

204
/ NEIGHBOR TO THE BIRDS /

by

STANLEY AUBURN GALLOWAY

B. A., Northwest Nazarene College, 1981

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

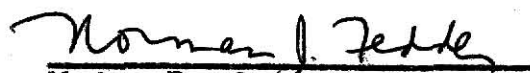
MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1983

Approved by:


Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1983
G34
C.2

A11202 571228

I would like to acknowledge . . .

. . . Dr. Norman J. Fedder for his indispensable help regarding playwriting techniques in developing the play from its inception to its present form.

. . . all my friends and relatives who have supported me with encouragement and prayer during my most irritable fits of frustration.

. . . the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, without which this project would have been impossible; and the encouragement of God's Holy Spirit making it possible for me to carry on when my own strength had failed.

NEIGHBOR TO THE BIRDS

. . . I found myself neighbor to the birds; not having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them.

--Walden

Characters

BEN GUNN: an aspiring writer who lives in a cave

AL JACOBS: the father

SHEILA JACOBS: the daughter

It is late September. The weather has been nice, but the first snow emerges unexpectedly.

Act I

scene i: Dusk on a Sunday evening

scene ii: A half hour later

scene iii: Later that night

scene iv: Monday morning, after dawn

Act II

scene i: Monday evening

scene ii: Dawn, Tuesday

Act I

scene i

Late September; just before sunset on a Sunday. A light falling of snow can be seen through the cave entrance, but none has accumulated on the ground yet.

(In the darkness typing can be heard. As the lights come up inside the cave, BEN, a large bearded man--about 6'2", 200 lbs--is sitting on a rock typing on a typewriter that sits on a larger rock which serves as a desk. When the lights are fully up, he stops typing and crosses to his bed, which is on the opposite side of the cave. He lifts the bedspread, revealing his cached food, perhaps mostly canned goods. Taking out a small bunch of grapes, he replaces the spread, eats some of the grapes, and crosses to a pile of sticks near the entrance, which is centered at the back of the stage. Taking a few sticks from the pile, he crosses to the fire, which is near center stage, dropping them in the flames.)

BEN

Do not be dismayed, Feuer, at the first snow of winter. He rides not upon the pale horse. The snow is brother to the sun. We are safe with him.

(Finishes the grapes and drops the the stem to the fire; returns to his typewriter; sits on the smaller rock, looking quickly over the page in the typewriter. His face begins to indicate concentration as he types. He suddenly stops and turns to face the fire.)

How else can one say thoughtful? (Pause; then as if in response to a reply.) Pensive? For the present . . .

(Returns to typing. After a few moments of typing silently, he begins speaking while he types.)

People should not inflict their idiocy on others. (Looks at the fire.) Idiocy? (Shrugs.) People should not tolerate madness at the wheel of the machine. (Pauses, contemplating the page before him; suddenly turns to the fire as if defending himself against something that it has said.) What power lies in an unenforced edict? As long as the Jolly Roger is legal, we will be pirated away to the vilest nature we can reach. (Pause.) Here, we are liberated from that.

(Types silently for a few moments then stops, showing signs of frustration. He stands up, gyrates for a few seconds attempting to simulate a drunk's walking antics, then sits back down.)

(In a frustrated tone.) I am not one of them. I am like Stevenson's Blind Pew attempting to follow the rainbow to a pot of gold. (He contemplates the page before him.)

(A noise comes from off-stage.)

(Bringing a finger to his lips and turning to face the fire.) Hush!

SHEILA

(From off-stage.) What do you mean, you didn't bring a compass! Dad, it's snowing out here and it's gonna be dark soon.

AL

(From off-stage) It ain't as bad as you make it soun'.

Jus' a few little flakes. We'll jus' fine us a warm place outa the win'. It'll clear up in no time, an' we can get our bearin's straight. It's only September. It'll stay light enough for us to get outa here. Besides, the parkin' lot is prob'ly right aroun' the corner.

SHEILA

(From off-stage.) Well, maybe so. It does look a little like a fire over there.

AL

(From off-stage.) See, we're at the edge of the campgroun' already.

(SHEILA's face appears at the entrance of the cave.)

SHEILA

(Turning away to face AL.) Oh! Dad! This isn't . . .

(Enter AL, a balding man about 5'10" and 200 lbs., with a stick of jerky in his hand. SHEILA, his eighteen-year-old daughter of short, medium build, follows him. Both are wearing backpacks with sleeping bags attached.)

AL

(Looking around.) Why, this ain't the campgroun'. It's a regular (Pronounced REG-uh-ler.) home-away-from-home. Who woulda ever imagined, out here in the middle of nowhere . . .

(Seeing BEN, he steps forward in front of SHEILA in a gesture of protection.)

We have company.

BEN

No, I have company.

(There is a moment of silence as BEN and AL size each other up.)

AL

Who are you an' what are you doin' here?

BEN

I think it my place to ask as much. I am in residence here.

SHEILA

(Stepping to the side of AL.) We came out camping-- and we got lost trying to find our way back to the campground. We were looking for some place out of the snow. We weren't prepared . . .

AL

(Interrupting.) Wait a minute. You can't live here. This is gover'ment lan'.

(Takes a bite of jerky.)

BEN

(Steps toward him. The snow is falling faster.)

I have no intention of tolerating any more bureaucratic trumpery.

(Turning, walking toward the fire, speaking to it.)

Peace, peace; there is no peace.

SHEILA

(To AL.) Maybe we shouldn't bother him. He was here first. However humble it might be, this is his home, and we've come uninvited.

BEN

(Turning to them suddenly.) That's right!

AL

(To SHEILA.) But he can't live here.

SHEILA

(A bit disrespectfully.) He's here, isn't he? Open your eyes!

AL

Sheila! Show a proper respect.

BEN

The girl does have a point.

AL

(To SHEILA, spitting out each word.) This man cannot live here. This is fed'ral wilderness. No one can give him the right to live here.

SHEILA

The fact is, the man is here and he's obviously been

here for some time. Until we know differently, we should respect his right to be here.

AL

Well, first thing when we get back . . .

SHEILA

(Interrupting.) Get back!? You forgot the compass. And did you mark the trail? You're not Natty Bumppo. You've probably never even read any Cooper.

AL

(Crossly, to SHEILA.) Let's not get on my education. Jus' 'cause you was lucky enough that I could provide one for you . . .

SHEILA

(In mock-defense.) Oh, I'm not . . .

BEN

(Interrupting.) I don't care if you have a Ph.D. I did not ask you here for a guest lecture--I did not ask you here at all!

SHEILA

(Stepping closer to him, apologetically.) We didn't choose to come here.

AL

The trail disappeared.

BEN

I am unconcerned with how you got here. And I am equally

unconcerned with how you leave, so long as you do.

AL

It ain't our fault.

BEN

Did I say it was?

(Walks back to his typewriter,
looks at it for a moment.)

I took leave of the city because I was sick of the red-tape
injustice, our impotent system of retribution. As I see
it, now you are in my jurisdiction.

AL

(Stepping closer.) Now jus' you wait a minute.

BEN

No, you wait. I do not appreciate people barging into my
home and telling me I do not belong here.

AL

Bargin' in?

BEN

I heard no doorbell.

AL

Doorbell!? Where on earth is there a doorbell in this
hole?

(BEN walks calmly to the en-
trance of the cave while AL
and SHEILA skirt his path
and cross to the fire. BEN
rings a cowbell that is sus-
pended to the left of the
cave entrance.)

BEN

(Sardonically.) By the door.

(AL begins to respond but
SHEILA motions him to be quiet.
AL begins to finish the jerky
that is in his hand.)

SHEILA

We didn't see it. We've never been in a cave with a
doorbell before. We weren't expecting one.

BEN

That does not excuse you. (Pointing to the ground.) And
here! Haven't you even the decency to wipe your feet?

(He takes an old broom from
the right of the entrance
and sweeps out mud and any
snow that may have drifted in.)

SHEILA

We weren't expecting a home. We just wanted to get out
of the snow. It was a mistake anyone could've made.

BEN

(Pointing to each.) But it is you who are guilty. And
I wonder what corrective measure you will propose.

SHEILA

(Trying to mask her disappointment.) We're sorry. Could
you show us the way back to South Campground? We kinda
got turned around once we lost the trail.

BEN

Gladly.

(He walks to the entrance
and points.)

Go down to that big snag.

(SHEILA joins him, looking.)

Bridge the stream on that fallen fir. Do you see it
there?

SHEILA

(Shaking her head.) There's too much snow.

BEN

You will. From there, cross the ridge and then the next.
At the bottom of the other side you will discover a path
that leads to the campground. It is most likely the one
that eluded you.

SHEILA

(Nods resignedly, then looks at AL.) We should hurry,
otherwise the snow'll get too deep.

(AL is visibly disturbed but
nods to SHEILA. AL and SHEILA
step haltingly through the
cave entrance. SHEILA slips
and falls. AL helps her up.
SHEILA looks back to BEN with
pleading eyes. They turn and
exit. BEN turns his back to
the entrance and holds his
hands out to the fire to warm
them, smiling.)

BEN

(To the fire.) Discourteous citylubbers! I could have
told you, Feuer, you would not be impressed with them.
(Pause.) They showed little respect at all for me--a

human being just like them. All they could think of was themselves--egotistical to the core. (Pause; looks at the snowy cave entrance. In a relenting manner.) It is rather snowy. (Pause.) And chillsome. (Pause.) And darkness will be falling soon.

(From off-stage, there is a shriek followed by a splash of water.)

SHEILA

(From off-stage.) Dad! Help!

(BEN turns quickly and rushes out of the cave in the direction of the sound.)

(Lights fade.)

scene ii

A half-hour later. Darkness falls on the entrance of the cave during the first pages of the scene.

(SHEILA is shivering, sitting on a sleeping bag next to the fire, her legs wrapped in a blanket; her clothes are laid in an orderly fashion nearby to dry; she is wearing a long-sleeved shirt--possibly flannel and perhaps too large--and panties; her hair is wet. AL's pants show watermarks just above the knee; he is standing on the opposite side of the fire from SHEILA, fidgeting from one foot to the other in an effort to stay warm and to dry his pantlegs

by the fire; he is eating some beef jerky. BEN crosses from the woodpile and tosses a handful of sticks on the fire.)

BEN

(Apologetically.) I do not understand my thoughts when I sent you away. I should have realized that you could never make it under these conditions. Please, stay the night and dry out. The first snow is brief. You can most likely get an early start in the morning.

(At the end of this speech, BEN is standing by the fire, nearest the typewriter.)

SHEILA

(Nods.) Thank you.

(AL nods.)

BEN

It has been some time since I have been around people. I guess I forgot my responsibility.

SHEILA

(Making conversation.) How long's it been?

BEN

Nearly one year.

SHEILA

Why'd you leave?

BEN

(Hesitates.) It's not important. (Changing the subject.)

I am sorry I haven't more luxurious accommodations.

AL

Howard Johnson's wouldn't give you a franchise, huh?

(They all laugh.)

BEN

I need very little to take care of myself. I have never had guests here before.

SHEILA

Don't worry about it. (Looking at AL but speaking to BEN.) I think as long as we keep warm, we won't complain. (Stretches out her hands toward the fire.) A warm home is a happy home.

BEN

(Smiling weakly to SHEILA.) Why are you out here in the woods anyway? Are you out of school?

SHEILA

We've just been up here for the weekend. I'm supposed to have school tomorrow, but it's no big deal.

BEN

Oh. Do you camp often?

SHEILA

(Smiles, looking at AL.) Obviously not. This is the first time.

AL

(Interrupting loudly.) So I made a oversight. But I

didn't see you carryin' a compass or anything to help.

(BEN backs to the typewriter and sits, but not typing; AL and SHEILA sit on sleeping bags arranging things while they argue. During this, BEN takes out a notepad, discretely jotting from time to time.)

SHEILA

If you hadn't stuffed so much food in your pockets you might have had room for a compass. You must have eaten a pound of jerky just today.

AL

I ain't either. I hardly ate a thing all day.

(Takes a bite of jerky.)

SHEILA

(Almost spitefully.) Well, it seems like you should have had the foresight to realize that there wouldn't be any road signs in the woods.

AL

Now listen here . . .

SHEILA

You could've at least asked me if I had a compass. I just assumed that you had enough sense to bring one. Mother would've never let you come out here without one.

AL

Leave your mother out of this. She's gone and that's that. Sheila Marie, I think you need to learn a little

respect. I can still tan your backside even if you are eighteen.

(AL starts toward her. BEN turns to watch.)

SHEILA

Go ahead. It's about time you took an interest in raising me since Mother's gone. Maybe now you'll listen to me. It can't hurt to listen, can it?

AL

(Backing down.) You'll never learn any respect that way.

SHEILA

Do I lack respect because I say what I think. At least I try to talk to you.

(AL begins to rise but is distracted by BEN's statement.)

BEN

(Musing aloud, looking away from the fire.) "It is a wise father who knows his own child."

AL

What's he babbling about?

SHEILA

Who knows. You only hear what you want to hear anyway. I can talk all day and you never hear a thing I say.

AL

I do hear you.

SHEILA

You always have your mind made up about everything, and twenty things to do at once. Have we ever done anything that I wanted to do?

AL

Yes, we came out here into the woods to freeze our tails off while you griped at me. Gripe, gripe, gripe. That's all you done all weekend.

SHEILA

That wasn't my intent. Dad, you never take time to listen to me--that's why it sounds like griping.

AL

I pay more attention to you than a lot of fathers do. If you wanted to gripe at me, why'd we hafta come out here?

(When SHEILA says beer, BEN cocks his head to listen more intently but without facing them.)

SHEILA

Dad, you know what'd happen if we stayed home. You'd have your feet up on the ottoman drinking a beer and watching t.v. It wouldn't make any difference what I said, you'd tune me out. And if not that then you'd be out working on the car or going to some meeting or mowing the lawn.

AL

(Playing in the fire with his foot.) We can find other things to distract us.

SHEILA

(Becoming upset.) But we don't want to! Don't you understand? That's what you've always done.

AL

Sure I understan'.

SHEILA

You don't act like it!

AL

(His ire building.) I go out an' work my fingers to the bone day after day workin' two jobs so that you can have meat on the table an' a warm place to sleep! If you think I do that 'cause I got nothin' better to do, you got another think comin'. I do it 'cause I love you. You should know that without me havin' to tell you every minute of the day. Have a brain. I got other things to do with my time.

(BEN turns to face them.)

SHEILA

Are those things more important than your family?

AL

For heaven's sake, I ain't your babysitter. You oughta be old enough to be your own family by now. I can't

spen' every minute of my time playin' with you. We gotta eat ya know.

SHEILA

That's not what I'm asking.

AL

I got my own concerns to look out for. We both got important things to do. You got school an' I got work.

(BEN starts to interrupt but changes his mind, jotting down some notes.)

SHEILA

But, Dad, that's just the point. You get so wrapped up in the things you're doing that there's no time left for me. Who was the last one to know we were getting a swimming pool? The Spatnys across the street knew before I did. I come home and there's a bulldozer ripping up our

(AL is silent, anger mounting.)

back yard! You'd certainly never tell me if something important was goin' on. I have to find out through the grapevine.

AL

Now listen here, young lady, I think I had about all I can take of you spoutin' that pretty little mouth of yours. I won't condone your actions; but, I know you'll live through it. I did. I was jus' as spunky as you are. And look-it how I turned out.

SHEILA

Oh, all you're really concerned about is yourself.

AL

Then why'd I buy a swimmin' pool? I don't swim. (Pause.)
(Softly into the air.) Where'd I go wrong, Louise? (To
SHEILA.) You'll never be happy till you choose to be.
You're the one that gots to choose. Likewise, I'm the
only one that can make me happy. I'm responsible for me,
and me alone.

(BEN starts to interrupt,
half-rising, but sits and
jots more notes as SHEILA
continues.)

SHEILA

Is that your answer to everything, look out for number
one?

AL

Well, what do you do? I don't see you out pullin' for
dear ol' dad. You know, your problem is you talk fine--
"Daddy, we don't talk like when Mother was alive"--but
when it comes to puttin' it to action, you don't! You're
all blow and no show. You complain about a situation
(Pronounced SITCH-ee-A-shun.) but you don't lift one
pretty little finger to help. Now, if you don't mind,
I think I'm gettin' tired of the third degree. This
weekend certainly ain't been no picnic.

SHEILA

(Relenting for a moment.) Okay, maybe we should relax.
I know we're kinda tense. (More harshly than she intends.)
It hasn't been easy for you to spend a whole weekend with
me.

(AL sighs, tired of her cuts.
SHEILA takes her backpack
and begins rummaging through
it. She rakes out three cans
of beer, tosses one to AL,
then turns to BEN.)

Here. You look like you could use one too.

(BEN's eyes widen as she tosses
the can to him and he catches
it. He rushes from his rock
and hurls the can out the cave
entrance, grenade fashion. AL
and SHEILA sit looking dumb-
founded for a moment, just
looking at BEN.)

AL

What'd you do that for?

BEN

(Breathing heavily.) There will be none of that for me.
And I hope that as long as you remain in my home, you
will also retain your God-given faculties.

SHEILA

(Looking confused.) It was only a beer.

BEN

I will not have that poison. (Turns away from them,
still breathing heavily.)

SHEILA

I think maybe it's about time to go to bed. It's been a long day for all of us, I think.

AL

(Setting his beer aside unopened; in a restrained tone.)
How can you think of sleep with a crazy man in here?

(BEN turns and looks at them
then returns to his typing
area.)

(Seeing no better alternative to sleep.) Well, I don't
know how much sleep I'll be gettin'.

(AL strips to his boxer shorts
and slips into the bag. SHEILA
sits, unmoving, watching the
fire. BEN sits staring blankly
at his typewriter.)

AL

(Sitting in his sleeping bag, looking at SHEILA.) Well?
Ain't you goin' to bed, too?

SHEILA

I will. I want to watch the fire first.

(AL shakes his head and lies
down. SHEILA opens her beer
and sips from it.)

Goodnight.

AL

(With some exasperation.) Goodnight. Don't catch cold.

SHEILA

(Answering mechanically.) I won't.

(Lights fade.)

scene iii

Later that night. Snowflakes are dwindling; there is a ground cover seen through the entrance, by the light coming from the cave.

(AL is asleep. SHEILA sits, watching the fire. BEN sits contemplating the typewriter keys. After a moment, BEN turns to SHEILA.)

BEN

There is more wood by the door. It will be advantageous for you to keep the fire up while you are still vulnerable to illness.

(SHEILA nods absently and rises, unconcerned with her state of dress. She takes an armload of sticks from the pile and returns to her seated position with the blanket over her legs. She begins to feed the sticks into the fire, gingerly. BEN watches.)

BEN

The fire is enjoyable.

SHEILA

It's been a long time since I was able to just sit and relax beside a fire.

BEN

It can be quite a comfort.

SHEILA

(More to herself than to BEN.) You can see all kinds of things in a fire.

BEN

(Nodding.) Even yourself, if you aren't careful.

SHEILA

(Not really paying any attention to what BEN has said.)
You can relax and dream about a time and place where
people care, where people listen to each other without
just turning away to tend to their own affairs. (Coming
back to reality.) Comfort, yes, (Nods, then shrugs.)
but it can't solve anything. (Pause; points to the type-
writer.) What are you doing?

BEN

(Pauses in indecision.) I'm writing a book.

SHEILA

What kind of book?

BEN

A novel.

SHEILA

What's it about?

BEN

It's similar to The Jungle. You know, one that points
out the flaws of society. It's going to show people
that they can't escape their problems by diverting their
energies to other things. Problems stay until they are
confronted--and some people wait until their problems
become insurmountable. That's what is happening with
alcohol in our country.

SHEILA

Oh. (Politely.) What's it called?

BEN

The Cesspool.

SHEILA

Not a real appealing title.

BEN

It's not an appealing book, either.

SHEILA

Does it have something to do with red tape, too?

(BEN studies her face for a moment.)

BEN

(Firmly.) Not directly, but you could say that. How did you know?

SHEILA

Aside from your eloquent speech on the city's injustice, I took a wild guess.

BEN

(Thoughtfully; looking away from SHEILA.) Perhaps I am more translucent than I would like to believe.

SHEILA

(Pauses, taking a drink from the beer can, mechanically.)

Why are you hiding?

(BEN stares at her for a moment but makes no reply. Suddenly he rips out the page from his typewriter and threads a new one. He begins typing at a furious pace. AL readjusts with a couple of snorts and resettles. SHEILA looks perplexed at BEN's response. She takes another drink of beer, then rises slowly and crosses to behind BEN to see what he is typing. She holds her arms close to her body for warmth.)

BEN

(Turning to her.) Do you mind?

SHEILA

Sorry. I thought maybe you were typing an answer, since you didn't say anything.

BEN

Well, perhaps I am, but perhaps I'm not. In any case, I will show you what I want you to see. Now go back where you belong. (Points to the blanket by the fire.)

SHEILA

(Sarcastically.) Yes, Master.

(SHEILA makes a mock-bow and returns by way of the woodpile, picking up more sticks, and plays with them in the fire, sitting on top of the blanket, cross-legged. BEN is disturbed by her reply and does not resume typing.)

BEN

(After this pause, he turns to her defensively.) Did you come here to hound me?

SHEILA

Sorry if I gave you that impression. I only wanted to understand . . .

BEN

(ALmost snapping.) Well, it's none of your business. Why did you come here, anyway?

SHEILA

(Sassily.) I suppose that's none of your business, either.

(The last of the snowflakes fall during a pause in which SHEILA watches BEN as a change comes over his face.)

BEN

Touche'. Points awarded to . . . Sheila?

SHEILA

(Smiles and nods.) And what do I call you?

BEN

(Slight pause.) Anything you fancy.

SHEILA

No, what's your real name?

BEN

Does it matter that much?

SHEILA

Well, I've gotta call you something, and "Bearded Man" doesn't seem to do the trick.

BEN

(Laughs. In a relenting manner.) Okay. Ben Gunn.

SHEILA

Okay. Ben. (Points to AL.) Al Jacobs. Dad to me.

BEN

And I suppose I should say, "Pleased to meet you."

SHEILA

If you like.

BEN

And if I don't?

SHEILA

Then don't say it.

BEN

Fair enough.

SHEILA

(After a pause.) So, what now that the formalities are over?

BEN

Do you have something in mind?

SHEILA

(Not in a seductive manner.) I've got nothing to hide.

BEN

I have nothing to uncover.

SHEILA

It sounds like we have "nothing" in common. We can talk about that. You go first.

BEN

(Laughing.) Okay. If you insist. (Looking around; pointing to the entrance.) The snow has stopped.

SHEILA

(Turns to the entrance and then back to BEN.) I guess we should be able to see more clearly now.

BEN

Are you waxing philosophical?

SHEILA

Just trying to see through things.

BEN

(After a brief pause.) It takes more than that.

SHEILA

You sound like a voice of experience.

BEN

(Pause.) I know a little about it.

SHEILA

Explain.

BEN

(As if lecturing.) Knowledge does not bring change. All across this continent is the knowledge that alcohol dulls the senses and destroys millions of brain cells.

And that's every day. The knowledge is there, but there is no change. People continue to abuse others as well as themselves and our system accommodates it.

SHEILA

(Looks out the entrance then at the beer can next to her then back to BEN.)

I see.

BEN

People are so callous to the adversity of others. But when it strikes in their own back yard, they want something to be done.

SHEILA

What do you mean?

BEN

(Continues, not really answering her.) It's sad to see people destroying themselves and others with drink. (Slight pause.) I used to be a junior high teacher. I would see students every day with such potential, but they wasted it drinking with their friends. For them school was nothing more than a way to meet their comrades and get drunk. And no one does a thing to stop it. Then they grow up into irresponsible citizens that our system protects.

SHEILA

But they're not hurting anyone but themselves.

BEN

(Blurting out; frustration mounting.) That's a lie!
When you see one stagger away from a car he's just obliterated your doghouse with, see the ugly tracks in your yard, see the judge slap his wrist and set him free, and the most precious thing in your life is suddenly gone . . . you'll think differently.

SHEILA

Doghouses and lawns can be fixed.

BEN

(Turns his head away from her.) It's not that.

SHEILA.

(A bit more derisively than she thinks she is being.)
You lost your dog. Is that why you came out here? Because some drunk ran over your dog!

BEN

(Turning to her, glaring; with great control, yet trembling.)
Not my dog, my wife. (Turns his head away.)

SHEILA

(Her face tightening in humility.) I'm sorry. I didn't know.

(Crosses to comfort him.)

(Softly and apologetically.) Forgive me.

(BEN makes no response, but raises a hand to his face.)

(Consolingly.) My mother died a few years ago. I know

it hurts. (Pause.) And now I think I'm losing my father. He doesn't seem to notice, but he doesn't seem to pay any attention to me anymore. He's not cruel, but we're drifting apart. It's almost as if he doesn't want to have anything to do with me. It's even worse than him dying because I'm still with him, but I can never reach him. (Pause; seeing no response from BEN, she continues.) I know it's because I've disappointed him. I'm not the perfect little girl that he wanted me to be. I think it all started when I was thirteen. A neighbor and I was in the basement discovering the joys of adulthood, if you know what I mean, and he found us. Since then I think he's gradually dis-owned me.

(BEN looks up at her.)

You understand how it can hurt. For the second time, I'm losing someone precious, and he's always around as a reminder of the family I used to have. We've been out here all weekend and he still refuses to admit to himself that I don't love him less because I disagree with him on some minor things.

BEN

(Picks up notepad casually.)

Such as?

SHEILA

(Looking to AL then back.)

He's like you--he thinks I drink too much.

BEN

He showed no resistance to you drinking tonight.

SHEILA

A can or two when nobody's around is fine, but he never gets drunk and thinks I shouldn't either.

BEN

But you do?

SHEILA

(Smiling.) What are weekends for?

BEN

(Skeptically.) What's wrong with softball or swimming or something more physically beneficial?

SHEILA

Oh, you can do that too, but the weekend's not complete until you've been snookered at least once. (Points to AL.) But that doesn't mean I don't love him. Why can't he see that?

BEN

Perhaps he sees your rebellion--your drinking--as directed at him. You said you knew he disapproved.

SHEILA

It's not him.

BEN

What is it? If you can show him a reason that you drink, he may be able to accept that he is not the target of

it all. But until you can identify why you do, he will never have a reason to know that he is not the reason.

SHEILA

I've tried. I don't have the answer.

BEN

You probably do have the answer, but it eludes you like the trail to South Campground. You will come upon it, if you keep looking. (Pauses, then points to her sleeping bag.) Go to bed. The rest will help. You need it . . . and so do I.

(SHEILA walks slowly to her sleeping bag; turns and looks pleadingly at BEN. He motions for her to get in bed. She does.)

(Lights fade.)

scene iv

Monday morning. There is a shallow drift of snow near the entrance of the cave, but the sun is shining.

(Lights come up; AL is in his sleeping bag; SHEILA is sitting on hers, cross-legged, just putting an empty beer can into her pack. She tosses a few sticks that are by the fire onto the fire.)

SHEILA

Dad?

AL

(Rousing himself a little.) Go back to sleep.

(SHEILA opens a can of beer; rises; checks her pants for dryness; dissatisfied with the cuffs, she holds them over the fire, while drinking occasionally from the can of beer, which she sets at her feet when she is not drinking.)

SHEILA

Aren't you gonna get up?

AL

(Sitting up and looking around; noticing that BEN's bed is empty.)

Hey, where'd the geezer go?

(Rises and begins dressing.)

SHEILA

He got up about sunrise and fixed the fire then left.

AL

(Stacatto.) Hm. Prob'ly stranded us here. Shoulda knew we couldn't trust him.

SHEILA

Dad, don't be ridiculous. He'll be back. He wouldn't just up and walk away from all this.

AL

(Looking around; doubtfully.) Maybe. But just the same, I don't trust him. He's prob'ly hidin' from the law.

SHEILA

He's not either.

AL

I tell you, he's gotta be hidin' from somethin'. (Pauses in thought.) You seen the way he tossed that beer can out last night. I bet he's some kina war criminal. He's gone crazy from years in a concentration camp.

SHEILA

You sound crazier than he does.

(She checks her cuffs and then puts her pants on. AL begins to poke around in BEN's things near the typewriter.)

SHEILA

What are you doing?

(She takes a drink of beer.)

AL

Lookin' for plunder. You know: greenbacks, jewels, negotiables. He's prob'ly robbed somebody. An' I bet there's even a reward out for him.

SHEILA

Dad, stop it right now. He's not a thief; he's a school teacher.

AL

How do you know that?

SHEILA

He told me last night after you'd gone to sleep.

AL

An' I s'pose he's out here on a field trip.

SHEILA

He said he was writing a book, but, Dad, he's grieving over the loss of his wife. She was killed by a drunk driver. That's why he had that little flare up last night with the beer can.

AL

I'm sure. You believed a story like that?

(SHEILA nods.)

So his wife was killed by a drunk--that's still no excuse for runnin' out to the woods to keep the other birdbrains company. Your mother died from mercury poisoning. I don't go throwin' tuna fish into the street. That guy is wacko. Some things God wills to happen that we don't

(BEN enters with an armload of sticks.)

like. I accept that. You don't see me hidin' in a hole jus' 'cause God an' me don't see eye to eye on somethin'.

SHEILA

(Seeing BEN.) You're back.

(BEN nods; puts the sticks on the woodpile; carries a few sticks to the fire, then goes to his typewriter.)

BEN

The trail is clear all the way to South Campground.

(He sits. AL gets his things ready to go. Then AL notices that SHEILA hasn't gathered her things.)

AL

Get your things ready to go.

(Kneeling, SHEILA hurriedly gets her things together; noticing the opened can of beer, she quickly covers it with the panties that were drying and attempts to shield it from BEN's view, leaving it on the opposite side of the fire. She rises.)

BEN

(Turning to them.) Wait.

AL

What now? You wanna search us?

BEN

(Ignoring AL's incivility.) I've been thinking. (Hesitates.) If you'd like to stay, you're welcome. I don't want to interfere, but if you think it would help to stay a little longer . . . you don't have to leave.

SHEILA

Dad, if we go home you'll never hear a word I say. You'll be glued to that t.v. Let's stay. We may never get another opportunity like this.

AL

Thank heaven.

SHEILA

Please?

AL

(Softening.) I won't promise how long . . .

(SHEILA runs to BEN and kisses him on the cheek.)

SHEILA

Thank you, Ben. You're a real human being.

(AL sits on his rolled-up sleeping bag. BEN turns to go back to the typewriter.)

AL

(To SHEILA.) Okay. How else have I failed you as a father?

(SHEILA turns to him and crosses to the fire and sits opposite AL on her rolled-up sleeping bag. BEN discreetly takes out a notepad and jots during the following.)

SHEILA

Dad, that's not a very good attitude to take. It's not all your fault.

AL

(Sarcastically.) Well, that's comforting to know.

(SHEILA sighs exasperatedly.)

SHEILA

We may look like a family, but blood is all that makes us one. We don't help each other with the problems that

we have. We just do our own thing.

AL

We're individuals. We gotta do our individual things.

SHEILA

Not exclusively. We're home in the evenings sometimes.

(Spotting her panties and the beer, she mechanically pulls her panties aside and drinks from the can.)

AL

Except ev'ry other night when you're out with another guy.

SHEILA

Well, when I'm not, how come we don't talk about it. You never ask me where I've been or what I've been doing or even if I enjoyed it. Sometimes I might have problems with guys.

AL

That's somethin' you gotta work out on your own. I'm not gonna sit down a bunch of dos and don'ts. I've told you before. You know what I think's right, but you gotta decide for yourself what you'll do.

SHEILA

Can't you at least give me some ideas? You dated Mother.

AL

Things has changed since I was datin'. If this was twenty years ago I could tell you what was expected and what

was taboo, but it ain't. If you wanna know about datin' nowadays, you gotta ask somebody that's datin' nowadays.

SHEILA

(Takes a drink of beer.)

Don't you care what I do when I go out?

BEN

(Muttering.) Has counsel perished from the prudent?

AL

(Ignoring BEN.) I prob'ly care more than you do. But I ain't gonna tell you what to do. You're an adult an' I try to treat you like one. And especially now that you're eighteen, you're free to do what you choose.

BEN

(Interrupting quietly.) Will you give her no guidance at all?

AL

(To BEN.) She's old enough to decide what she wants.

BEN

(Sets his notepad aside and rises, crossing to the fire.)

But does she know what she's choosing between? It's your responsibility to explain the options. After all, you've seen the consequences to decisions in your life, but she's only beginning to experience responsibility.

(SHEILA finishes off the can of beer and sets it aside;

casually and mechanically
she takes another from her
backpack and continues drinking
throughout the scene, using
as many cans as needed.)

AL

(Standing.) I learned by experience an' she can too.
I've give her responsibility since she was little. She's
had full choice in her datin' an' her free time since
she was thirteen. She knows she's free to do what she
wants. An' by the same token, I have that freedom, too.

BEN

You have a responsibility to help her. You think she
drinks too much--or so I've been told--but have you ever
explained to her or shown her why you are opposed to
excessive drinking?

SHEILA

He's not gonna tell me anything. He's established that.

AL

(To AL; ignoring SHEILA.) What do you know about it?

BEN

Granted, not enough. But the facts may prove that you
know less than you imagine you do. Why does she keep
company with the bottle at all?

SHEILA

(Giggling.) It's a can.

AL

(Ignoring SHEILA.) I don't forbid her to drink.

SHEILA

Hear! Hear!

(SHEILA holds up the beer can then takes a drink in a very grand style. BEN looks away from her with displeasure.)

AL

After workin' all day, there's nothin' wrong with a little drink to relax.

BEN

(Almost sardonically.) If a little is good isn't more better?

AL

Not when it makes you do things you wouldn'ta done otherwise.

BEN

Well, obviously the girl has observed otherwise.

SHEILA

Daddy . . . it's not as bad as it might seem. Once you get used to the idea, it's kinda fun to see what will

(BEN slowly backs to his rock and sits, taking notes.)

happen next. Sometimes it's like getting off a roller coaster and the ground won't stand still. (She giggles and takes another drink; continues in a smooth voice.) And other times it's a very stable, very mellow feeling when you're so relaxed nothin' seems to matter. (Giggles.)

AL

I know what it's like. I was drinkin' before you was

even thought of. Before your mother an' me got married, I usta drink up a storm. (Pause.) But really, nothin' good ever come of it.

SHEILA

Did anything bad ever come of it?

AL

(Hesitates.) I punched your mother's father in the nose.

SHEILA

(Laughing.) Grampa!?

AL

Then I hit the same tree three times with his car, trying to get outa the driveway.

SHEILA

(Shrugs, laughing.) Those things happen. (Smiles devilishly.) Wasn't it fun?

AL

(Beginning to smile.) He deserved it. Said I wasn't good enough for any daughter of his.

SHEILA

(Still laughing.) He only had one!

BEN

(Interrupting; appalled.) What kind of precedents have you set for her? Any?

AL

(Becoming serious at this interruption.) I ain't forced

her into no mold, if that's what you mean. When I was growin' up, my parents told me ev'ry little thing: who I could visit, when I had to be home, even what movies I could see. They didn't give me no room to exercise my freedom of choice. I was stifled. That's why I quit school an' left home. I couldn't stan' bein' told ev'ry little thing. That's not gonna happen to Sheila. She's gonna choose rules that she can live with.

BEN

(Crossing to them.)

It seems to me that you have gone to the other extreme. By God, families were made to guide the next generation. Without any guidance, they'll grow wild--with no direction. Let me tell you a little story.

(AL and SHEILA listen intently; SHEILA drinks frequently, BEN adopting the role of an old-time village storyteller.)

Saxon the Small-Minded, scourge of the Dutch fleet, gathered over three and a half million in the years of his piracy. When age began to slow him down, he rigged a ship, hired a crew, and sailed for the South Seas to "retire." But the Dutch authorities dogged his trail halfway around the world. He was in great danger of being overtaken, so he decided to hide his treasure on a small, barren island. During the night, he stole ashore and buried it all without the help of any of his men, and to mark the spot he planted a rose bush. The next day they sailed on and the Dutch followed. After nearly

a year of sea skirmishes and bad water, he escaped into the mountains of India. Now even though Saxon was called the Small-Minded, he knew the statute of limitations was six years. So he lived peaceably in an Indian village storing up for his return to the island and the luxury it would bring. Well, the day came and he hired an Indian crew and sailed after his booty. But when he returned and stole ashore, he was appalled to find the entire island covered with roses. You see, he had planted climbing roses; but with no trellis, the rose had just spread to cover the ground in all directions. He would have to unearth the entire island to find his hidden treasure. His purpose was defeated because he had not provided a structure, a trellis to control and direct the rose's growth.

(SHEILA finishes off the can of beer and sets it aside, then she claps.)

SHEILA

Excuse me. Nature calls. (Giggles.)

(She rises and exits.)

BEN

(Pointing to SHEILA as she exits.) You don't have to pigeonhole her every action, but she needs a form to cling to and to provide direction.

AL

(Standing.) This trellis you talk about nearly killed me.

BEN

There is a middle ground.

AL

I won't force my daughter into anything.

BEN

You don't have to. Just make suggestions--explanations.
Can't you see she craves a filial relationship with you?

AL

A what?

BEN

She wants you to be a father, not a landlord.

AL

If she wants something of me, then why don't she ask?

BEN

It's not something material, like a swimming pool, for
you to give to her. It is your attention she needs.

AL

I take all the trouble to come out here campin' an' you
say I don't pay no attention to her?

SHEILA

(Entering.)

It's amazing what just a couple of cans of beer can do.

(Sits and pulls another can
from her backpack; looks at
it puzzledly, shakes it; seeing
it is empty, she sets it aside
and pulls out another which is
empty. She smiles sheepishly.)

I guess I forgot about having breakfast, too.

AL

(Huffily.) This man says you need my attention. Is that what you think?

SHEILA

I think it would be nice if you'd listen to me once in a while.

AL

(Exploding.) I have . . . (Swallowing his indignation.) Okay. I'll listen. You have my attention.

SHEILA

Okay.

(BEN returns to his rock, taking notes casually.)

AL

You wanna tell me about the wild oats you sown? Well, I already know about you and that Spatny kid studyin' anatomy together in the basement a few years ago. An' I know you drink a lot of beer on weekends.

SHEILA

Dad, be quiet! I'm the one that's s'posed to talk.

AL

Okay, talk. I'm all ears. Whata you do at those parties of yours?

SHEILA

Well, I don't know what you'll think of this. (Pause.)

Last summer, Astrid and me went to this one big bash out at the lake and it was a hot night, so a bunch of us went skinnydippin'.

(AL nods understandingly.)

We were drinkin' and havin' a real good time and all of a sudden this guy yells out, "Hey, let's streak 69th Street.

AL

Oh my.

SHEILA

Well, we all loaded into the back of some guys truck and headed for 69th Street. That's the main drag where everybody goes. We all got out at Colorado Street and ran up 69th--fifteen of us--until Florida Street where the truck was sitting, waiting for us. Boy, we got a lot of honks and whistles as we went by. (Drinks.)

AL

(Not happily.) I imagine so. What happened after that?

SHEILA

Mainly we just paired off and left. (She smiles seductively to finish her thought, turning her head away from AL, which makes her facing BEN.)

AL

(Wanting to disbelieve.) Not much happened after that, huh?

SHEILA

(Becoming a bit belligerent because of her father's refusal to believe what she has suggested, but not wanting to necessarily admit to it either.) Yaa, somethin' happened after that. Bart and Zeb Schlecht was following Astrid and me. So when we stopped for a light, we jumped out and peed on the front of their Lincoln.

AL

Sheila! Your manners are no better than a dog's.

SHEILA

(Defensively.) It was funny. And they deserved it. I'd never give them a piece . . .

AL

Still, I've raised you better than that. I . . .

SHEILA

I'm not done. (Takes a long drink.) What if I told you some of those wild oats had sprouted.

AL

(Suddenly paling.) What do you mean? (Taking a beer from her backpack and beginning to drink.)

SHEILA

What if I said I didn't go to school last Monday?

AL

(Hesitantly.) So? (Drinking heartily.)

SHEILA

I went to the abortion clinic. (Takes another drink.)

AL

You what!?

SHEILA

Astrid got pregnant and she needed someone to drive her. I didn't mind cuttin' out for the day. She needed somebody for moral support.

AL

(Somewhat relieved.) Oh, I thought you meant . . .

SHEILA

No, come on Dad. I'm not . . .

AL

Well, the way you said it. And after some of the other things you said.

SHEILA

I'm careful.

AL

(Trying to reassure himself.) I guess it's not like you're still discovering you're different from boys. You've gotten over that.

SHEILA

Well, (Smiles coyly at BEN.) it's still fun to explore.

(She finishes the can of beer;
opens another.)

BEN

(Politely.) Don't you think you've had enough?

AL

Let her be. When she gets enough, she'll quit.

BEN

(Crosses to them.)

How can you stand by and let her do this to herself?

AL

It takes willpower. But, sometimes you gotta go a long ways down before you can see what's up.

BEN

(Returns to his rock in disgust.)

Odors of Edom.

AL

(Somewhat abusively.) An' apparently she's been goin' down for quite a while. I guess it all started with that Spatny kid. I guess I shoulda did somethin' then--nipped it in the bud. I had no idea your conscience would let you go this far. Who knows how many guys have sampled the wares by this time.

SHEILA

(A bit uncertain.) What's that supposed to mean?

AL

Variety's the spice of life and you always liked Mexican food.

SHEILA

(Standing up unsteadily in anger.)

You think I'm a bimbo! That I jus' jump in bed with anybody that comes along. Jus' because Astrid gets caught doesn't make me a tramp! (Takes a long drink.)

AL

It's easy to mix sex an' drinkin'.

SHEILA

Dad, I'm not some streetwise whore. I'm your daughter!

AL

Apparently you think you can be both!

SHEILA

Dad! I'm no more a whore than I am a . . . a . . . junkie.

AL

So you're an addict to, huh?

SHEILA

No! I've hardly ever used anything like that. I'm a good girl. Ask anyone.

(SHEILA lays down in a pouting gesture with the beer can and rests her head against the rolled-up sleeping bag, drinking frequently.)

AL

(Rising.)

You're a legal adult now. Free to come and go as you please. You've taken the legal responsibility for you from me.

BEN

(Rising and looking at AL.)

Perhaps your legal responsibility has ended, but you still have a moral responsibility to make the best person of her that you can. (Pointing to SHEILA.) It's pitiful to see. She has ideas in that head of hers.

AL

(Defensively.) Let her speak for herself.

BEN

She is in no condition to speak for herself. Listen, just because she doesn't happen to believe the same way that you do, does not mean that she should be ignored. Use a little fatherly discipline. Can't you see that she's pillaging herself?

(Crosses to SHEILA and reaches, taking the can from her.)

AL

It's her life. I give up. I tried to raise her up right. I took a int'rest in her and provided for her. An' the hussy stabs me in the back. I'm not gonna harbor a slut.

(SHEILA takes a long drink.)

BEN

It's your fault. You can't just let it grow wild and expect to tame it over night. She needed a father along the way.

AL

It's bad enough when my own daughter tells me I ain't a fit parent, but here a total stranger thinks he gots the same right. (Picking up his pack.) I'll jus' leave you to rail against me in private. I'm leavin'!

(SHEILA tries to rise but has difficulty, sinking to the sleeping bag in a sitting position. AL turns to leave; BEN grabs his arm.)

BEN

I can't let you abandon your own daughter.

AL

I'm tellin' you. Let go or you'll be drinkin' teeth.

(BEN let's go.)

I don't care what you do with her. She's no daughter of mine. Maybe, bein's she's already laid out, you can relate to her on her own level. I'm hotfootin' it back to people with some sense.

BEN

(Grabbing AL's arm again.) For her sake, stay.

(AL hits him in the face. A scuffle between the two ensues. The can spills and rolls away and SHEILA retrieves it, trying to drain the remaining drops. The scuffle suddenly stops as AL rises quickly, grabbing his things and racing out of the cave. BEN glares at SHEILA.)

BEN

(Pointing to the entrance.) You had better catch him.

(Seeing this as an eviction notice, SHEILA clumsily picks up her sleeping bag and pack and exits. BEN follows behind her to the entrance and then follows them with his eyes for a moment.)

BEN

Just as you drank on this hill, so all the nations drink continually; they drink and drink, and their inheritance is drink.

(Turns and walks to the fire, continuing to pace around it as he speaks.)

Do you see what I mean, Feuer? They are savages, feeding on the flesh of each other and themselves. Do you understand why I came out here?

(Spots the beer cans scattered around the fire.)

And this vile potion!

(Kicks the cans out of the cave violently.)

I have been besieged with a plethora of it. It would seem that no matter where I go, it spies me out--even buried up here. (He indicates the cave.) I had forgotten how burdensome people could be. (Pause.) Well, we have our solitude again. Huh? (Pause; then as if in reply.) Yes, they were in need of help, but they refused to even recognize it. If I have them pegged, they will go back home,

nothing changed, and start over right where they left off. (Pause.) And so will I.

(Crosses to his typewriter, wipes his hands on his pants, takes out the notepad and looks it over, then rests his fingers on the keys. After a moment, he begins typing and the lights fade for intermission. If there is to be no intermission, then the lights can fade and rise again with no break in the typing to begin Act II.)

Act II

scene i

Monday evening. Darkness falls during the first few pages of the scene.

(As the lights come up, BEN is typing intently, his lips moving as if speaking. When the lights are fully up, he begins to speak what he is typing.)

BEN

"Shattered glass sprayed the grass, punctuated by a shriek, as blood bedabbed a thousand pinholes. A dog's yelp, a pyre of steam, a groan of metal on metal marked the point with an aura of finality. The young man stumbled forward as if emerging from a wild ride on the Zambeeze Zinger, a stupified smile, an inane laugh upon his lips."

(SHEILA steps into the entrance, stands a moment, then rings the bell very deliberately.)

BEN

(Turning with a start.) You!?

SHEILA

I didn't mean . . .

BEN

What trouble does the daughter of Jacob wish to cause now?

SHEILA

No trouble.

BEN

I thought I sent you scurrying back to your kind.

(SHEILA just stands there looking pitiful. BEN rises and crosses to her.)

SHEILA

I've been thinking about what you said. I need someone to talk to, someone who can listen. Dad may look like he listens, but he doesn't understand.

BEN

(Speaks firmly.) But why have you returned here? Why have you not sought some other ear?

SHEILA

My friends are just as selfish as Dad is. You're different. I want to believe in you--in what you stand for. You know where to pull the rein and where to give it slack because you do more than listen--you understand. You can be my trellis.

BEN

That's what you want to see in me.

SHEILA

It's there!

(BEN tosses some sticks on the fire and crosses to his typewriter and sits. SHEILA walks to the fire and sits on her rolled-up sleeping bag.)

BEN

(Flattered by the thought but not convinced.) You really think so?

(SHEILA nods.)

(After a moment of hesitation.) You can't repair a sinking schooner by bailing out. You would be running away from your problem if you remained out here.

SHEILA

(Looking at him pleadingly.) I won't be a problem. I'll stay out of the way and just watch. Dad is small-minded. I don't think he knows what a trellis is. But you do. You won't let the roses grow wild, will you?

BEN

(Sits silently for a moment, looking at the entrance which has grown dark.)

(Half-musingly.) It's too dark to go back tonight.

SHEILA

(Begins to roll out her sleeping bag.)

(Eagerly.) I guess I'll have to stay.

BEN

No reason why we can't be friends.

SHEILA .

I guess I should apologize for the way I acted this morning. It was rude of me to get sloshed right here in front of you, but I just felt like I had to. There was nowhere to turn. Dad wouldn't really listen even if he said he was.

(SHEILA begins arranging her things during the following.)

SHEILA

Ever since Mother died, I've craved attention from somewhere, and I guess I expected Dad to fill in for her. When he didn't come through, I tried to forget about it-- usually by partying.

BEN

Did you tell him that?

SHEILA

I don't know how. I thought maybe if I stayed with you I could work through it. I certainly want to try.

BEN

Then I will be quiet and let you think.

(BEN regards his typewriter. SHEILA gets an armload of sticks and sits by the fire, cross-legged on her sleeping bag, playing in the fire with the sticks. BEN begins to peck on the typewriter slowly.)

SHEILA

(Looking around distractedly.) What is there to eat out here?

BEN

(Stops typing; looks furtively beyond SHEILA to be certain that the bedspread is in place. Nonchalantly.) Out here? Mice, bird's eggs, wild parsley: whatever one can find.

SHEILA

(Uncertainly.) Oh. (Looks around suspiciously, especially

at BEN. Calling his bluff.) Well, it certainly looks as if you find enough. If you've managed to keep your weight up for a year, it can't be too bad. Do you have any handy?

BEN

(Mildly surprised.) Uh, no; I don't like to keep it around the house. I go out and get it. If I kept it here, it might attract bears.

SHEILA

(Not wondering if there are bears, wondering if he said bears.) Bears?

BEN

(Nods.) They will eat nearly anything, especially this time of year; and they are on the lookout for warm caves to sleep in.

SHEILA

Oh, Ben, you're just trying to frighten me. A bear wouldn't come near the fire. (Smiling coyly.) You want me to be scared and run to you for protection.

BEN

No! It would be improper for a shepherd to scare his own sheep.

SHEILA

(Smiles.) I guess so.

(BEN stands and stretches.)

BEN

I think I need a drink.

SHEILA

Good idea.

(Grabs her pack and pulls
out a can of beer.)

BEN

(Pointing to the entrance.) Of water.

SHEILA

Oh. Sorry. I forgot.

(SHEILA sets the can down.
BEN exits. SHEILA opens the
can and gulps from it, watching
the entrance.)

SHEILA

(To the entrance, but not loudly.) Who knows, maybe
beer is good fertilizer for roses.

(SHE drinks some more. BEN
enters. SHEILA tries to hide
the can behind her back.)

BEN

Don't try to hide. Be yourself. That's the only way
you will accomplish anything. You must be honest about
yourself or you will never be able to discover what you
need to know.

SHEILA

(Shocked.) I thought it was offensive to you.

BEN

(Crossing and sitting at his typewriter, not looking at her.)

For you, I may be able to tolerate it.

SHEILA

(Hesitantly drawing the can from behind her back.)

You're sure it won't bother you? I know it sure did earlier.

BEN

(Turning to her.) You caught me off-guard. I think I have control now.

SHEILA

You're sure?

BEN

(Forces himself to nod; motions to her and watches.) We can't have the sheep bleating all night. Drink up.

(SHEILA raises the can to her lips. BEN searches for something to talk about.)

BEN

What's music like now? I have heard none for a while.

SHEILA

Well, it's still got a real beat to it. I mean you can really move to it.

(Sets the beer down and stands up, dancing while she continues to talk.)

Some of it's pretty wild and bizarre, but the mellow stuff still gets airtime. One of my favorite is "Slowed Down Lullaby," by Bronze. (Begins to sing while slow-dancing.) "Slow, Sleep, Down like a duck with me. Sleep, Slow, Just how far can we go . . ." (Sits.) It's hard to describe music. (Sips beer.) You have to hear it to know what I'm talking about. (Sips beer.)

BEN

I think you're right. Do they still play music at parties?

SHEILA

Oh yes. It's one of the Basic Three.

BEN

Basic Three?

SHEILA

Yaa. Every girl knows for a successful party you need three things: lots of beer, lots of goodlooking guys, and lots of loud music. (Drinks more beer.)

BEN

I see things haven't changed much.

SHEILA

It hasn't been that long. Besides, how could those things ever change?

BEN

(Laughing half-heartedly.) I guess it's here to stay. It sounds like you attend your share of parties. I guess you said you did.

SHEILA

(Nods.) Every weekend. Sometimes they don't last long, depends on how well-planned it is. Some of them can run from Friday night till Saturday afternoon. Most of them run out of beer before that though. (Drinks beer.)

BEN

What happens then?

SHEILA

(BEN winces at the word crash.)

We all go home. That is, to somebody's home. People are generous after a party. Sometimes we all go crash somewhere and . . . (Noticing BEN's reaction.) I mean we all go sack out somewhere. Or at other times someone volunteers to take everybody home. (Sips some beer.) Usually parties don't last real late--past two. Nobody's rich enough to provide after that.

BEN

Is that enough to get you drunk?

SHEILA

It depends on the person, how much they have to drink and how fast and how well they can handle it. I like to drink it fast because it seems to have more of a kick to it that way. (Drinks some beer in large gulps for emphasis.) If you drink it slow, the body has time to prepare for it.

BEN

(Sarcastically.) We can't have that.

(SHEILA finishes the can and sets it aside. She takes another can from her backpack and opens it. She sips from it thinking.)

BEN

(In mock-humility.) I don't like to pry, but are there times after you've been drinking that you forget what happened?

SHEILA

(Pause, while drinking.) Not that I remember. (Giggles.) That's funny--"Not that I remember."

BEN

(Patronizingly.) Yes.

SHEILA

(She fans her shirt and unbuttons a button.)

It's getting warm in here. This place keeps the heat in pretty good for not havin' a door.

BEN

(Musingly.) Feuer can last a long time. (Looking at her critically.) This may seem an ignorant question, but just what is it that you enjoy about drinking?

SHEILA

I don't know. (Takes a drink. Shrugs.) I guess it relaxes me. I don't always drink this much.

BEN

Why are you drinking now? Are you uncomfortable without it?

SHEILA

I don't know. We could find out.

(SHEILA sets the can near the fire, a full arm's length away.)

BEN

I think you will feel better if you try. You will be able to think more clearly. You can be relaxed without being inebriated.

SHEILA

Okay. I'll sit here and think and you do whatever you want--work on your book or something--and I'll think.

(Pause.) What was it I was supposed to be thinking about?

BEN

Try to figure out what drinking does for you.

SHEILA

Okay. (A look of forced concentration comes over her face.)

(BEN begins typing at a slow, but steady, pace. SHEILA looks around, having trouble concentrating. She starts to reach for the beer can but then pulls back her hand. She looks at it almost longingly for a few moments. Finally she breaks the spell of fascination the can had held over her and looks at BEN.)

SHEILA

What are you typing now?

BEN

(As if in reply, he begins to speak as if reading while he types.) "The bear forced his snout through the blockaded cave entrance. The people screamed and one particularly pretty girl tried to run, but she had been securely bound, a sacrifice to the king of bears."

SHEILA

(Laughing.) Oh, stop it.

BEN

You asked.

SHEILA

I thought you said shepherds weren't s'posed to scare the sheep.

BEN

Oh, did I frighten you?

SHEILA

No. (Pause.) Can I read it when you're done?

BEN

(Seriously.) Read it!? You want to read my book? There is a great deal of myself in it.

SHEILA

Isn't that why you're writing it, so people can read it?

BEN

Ah yes, as Thoreau said, "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book?"

SHEILA

Well, let's not go too far.

BEN

No, my aim is to begin a new era. Upton Sinclair opened the eyes of the people and the laws got changed. I, too, want to rescue people, people like you--from the roguish spirits.

SHEILA

(In mock horror; holding her arms up.) Oh, save me, save me! (Stretches out on the sleeping bag in a mock swoon.)

BEN

(Chuckles.) You'll have to wait until the book comes out.

(SHEILA lies still. BEN returns to typing. After a moment, SHEILA sits up and looks at BEN who seems not to notice her. Her hand reaches out for the beer can.)

BEN

(Quits typing; turns to her.)

(Not harshly.) What are you doing?

SHEILA

(Setting the can down near her.) Waiting for the book?

BEN

(Sighs; with a concerned tone.) When did all this start?

SHEILA

(A bit hesitantly.) In junior high. Just like the ones you talked about earlier. You don't hate me, do you?

BEN

Of course not. I don't like what you do, but I don't dislike you.

SHEILA

Good. I can't stand for someone not to care about me. I think the reason Dad holds down two jobs is just so he doesn't have to be around me. He's done it ever since Mother died. (Pause.) Mother and I did all kinds of fun things together. Dad and I don't do anything. We would bake cookies or fold clothes or go the park. We had a fun time with whatever we did.

BEN

Did you drink when your mother was alive?

SHEILA

(As if he should have already known.) No.

BEN

(Rising with a look of discovery on his face.) It sounds to me as if you drink to not feel alone. It's an escape for you, can't you see?

SHEILA

I don't wanna think about it.

BEN

(Excitement rising.) You have to. You've got to face it. Now. If you don't do it now, you never will!

SHEILA

Okay. So I drink because Mother died. Is that what you're saying? So why does Dad hate me?

BEN

He doesn't hate you. He is avoiding the mistakes that he saw in his parents. He wants to raise you right and he is doing it the way that seems best. It is difficult to be a mother and a father. Both of you are going to have to give something extra, some extra effort to reconcile this estrangement. But you've got to quit running to your liquor to avoid the issue.

SHEILA

It's unbearable without my beer.

BEN

Face up to what it is doing for you psychologically if not physically.

(SHEILA turns her back to BEN, picks up the beer and begins to drink.)

BEN

(Frustrated that she is not heeding his advice.) You don't need that. Don't try to run away.

SHEILA

I do need it.

(BEN steps to her and hits the can from her hand. SHEILA begins to cry.)

BEN

You can't use that as your escape anymore. You've found the problem--charge it head on.

SHEILA

(Sobbing.) I can't

(SHEILA reaches into her pack for another can of beer. BEN stops her, picking up her pack and taking the cans from it. SHEILA rises, struggling with him for a can.)

SHEILA

Give me one, please. I'll do anything, just give me a beer and leave me be.

BEN

I can't let you turn back now.

(He heaves the cans out the cave entrance.)

You've got to face up to it. Can't you see it; you're so close. You can overcome it.

(SHEILA collapses, sobbing, to her sleeping bag.)

BEN

Get up! You can do it! (He nudges her with his foot.)

You can do it.

(Seeing no response except for her sobs, he watches her silently for a moment. Then he turns and walks briskly to his typewriter and begins typing. Lights fade.)

scene ii

Tuesday. Dawn.

(Lights come up dimly. BEN is typing almost as if in a trance. SHEILA lies silently on her sleeping bag where she had fallen earlier; she lifts her head, wiping her eyes slowly with one hand. She looks around; her eyes settle on BEN typing intently. Stiffly she stands up and crosses quietly, but not necessarily furtively, to the typewriter and picks up a sheet of paper lying next to it and reads to herself. BEN seems not to notice. After a moment, SHEILA steps out of BEN's reach and begins to read aloud, as if delivering a speech. BEN sits up with a start; stops typing; turns to face her; starts to rise but stops, somewhat mesmerized by his attraction to the prose. He sits listening intently.)

SHEILA

"Fifteen hot, sweaty bodies piled into the truck. No one noticed whose leg crossed whose lap or who had developed emblazoned tan lines and whose skin was consistent. With no clothes to separate and plenty of beer to (She stumbles with the pronunciation of obfuscate.) obfuscate, all were created equal. At least to those present. At 69th the herd of them trampled out and into the publishing streetlight. The girls giggled and laughed, unashamed and unperterbed. (Smile widens.) The guys giggled and laughed, unabashed and undeterred. Like a great mass of

giggling, jiggling flesh, they moved forward through the red lights, through the stopped cars and on. Past honking voyeurs and would-be voyagers. And then like so many cattle, back into the truck to be shipped, topsy-turvy, to the stockyard, (Smile fades.) humanity stripped from them with their humility. No better than the animals they imitated, they trickled off by twos to begin rutting. A bull and a cow, each separated and joined by chance, each moved by animal passion, threaded their way through the reek of spilt beer to wherever Nature led them."

BEN

Beautiful.

SHEILA

(A little upset; shaking her head.) It wasn't quite like that. You make it sound sad. It was a party. It was a fun time.

BEN

Did I include anything that didn't happen?

SHEILA

Yes. No. I don't know.

BEN

I listened carefully.

SHEILA

But I didn't talk carefully. You ruined the whole thing. Nobody there felt like an animal. That was one of the

best parties all summer.

(She sets the page back where it was.)

What else have you ruined?

(Pulls a page at random from the stack of pages; begins to read aloud.)

"Her delicate step caught his eye, but he refused to turn his head. Her legs, a coppery tan from frolicking in the summer sun, marked the peripheral arc of his sightline. Like brandished eels, they swam for a moment with an air of the celestial. The glint of a coppery bottle begging him to turn his head, the aroma of hops tickled the nostrils and conjured a siren song too great to arm himself against. His head snapped and the eyes dined on the young girl's limber form. He locked his knees and gazed in mixed delight and fear. The girl so attracted him but the rumors, no, the evidence he had seen warned him not to turn aside. She made no sound but simply quaffed her brew in the enticing firelight. The exterior so delighted but the basis so affrighted that the man remained immobile as she mutely slipped away." Wait a minute! Is this talking about me?

(BEN smiles.)

Are you saying I was a tempting sight but you were kept back by the beer?

BEN

I must admit, you would be more attractive without it.

SHEILA

You find me attractive?

BEN

(Hesitates.) To an extent.

SHEILA

What do you mean by that?

BEN

If attraction were purely external, there would be no question. But total attraction must come from the inside as well and that part has not captivated me.

SHEILA

(Frustratedly.) Then why do you write this?

BEN

I want people to see the ugliness that drink can cause in people, regardless of the external. No one desires to be ugly. If people associate drink with ugliness then soon the stigma will cause them to stop, don't you think?

SHEILA

But it's not ugly. It's comforting. It's a way out. We all need some escape or we'd never be able to cope.

BEN

Not true. I have no escape to turn to. I face things as they come. And I deal with them head on.

SHEILA

You've got to have some kind of escape. You can't tackle everything as it comes.

BEN

Granted, one cannot always be victorious at the initial conflict. Sometimes one must wait for the opportunity to overcome. Patience is not escapism. You are trying to escape your problem by turning to drink. I am patiently awaiting the time when the world is ready to comprehend my book.

(SHEILA sits, thinking, on her sleeping bag. BEN returns to typing. After a moment, SHEILA rises.)

SHEILA

It seems to me that patience is only possible when nothing can be done. But you're sitting up here when there's plenty to be done. You should be down in the city doing something about the drinking instead of just sitting back all high and mighty writing about it.

BEN

By writing, I can create a viable sensation that will cut deeper, quicker, than any street work ever could. My creative power will enlighten . . .

SHEILA

(Crossing to halfway between the fire and the typewriter.)

Creative!? You didn't do any work at all on this part; (Points to the first paper she'd held.) you stole it from me.

BEN

Stole it!?

SHEILA

(Pointing to the typewriter.) Is this a collection of trophies? How many others have come along to give you stories so you can be the inspired writer? How many others do you give your sob story to and then soak up the response?

BEN

It's not that way at all. I've never lied to you.

SHEILA

(Dramatically.) Me, a poor innocent sheep, being abused by her own shepherd. Fattened up for the feast. I can see it now. I'm the one who's lost, so mighty Ben Gunn is gonna rescue me and take whatever he can get in the process. You about done, or you need a little more mutton to sustain you?

BEN

Listen. It's not like you are making it sound. I have never taken anything from you. (Pause.) I had a little bit of a block. It was something I didn't know anything about. So I asked you some questions. (Lamely.) You didn't have to answer.

SHEILA

(Crosses to the fire.) Well, I certainly didn't know you were recording the conversation.

BEN

I didn't record it. I recreated it--from my point of view.

SHEILA

That's right! Not only did you steal it--you perverted it from something fun into something sad.

BEN

It is sad to me.

SHEILA

(Heating up.) But not to anyone else. Even Dad remembered that there was some fun involved. People don't want to read about the sad aspects of something.

BEN

If a liar or deceiver comes and says to the people, "I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer," he's just a puppet of the people--an appeaser. I want to deal with reality--I'm not up for the popular vote.

SHEILA

(Motioning around.) You call this reality!? This is an escape. You've created your own little world and called it reality. What do you know of social problems? You're not even a part of the society you're criticizing.

(BEN turns suddenly and starts typing furiously.)

You won't find your sinking schooner in the forest, or in that typewriter. I know why you came out here now. You're an ostrich and you needed a hole to bury your head in.

BEN

(Stops typing; turns to her.)

I'm here to write a book. A book that can show people

how to patch that schooner. My book will be the trellis that guides the tendrils up to make beautiful roses, not something creeping on the ground.

SHEILA

Don't kid yourself. You patch a ship with boards and nails and hard work. And roses don't have to grow straight up to bloom.

(BEN resumes typing.)

Well, you afraid to answer me?

BEN

(Without looking toward her and without slowing his typing.)
My book will show them how to make the city a good place.

SHEILA

Your book, your book, your book.

(Crosses to the typewriter.)

I'm tired of hearing about your stupid book.

(Picks up the manuscript.)

The only one it might be helping is you, and I have my doubt about that.

BEN

(Pointing to the entrance.) I'll show them . . .

SHEILA

You'll show them what? That you don't have to drink because you've got a book to drown your sorrows in? You have an escape just like me and everybody else. Everytime you feel threatened you dive into that typewriter as if it were the last bottle of beer on Earth.

It may not make you giddy, but it takes your mind off your troubles.

BEN

(Defensively.) But I must write.

SHEILA

Just like I have to drink. (Pause.) Whenever something tips the balance, your mind and fingers start exploring another world--of your own creation.

BEN

But this is my life!

SHEILA

(Spotting an empty beer can and kicking it.) No more than this is mine. (Pause.) I thought maybe you would listen. I wanted you to care, to understand. You're just like Dad. You hear what you wanna hear. You just do a better job acting. Instead of immersing yourself in a t.v., or a second job, you bury everything in this. (Holds up the manuscript.) Well, if I'm s'posed to be able to live without my escape, you should have to do without, too.

(SHEILA crosses to the fire with the manuscript and angrily throws it in the flames.)

BEN

No! What are you doing!?

(BEN lunges across the cave to the fire. SHEILA throws her unfolled sleeping bag over her shoulder, picks up her pack and exits while BEN rakes what he can of the manuscript out of the fire.)

BEN

(Kicking at a can and pointing to the cave entrance.)

The prince of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light that I would bring. (Nodding sadly.) Poor blind girl. She has thrown away the very thing that could set her free. She has eyes, but she cannot see. (Sits wearily in the clutter.) Once that mind is sealed it shall forever smolder in embers of its own design.

(Lights fade.)

Curtain

A Critical Apparatus to
Neighbor to the Birds

The essential process of writing Neighbor to the Birds involved developing the character of Ben. Beginning with a stray thought, an envisioning of a man alone in a cave, I began to explain and justify his presence to myself and to eventually develop the dramatic tension that I thought would be stageworthy. I was faced with some serious probing into his character before the writing could begin.

Obviously a man who had chosen to divorce himself from society was misanthropic; I reread Moliere's The Misanthrope. Alceste's demands of society are not met. I assumed the same of Ben. Alceste concludes from the dishonesty that he observes around him, "Deceived on all sides, overwhelmed with injustice, I will fly from an abyss where vice is triumphant, and seek out some secluded nook on earth . . ." (The Misanthrope, 1666, in Tradition and Revolt, Anderson & Warnock, editors, Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967, p. 140). This gave me, as author, the necessary impetus to put Ben in his cave; so that, in a sense, Neighbor to the Birds takes up where The Misanthrope left off. Ben has left society and taken up residence in his "secluded nook."

For a man to leave civilization he had to have strong feelings about something. Perhaps somewhere in the back

of my mind lurked a remembrance of the isolation that Hamlet felt in trying to right things in his native Denmark. Hamlet, too, was intolerant of the hypocritical nature he saw in man. "Man delights not me" (II-ii-324), Hamlet says. This attitude is the very one found in the emerging character of Ben. Ben's wife was killed without reason; Hamlet's father was killed without just cause. This is enough to shatter the idealism of each. To fill in details for Ben, though, I had to draw from contemporary conditions. A modern dramatic situation must be drawn not from royal intrigue but from the common man's condition. What can be more ubiquitous than the drunk driver? Ben has resolved that man would be more true to himself if he were to do without alcoholic drink.

Perhaps because I had read Winesburg, Ohio recently, the idea of the "grotesque" began to intrude on my ideas as the character developed. The author in "The Book of the Grotesque" relates that in the beginning of the world there were only thoughts. When people came along, they claimed those thoughts as truth. But if a person claimed only one truth, "and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood" (Winesburg, Ohio, Sherwood Anderson, 1919, New York: The Viking Press, 1960, p. 25). Ben claims this one truth: that if men will give up alcohol, then relations between people will improve because they will no longer use drinking to escape their problems and will, instead, face those problems.

Somewhat settled on the identity of the main character, a grotesque idealist, I began the plot of the play. Ben, having justified his escape by writing a novel exploring the problem that he sees in society (a la Upton Sinclair), must have some conflict to overcome. Obviously he is not going to desert his cave, so the conflict must come to him. This happens in the form of a father-daughter family. The Jacobs are trying to improve family relations by means of a therapeutic backpacking trip, which turns out to be unsuccessful. The first snow of the coming winter leaves them lost and seeking shelter. They stumble on Ben's cave. The conflict is first territorial; but later when Ben realizes that Sheila, the daughter, is an immoderate drinker, the conflict shifts to engage all of his energy. Still later, the conflict appears to subside and moves on a more submerged level.

Making a junior high teacher of Ben created a mental set that seemed to work well in his relating to the Jacobs and in explaining Ben's behavior in the play. As a teacher, he has learned to be an authority figure. He is accustomed to giving the answers to problems (whether he knows the answers or not). When he sees a problem in the Jacobs family, it seems natural to him to suggest the answer.

His nearness to young receptive minds, in junior high, has also developed in Ben a missionary drive to convert others to his way of thinking. His students have developed in him a zeal for propagating his ideas. When the Jacobs

enter his world he does not suddenly become a zealot. His mind is already set in accordance with his grotesque ideals. This missionary zeal combined with his conception of himself as an educator is manifested in his prophet-like behavior.

Like many authority figures, when Ben approaches an area of uncertainty, he tends to pronounce "facts" rather than present logical arguments that can be followed by his hearers. This happens with the quotations that Ben uses. He uses slices of various literary texts as slogans to be followed rather than truths to be discovered or explored, treating these selected texts in only a superficial way. By relying on the time-worn axioms of established writings, Ben feels that his own pronouncements become more significant. His borrowing is superficial, though, and a deeper look by the audience at what he says will turn his condemnation from others to himself. His use of literary sources serves not to strengthen the representation of his ideals but to highlight the defects, because of the shallowness of his understanding of those texts in relation to his own behavior.

Ben, in preparation for his teaching, has read and studied Treasure Island, which was one of his favorites as a youth. The Romantic side of him often thinks in terms of pirates and of the glory of absolute power achieved by cunning and might--something which would violate his present method of reform and which must, therefore, be kept hidden. However, when Sheila asks for a name, the Romantic element

in Ben conjures up Ben Gunn. Ben Gunn was a man who helped fight evil--of course, the only evil on Treasure Island was that of Long John Silver and his men; Ben Gunn had been marooned by Silver on a previous expedition. Ben sees himself, like Ben Gunn, as marooned by the injustice of society. Society has abandoned him by not fulfilling what Ben had expected of it. Indeed, Ben's hideaway does not represent a physical exile so much as a psychological one. Ben has chosen to set himself apart, which may make that estrangement more effective than a physical retreat. Had his exile been only physical, the entrance of the Jacobs would have been a sign of rescue; but, since he is separated psychologically, their succor goes unrecognized by him. This failure to see the possibilities underscores the meaning of the ending of the play.

In his frustration in the opening scene, Ben also compares himself to one of Treasure Island's pirates, Blind Pew. Because Pew was blind he was unable to see the things he sought. His death was brought about because he could not see to get out of harm's way. Ben makes the comparison because he is at a part in the manuscript where he is unable to see how to continue. However, this also foreshadows a greater blindness in Ben that the play continues to develop.

Ben, as a junior high teacher and faculty sponsor of the Ecology Club, is also familiar with Walden. His concern for man being his best self prompted him to volun-

teen to work with the club, and he made Thoreau's Walden required reading for members. Familiarity does not mean comprehension, however. Ben sees his retreat to the cave in terms of Thoreau. Like him, Ben has separated himself from the sham of society, or as he calls it, the "red-tape injustice" that is related to drinking. Walden is Ben's literary impetus for going away to work. He wants to be set apart to write. Unlike Thoreau's seclusion however, Ben's is not an exemplary exile. He has deluded himself with his idealism. He overestimates his effectiveness. Ben still expects to change the world, naively clinging to Thoreau's optimistic assertion, "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book" (Walden and Other Writings, 1854, New York: Bantom Books, 1981, p. 185). He fancies himself a powerful writer of prose, capable of changing even the hardest of hearts; but, in reality, he is obscure in his delivery and purposes. In the early drafts of the play, I had Ben excuse this outrightly by way of Thoreau: "You will pardon some obscurites, for there are more secrets in my trade than in most men's" (Walden, p. 117). Sheila has difficulty understanding Ben's intentions in his writing. In the "temptation scene" that she reads, it is only uncertainly that she makes a connection with what has transpired, and even then she fails to comprehend his purpose: "Then why do you write this?" (II-ii-75).

His dealing with "hardened hearts" brings out another temperament in Ben, one similar to that of the Hebrew prophets. Ben does take on the appearance of the prophets and even speaks as they did to the Israelites. Ben certainly has a knowledge of these prophets, but he is not burning with the same fire that burned within them. His zeal is not a God-given desire to bring the people back in line with the covenant they had made with God. His desire is to make a better world for his own peace of mind. As he sees it, if everyone would have the same ideals that he does, the world would be a pleasant place in which to live.

Ben's first reference to the prophets comes on page five: "Peace, peace; there is no peace." In Jeremiah 8:11, the people are accused of hearing only the words that they wished to hear: "'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace." (All scriptural quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version, New York: New York International Bible Society, 1978.) The implication is that men will not face the problems that beset them, but instead will choose to see the problems in a pleasant light. This foreshadows the conflict between Sheila and Al; but it also can be turned back on Ben, as Sheila does in the final scene when she accuses him, "You've created your own little world and called it reality" (II-ii-78).

In the second scene, when Ben is just listening to Al and Sheila discuss their problems, he speaks, much like

the Hebrew prophets, to deaf ears. This time, however, he unwittingly quotes from the foolish Launcelot Gobbo of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice: "It is a wise father that knows his own child" (II-ii-70 & 71). As with the prophets, the importance of his words is lost on the people. But, ironically, Ben cannot see the application of the expressions he borrows from literary sources either.

In Act I, scene iv, Ben again goes to the scriptures to further strengthen his point that people must work in harmony (without alcohol, of course) for humanity to succeed in peaceful, "right" living. Jeremiah asks, "Has counsel perished from the prudent?" (49:1). Jeremiah is here speaking of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. At this and other points in the play, Ben alludes to the story of the contention between Jacob and Esau in order to equate the Jacobs family with the Biblical Esau. It is clear that Ben sees the Jacobs, and society in general, as not listening to the problems and refusing to get involved when the problems are known. Later in that scene (page 50), Ben continues the allusion to Edom when he backs away from his contention with Al over disciplinary practices with the interjection, "Odors of Edom." Ben is disgusted with people who refuse to interfere with the calamity of others. According to tradition, the Edomites stood by while Jerusalem was being razed by the Chaldeans and refused to enter into the conflict, even though the Edomites were brothers to the Is-

raelites (Deuteronomy 23:7). Ben withdraws from the imagined stench of people who watch others hurting themselves or others. This, too, can be turned back on Ben, for at the very moment that he says, "Odors of Edom," he turns and walks away from the problem at hand (though he later actively tries to rectify the situation). Finally, at the end of Act I, Ben pronounces a prophetic judgement on the departing visitors, paraphrasing the judgement that Obadiah, a contemporary of Jeremiah, pronounced on Edom: "Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been" (Obadiah 16).

Near the end of the final scene, Ben again goes to the prophets for support, paraphrasing Micah (2:11) this time: "If a liar or deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!" Again, Ben uses a Prophet's statement to claim that people only hear what they want to hear. Like the true prophet, Ben claims to tell the people the truth whether they want to hear it nor not. But, as the audience begins to realize, Ben himself is unable to hear the "truth" he is proclaiming.

In the final speech of the play, Ben sits wearily in the clutter of the cave after again drawing from the scriptures in pronouncing what might be considered his epitaph. This time he quotes from the New Testament. In his second letter to the Corinthians (4:4), Paul writes,

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." The "gospel" that Ben is trying to bring to the people, however, is not the true gospel. It is the "truth" of an Andersonian "grotesque." He has embraced his "truth" so tightly that it has become a falsehood.

Aside from the physical action, there are two important images in the play: one visual, the other verbal. When properly produced, the fire burning at central stage should make a striking visual image. The fire has become, to Ben, a sort of alter ego. Of course the fire does not actually speak, but for Ben it has acquired intelligent powers, serving in a capacity similar to a conscience at times, and even meriting a name of its own. Feuer is the German word for fire; this is satisfactory for Ben because it is functional and still retains a hint of mystery. However, the audience should be alert to the relationship between Feuer and fever. The fire is representative of Ben's obsession with his book, and it has become a sort of fever in him. At the beginning of each scene, the fire is rekindled; this serves to remind the audience that Ben is still zealous for his cause, or as fever would imply, that he is still in the grips of his illness.

Like the visual image of the fire, the metaphor of blindness is central to the play also. Ben first suggests his own blindness in the opening scene with his comparison

to Blind Pew. The blindness that Ben imagines in himself is not physiological but psychological. He uses the image to illustrate his writer's block. However, this is a foreshadowing of Ben's blindness with regard to determining not only his ideal's efficacy but also its scope and definition. In the end, when Ben talks about the blindness of the "unbeliever's" mind, he is unwittingly speaking of himself. He is a victim of the very fault that he sees in others. He is unable to tend to the "speck" in someone else's eye because of the "plank" in his own. (Cf. Matthew 7:4-5. It may be important also to notice that this scriptural message is not one that comes to mind for Ben. His selectivity in quoting reaffirms that he, too, hears only what he wants to hear.)

My growing awareness of the importance of this "blindness" metaphor suggested a plausible ending to the play. I was forever trying to arrive at the traditional happy ending of a comedy. In several drafts, Sheila and Ben left together, though not always with the same motives. But always, the drastic change in Ben was unbelievable. Ben was too set in his ways to be changed by just a few hours with a teenage girl. Finally, while writing the eighth draft, I felt that the conclusion of the play should grow naturally out of the "blindness" metaphor. When the manuscript is slipped from him and thrown in the fire, he is left with only scorched remains. Then only his blind dependence on the manuscript and the distorted ideals that it develops

remains intact when the play ends. His closing judgement of the girl is pathetically indicative of his own situation. He again turns to a quotation to affirm to himself that he sees the truth. But as he continues his closing speech, the audience is increasingly aware that Ben is even more blind than Sheila. "Once that mind is sealed, it shall forever smolder in embers of its own design." Ben imagines that he is pronouncing a judgement on the departed Sheila, but in reality his speech reflects on his own condition. It is Ben's mind that has been sealed and has, in fact, been smoldering throughout the course of the play. With the realization that no change is possible in Ben, the audience is left to contemplate the tenacity with which a person can persist in his ideals, blinding himself to more reasonable alternatives; and, the curtain falls.

NEIGHBOR TO THE BIRDS

by

STANLEY AUBURN GALLOWAY

B. A., Northwest Nazarene College, 1981

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1983

Abstract. In an original play of two acts, the ambivalence of a social idealist who paradoxically wants to both reform and escape society is dramatized. Ben, a thirty-year-old man, has taken up residence in a cave to write a novel condemning the evils of alcohol in our society. The Jacobs family, having become lost, stumbles on his cave. After unsuccessfully trying to rid himself of them, Ben allows the Jacobs to stay the night on the promise that they will leave the next morning. However, Ben becomes drawn into their lives because they epitomize the society that he is attempting to portray in his novel. He invites them to stay longer; but Ben's probing into the family arouses hostility, both verbal and physical, and the Jacobs leave. The daughter, however, returns, claiming she wants to stay with Ben rather than her father. Ben befriends her, seemingly interested in her for herself but actually looking for material for his novel. When the girl realizes what he has done, she accuses him of being an escapist and tries to destroy his manuscript, leaving the audience with the realization that Ben is no better than the people that he is denouncing. In a closing critical apparatus, the relationship between the play and other works of literature is explored. Problems in writing the play are discussed with the solutions used to achieve believability given.