  
in the groin of my grief  
to the mercy  
of my imagination.

I clean the waste  
from the streets  
the tar from the town (and the dream)  
to remind my griefless brothers  
that suburbs are right.

Grass is right.  
trees are right  
an acre is right  
a spring flower  
touching the side  
of a stone house  
is right.  
Grace is right.

and I have bought it all  
with my blood.

Lamb of God . . . . . I

II

If a city can grow  
from the soil of black sun  
laboring upon a cross  
of cement and steel  
confounding the suffering death  
it punishes  
before its burial  
and hold its Easter chalice  
to the lips of running dust  
scattering its joy  
to a redemptive dark  
it will win its gambled life  
house by tender house  
to endure and rise.

. . . . . have mercy on us . . . . .

I get up early  
which way? which way?  
and wrap myself  
in today  
laid at my door  
for a price.  
I pay it  
and go to sleep  
with angels listening.