

J. Willard Marriott Library
University of Utah
Electronic Reserve Course Materials

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction, which is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses a photocopy or reproduction for or purposes in excess of "fair use", that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

1996

SUDDEN FICTION (CONTINUED)

among the fallen leaves. Today she made her own path, bouncing this way and that way, vaguely keeping an eye out for snakes. She found, in addition to various common but pretty ferns and leaves, an armful of strange blue flowers with velvety ridges and a sweetsuds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds.

By twelve o'clock, her arms laden with sprigs of her findings, she was a mile or more from home. She had often been as far before, but the strangeness of the land made it not as pleasant as her usual haunts. It seemed gloomy in the little cove in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close and deep.

Myop began to circle back to the house, back to the peacefulness of the morning. It was then she stepped smack into his eyes. Her heel became lodged in the broken ridge between brow and nose, and she reached down quickly, unafraid, to free herself. It was only when she saw his naked grin that she gave a little yelp of surprise.

He had been a tall man. From feet to neck covered a long space. His head lay beside him. When she pushed back the leaves and layers of earth and debris Myop saw that he'd had large white teeth, all of them cracked or broken, long fingers, and very big bones. All his clothes had rotted away except some threads of blue denim from his overalls. The buckles of the overalls had turned green.

Myop gazed around the spot with interest. Very near where she'd stepped into the head was a wild pink rose. As she picked it to add to her bundle she noticed a raised mound, a ring, around the rose's root. It was the rotted remains of a noose, a bit of shredding plowline, now blending benignly into the soil. Around an overhanging limb of a great spreading oak clung another piece. Frayed, rotted, bleached, and frazzled—barely there—but spinning restlessly in the breeze. Myop laid down her flowers.

And the summer was over.

Robin Hemley

THE LIBERATION OF ROME

A young woman named Amy Buleric sat in my office looking down at her feet. I figured someone had died, or maybe she was having emotional problems, or was sick. I bolstered myself for whatever horror or misfortune she might throw my way. A colleague of mine forces students to bring in obituaries when they claim a relative has died, but I think that's pathetic. I'd rather believe a student and risk being a fool than become power-crazed. So I was bolstering myself because I was afraid to hear what Amy Buleric was going to tell me about the reason for her absence for the last three weeks.

One time a student sent me a note, "Dr. Radlisch, I'm sorry I can't finish the paper on Hannibal for you." The next day I learned the boy had killed himself—not because of my paper, of course. He had problems I only found out about later. He must have sent me that note out of a pitiful sense of duty. Still, his words haunt me even today.

This young woman was fidgety, not looking at me, and so I sat there patiently, waiting for her to find the courage to tell me whatever it was that bothered her.

"Dr. Radlisch," she said finally, her voice almost a whisper.

"Take your time, Amy," I said, just as softly.

She looked past me to one of my bookshelves. "Why do you have that sign in your office?"

I sat up and turned around so quickly that a muscle popped in my neck. The sign was hand-lettered, done by a friend of my daughter, Claudia, who specializes in calligraphy for weddings. It reads, "If Rome be weak, where shall strength be found?"

"It's a quote from the poet Lucan," I said.

"Yes, I know," she said, a bangled arm sweeping aside her hair. She looked at me with what seemed suddenly like defiance and contempt. "But why is it here? It's . . . like . . . propaganda."

"I'm not sure I understand what you're saying, Amy," I said. I sat back in my chair. My thoughts, my voice became formal. "I thought we were here to discuss your absences, any problems you've been having."

I saw she was about to cry, so I stopped. "I mean," I said, softening my voice, "it's hard to find a solution unless I know what's wrong. Still, I'm glad you stopped in here to talk. I hate it when students simply disappear without a word."

It was too late. She started to cry, and I could see this was the last thing she wanted to do, that she was terribly embarrassed. The tears ran down her face and she didn't make any move to wipe them away.

"I wanted to disappear," she said, "but I couldn't. I had to confront you. That sign is my problem. Part of it anyway."

"Confront me?" I said. I scooted my chair back an inch or two.

"You've probably never had someone like me in one of your classes, and so there was no one to challenge your ideas."

"Ms. Buleric," I said. "I teach Roman history. I don't know what you're talking about. I have no ideas to be challenged.

I voice the ideas of the ancients with my tongue, their accounts. I'm not sure where this is all leading, but I thought we were here to talk about your absences."

"I am here to talk about your lies," she said.

I stood up. Amy Buleric didn't rise from her chair and leave as I expected she would. Here I'd thought she needed my sympathy, my help, and she'd only come to accuse me of telling lies.

I sat on the edge of my desk and folded my arms. "How old are you, Amy? Nineteen. Twenty?"

"Twenty," she said.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"Someone needs to stop you from telling lies."

I waved my hand at her. "Not that. I mean, why are you in college?" I smiled to show I wasn't her enemy. "Do you feel that you know everything already? Or do you think that college might just possibly, just on an outside chance, teach you something—something that might even challenge some of your old notions or the notions of your parents?"

"What about you, Dr. Radlisch?" she said, sitting up straight in her chair. "Do you know everything already? What about your old notions? Can they be challenged?"

"People say I'm open-minded," I said, glancing at my watch.

"I'm here to better my people," she said, looking around the office as though her people had gathered around her.

"Your people? Are you a Mormon?"

"No."

"You're not . . . I mean, you don't look . . ."

"I'm a Vandal, Dr. Radlisch."

I put my chin in my hand. "A Vandal," was all I could manage to say.

"Part Vandal," she said. "Over half."

"You deface property?" I said.

"Another lie," she said. "Another stinking Roman lie." She spat on my carpet.

"You spat on my carpet," I told her and pointed to it.

"I'm a Vandal, Dr. Radlisch," she said. "If you only knew the truth about us."

"Amy," I said calmly. "I'm not doubting you, of course. But what you're telling me is that you're a Vandal. V-A-N-D-A-L. Vandal. Like the tribe? The one that disappeared from history in the sixth century A.D. when Belisarius defeated them and sold them into slavery?"

"Pig," she said. "Dog. Roman dung. Belisarius." And she spat again.

"Please stop spitting on my carpet," I asked her.

She nodded and folded her arms primly in her lap.

"And you're here in my office to set the record straight," I said.

"There isn't any record, Dr. Radlisch," she said. "That's the point. The Vandal tradition is entirely oral. We don't trust the written word. That was the way of the Romans. 'Lies are the province of Romans and writers.' That's an old Vandal proverb. The only record you have is the record of the Romans. They tell you that we were a war-like people who invaded Gaul at the beginning of the fifth century. But that was only because the Huns attacked us first. They drove us out of the Baltic. And we didn't attack the Gauls. We were just defending ourselves! Then the Franks defeated us in 409 and we fled into Spain. We were only there twenty years when a lying Roman governor invited us into North Africa to establish an independent homeland on the ashes of Carthage. We should have known better than to set up camp in Carthage. The only reason we captured Rome was to stop their oppression of us and other peoples who they had colonized or destroyed. We didn't sack Rome. We liberated it."

She knew her history. Or at least a version, one that I had never heard before.

"And now you're coming forward."

"We've always been here," she said. "You've never noticed."

I wanted to believe her, but I was having a little difficulty. "So for the last fourteen hundred years..."

"That's right," she said. "Oh, we've intermarried some, but we've kept our traditions alive." She started to wail. Her eyes were closed and her mouth was stretched in an unnatural grimace. After a minute of this, she stopped, opened her eyes, and wiped her brow.

"Birth song," she announced.

"It's very different," I said. "Haunting."

She seemed pleased that I'd said this. She bowed her head. "For over a millennium our voices have been silenced. No one wanted to hear the Vandal songs. No one cared, though I suppose we were lucky. In some ways, we prefer the world's indifference to its attention. As soon as you're recognized, you're hunted and destroyed. So we waited. And now we're back."

My shoulders tensed and I rubbed my neck where the muscle had popped.

"Thank you for coming forward," I told her. "I know how hard it must be for you. I'm sure there are many things you could teach me."

She smiled at me again and all the anger seemed to be gone. "About the paper that's due?" she said.

"What?"

"Lies are the province of Romans and writers."

At first I didn't get it, but then I saw what she was telling me. "Oh, right," I said. "I guess you can't write it, can you?"

"No, I'm sorry," she said.

"No, don't be sorry," I said, reaching over and nearly touching her shoulder, but not quite. "I understand. I understand completely. It's part of your tradition."

"The Vandal tradition," she said. "Thanks, Dr. Radlisch. I knew you'd understand."

"That's my middle name."

"It is?"

"No, Amy. It's just a turn-of-phrase."

"Oh," she said, and she smiled. She liked me now. I could tell.

But I felt saddened. I was so used to teaching my subject a certain way. I had found a strange comfort in Lucan's quote, but now his question seemed unanswerable, at least by me. "Where shall strength be found?" How was I going to learn the new ways?

That night, I dreamed about my student who had killed himself. He was accusing me of something. He told me I was going to flunk out. I panicked and shot him. That was the dream. Ludicrous, but when I awoke, it felt so real that I nearly cried with relief. When I went to my office that day, I almost expected to see graffiti scrawled on the walls, "Death to All Vandals." But there was none. The walls were clean. No one had defaced them. What's more, Amy never showed up in class again. On the final transcript beside her name there was simply a blank, no "Withdrawn" as I'd hoped. It was up to me. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't give her an "A." But I couldn't flunk her. She knew her history. So I settled on a "B." But why had she stopped coming to class? Was it me? I thought we understood one another now. As I always told my students, they should come see me, no matter what the problem, before they just disappear.

William Maxwell

WHAT HE WAS LIKE

He kept a diary, for his own pleasure. Because the days passed by so rapidly, and he found it interesting to go back and see how he had occupied his time, and with whom. He was aware that his remarks were sometimes far from kind, but the person they were about was never going to read them, so what difference did it make? The current diary was usually on his desk, the previous ones on a shelf in his clothes closet, where they were beginning to take up room. His wife's uncle, in the bar of the Yale Club, said, "I am at the age of funerals." Now, thirty-five years later, it was his turn. In his address book the names of his three oldest friends had lines drawn through them. "Jack is dead," he wrote in his diary. "I didn't think that would happen. I thought he was immortal. . . . Louise is dead. In her sleep . . . Richard has been dead for over a year and I still do not believe it. So impoverishing."

He himself got older. His wife got older. They advanced deeper into their seventies without any sense of large changes but only of one day's following another, and of the days being full, and pleasant, and worth recording. So he

Review. Copyright © 1987 by Madison Smartt Bell. Reprinted by permission of Gelfman Schneider Literary Agents, Inc.

Mitch Berman, "To Be Horst" from *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures*, edited by Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Originally published in *Michigan Quarterly Review* 32, no. 4 (1993). Copyright © 1996 by Mitch Berman. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Kenneth Bernard, "Sister Francetta and the Pig Baby" from *The Maldivian Chronicles*. Copyright © 1987 by Kenneth Bernard. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Margaret Broucek, "Alvin Jones's Ignorant Wife" from *TriQuarterly* 74 (Winter 1989). Copyright © 1996 by Margaret Broucek. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Robert Olen Butler, "Relic" from *Gettysburg Review* (Summer 1990). Copyright © 1990 by Robert Olen Butler. Reprinted by permission of the author and Witherspoon Associates.

Ron Carlson, "The Tablecloth of Turin" from *Plan B for the Middle Class*. First appeared in *Story*. Copyright © 1992 by Ron Carlson. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Andrei Codrescu, "A Bar in Brooklyn" from *Monsieur Teste in America & Other Instances of Realism: Short Stories by Andrei Codrescu* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1987). Copyright © 1987 by Andrei Codrescu. Reprinted by permission of the author.

William deBuys, "Dreaming Geronimo" from *Story* (Summer 1991). Copyright © 1991 by William deBuys. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Don DeLillo, "Videotape" from *Antaeus* (Autumn 1984). Copyright © 1984 by Don DeLillo. Reprinted by permission of Wallace Literary Agency, Inc.

Stephen Dixon, "Flying" from *Long Made Short* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Originally published in *North American Review* (March / April 1993). Copyright © 1993 by Stephen Dixon. Reprinted by permission of the author and Witherspoon Associates.

Yahya Gharagozlu, "A Simple Death" from *the new renaissance* 7, no. 1. Copyright © 1996 by Yahya Gharagozlu. Reprinted by permission of *tnr*.

Dagoberto Gilb, "The Señora" from *The Magic of Blood* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1993). Originally published in *The Threepenny Review*. Copyright © 1993 by Dagoberto Gilb. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Molly Giles, "The Writers' Model" from *Side Show* (Somerset Salt Press,

1993). Copyright © 1993 by Molly Giles. Reprinted by permission of Ellen Levine Literary Agency.

Merrill Gilfillan, "F. O. B. Flicker" from *Sworn Before Cranes*. Copyright © 1994 by Merrill Gilfillan. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Traci L. Gourdine, "Graceful Exits" from *ZYZZYVA*. Copyright © 1994 by Traci L. Gourdine. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Lynn Grossman, "Cartography" from *TriQuarterly* 74 (Winter 1989). Copyright © 1989 by Lynn Grossman. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Joy Harjo, "The Flood" from *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*. Originally published in *Grand Street*. Copyright © 1994 by Joy Harjo. Reprinted by permission of the author and W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Ursula Hegi, "Doves," *Prairie Schooner* 65, no. 4 (Winter 1992). Copyright © 1991 by University of Nebraska Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

→ Robin Hemley, "The Liberation of Rome." Originally appeared in *North Carolina Humanities* and *The Big Ear: Stories by Robin Hemley* (Blair). Copyright © 1995 by Robin Hemley. Reprinted by permission of the author and Sterling Lord Literary Agency, Inc.

Allen Hibbard, "Crossing to Abbasiya" from *Cimarron Review* (April 1992). Copyright © 1996 by Allen Hibbard. Reprinted by permission of the Board of Regents for Oklahoma State University.

Pam Houston, "Symphony" from *Cowboys Are My Weakness*. Copyright © 1992 by Pam Houston. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Shelley Hunt, "Giving It Away" from *What If?: Writing Exercises For Fiction Writers*, edited by Anne Bernays and Pam Painter (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995). Copyright © 1995 by Shelly Hunt. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Denis Johnson, "Out on Bail" from *Jesus' Son*. Copyright © 1992 by Denis Johnson. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.

Pagan Kennedy, "The Monument" from *Prairie Schooner* 63, no. 3 (Fall 1989). Copyright © 1992 by the University of Nebraska Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Andrew Lam, "Grandma's Tales." Copyright © 1996 by Andrew Lam. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

David Leavitt, "We Meet at Last" from *Mississippi Review*. Copyright © 1993 by David Leavitt. Reprinted by permission of Wylie, Aitken & Stone, Inc.

for The Conservation Fund, a national land conservation non-profit organization. "Dreaming Geronimo" first appeared in *Story*.

DON DeLILLO is the author of numerous plays and books of fiction including *White Noise* (Viking, 1985), *End Zone* (Viking, 1986), and *Libra* (Viking, 1988) which won the National Book Award. His most recent novel is *Mao II* (Viking, 1991). "Videotape" appeared in the final issue of *Antaeus* (Autumn 1994) and was reprinted in *Harper's*.

STEPHEN DIXON is the author of eleven story collections, the last an omnibus entitled *The Stories of Stephen Dixon* (Henry Holt, 1994). He has also published six novels, the most recent of which is *Interstate* (Henry Holt, 1995). The story "Flying" is from his collection *Long Made Short* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). He lives in Baltimore and teaches at Johns Hopkins University.

YAHYA GHARAGOZLOU grew up in Iran, went to secondary school in England, then studied in the United States before returning to his native country prior to the 1978 revolution. In 1984 he took an engineering degree from the University of New Hampshire and also began writing short stories about the plight of Iranian immigrants in this country. "A Simple Death" first appeared in *New Renaissance*.

DAGOBERTO GILB was born and raised in Los Angeles. He is the author of a novel, *The Last Known Residence of Mickey Acuña* (Grove Press, 1994), and a collection of stories, *The Magic of Blood* (University of New Mexico Press, 1993), which won the PEN Ernest Hemingway Foundation Award from the Texas Institute of Letters at the University of Texas. In 1995 he received a fellowship from The Guggenheim Foundation. He now lives in El Paso.

MOLLY GILES is the author of a collection of short stories, *Rough Translations* (University of Georgia Press, 1985), which won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award, and the Boston Globe Award. Her regular book reviews in the *San Jose Mercury* won her the 1990 National

Book Critics Circle Citation for Excellence in Book Reviewing. "The Writer's Model" first appeared in *Mānoa*.

MERRILL GILFILLAN is the author of three books of poetry and two collections of essays, *Magpie Rising: Sketches from the Great Plains* (Random House, 1991) and *Moods of Ohio Moons: An Outdoorsman's Almanac* (Kent State University Press, 1991). "F.O.B. Flicker" is from his collection of stories, *Sworn Before Cranes* (Orion / Crown, 1994). He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

TRACI L. GOURDINE lives in Davis, California. She teaches at three state prisons and chairs the creative writing department for the California State Summer School for the Arts.

LYNN GROSSMAN's stories have appeared in *Story Quarterly*, *The Quarterly*, *TriQuarterly*, and the anthology *Hot Type: America's Most Celebrated Writers Introduce the Next Word in Contemporary Fiction*, edited by John Miller (Collier, 1988). "Cartography" first appeared in *TriQuarterly*. She lives in New York City.

JOY HARJO is a member of the Muscogee tribe of Oklahoma. Her most recent book, *In Mad Love and War* (Wesleyan University Press, 1990), won a William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. Other books include *She Had Some Horses* (Thunders Mouth Press, 1983) and *Secrets from the Center of the World* (University of Arizona Press, 1989). "The Flood" first appeared in *Grand Street*. She teaches at the University of New Mexico.

URSULA HEGI grew up in Germany. She has authored four novels, including *Salt Dancers* (Simon & Schuster, 1995) and *Stones from the River* (Simon & Schuster, 1994), which was nominated for the PEN Faulkner Award, and a collection of short stories, *Unearned Pleasures* (University of Idaho Press, 1988). "Doves," was first published in *Prairie Schooner*. She teaches at Eastern Washington University in Cheney.

→ ROBIN HEMLEY is the author of the short story collection *All You Can Eat* (Grove / Atlantic, 1988), a novel, *The Last Stude-*

baker (Graywolf, 1992), and a book of practical criticism, *Turning Life Into Fiction* (Story Press, 1994). His stories have appeared in such journals as *Ploughshares*, *Story*, *North American Review*, and *Mānoa*, and have been anthologized in *The Pushcart Prizes* and in *The Best in American Humor of 1994*. He lives in Bellingham, where he teaches at Western Washington University.

ALLEN HIBBARD has spent most of the last decade teaching at the American University in Cairo as a Fulbright lecturer at Damascus University. He is the author of *Paul Bowles: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993) and a collection of stories published in Arabic under the title *Crossing to Abbasiya and Other Stories*. He currently teaches at Middle Tennessee State University in Mulfreesboro.

PAM HOUSTON has published fiction and nonfiction in a wide range of magazines, including *Elle*, *Travel and Leisure*, *Allure*, *Mirabella*, *Mademoiselle*, and *The Gettysburg Review*. "Symphony" first appeared in her collection of stories *Cowboys Are My Weakness* (W. W. Norton, 1992). She is the editor of *Women on Hunting: Essays, Fiction, and Poetry* (Ecco, 1994). She lives in northern California.

SHELLEY HUNT has published stories in *Utah Holiday Magazine* and *The Way We Live: Stories by Utah Women*. She is a graduate student at the University of Utah and has served as the executive director of Writers At Work, a summer writers' conference in Park City. "Giving It Away" first appeared in *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*, edited by Pam Painter and Anne Bernays (Harper Collins, 1995).

DENIS JOHNSON was born in Munich and lived in Tokyo, Washington, Manila, and Munich by the time he was nineteen, when his first collection of poetry, *The Incognito Lounge* (Carnegie Mellon, 1982), was selected for the National Poetry Series. He has published four other books, including *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991), and *Jesus' Son* (Farrar,

Straus & Giroux, 1992), which includes the story "Out On Bail." He lives in northern Idaho.

PAGAN KENNEDY has worked as a street preacher, cartoonist, Elvis impersonator, freelancer at the *Village Voice*, and restaurant reviewer. Her fiction has been published in such magazines as *The Quarterly* and *Story Quarterly*. "The Monument" first appeared in *Prairie Schooner*.

ANDREW LAM came to the United States at the end of the Vietnam War, when he was eleven years old. He is an associate editor with the Pacific News Service in San Francisco and has won numerous awards for his nonfiction, including the World Affairs Council Excellence in International Journalism award and the Society for Professional Journalists' Outstanding Young Journalist Award. He lives in northern California.

DAVID LEAVITT grew up in northern California. His collection of stories, *Family Dancing* (Knopf, 1984), was a finalist for both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award. His fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *Esquire*. His most recent novels are *The Lost Language of Cranes* (Bantam, 1987) and *Equal Affection* (Harper Collins, 1990). "We Meet at Last" first appeared in *Mississippi Review*. He lives in East Hampton, New York.

BRET LOTT grew up in Los Angeles. "I Owned Vermont" was his first published story (in *Writers Forum*), and later a chapter in his first novel, *The Man Who Owned Vermont* (Viking, 1987). His other novels include *Jewel* (Simon & Schuster, 1991) and *Reed's Beach* (Simon & Schuster, 1993). His collections of stories include *A Dream of Old Leaves* (Viking, 1989) and *The Difference Between Women and Men* (Anchor Books, 1994). He teaches at the College of Charleston.

DANIEL LYONS's story "The Birthday Cake" is taken from *The Last Good Man* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), a collection of short stories which won him the Associated Writing Pro-

Copyright © 1996 by Robert Shapard and James Thomas
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all the copyright notices,
pages 307-311 constitute an extension of the copyright page.

The text of this book is composed in Berthold Bodoni-Antiqua Regular
with the display set in Trade Gothic Light Oblique and Condensed.
Composition and manufacturing by the Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing
Company. Book design by Charlotte Staub

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

→ Sudden fiction (continued) : 60 new short-short stories / edited by
Robert Shapard and James Thomas.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-393-03830-0.—ISBN 0-393-31342-5 (pbk.)

I. Short stories, American. I. Shapard, Robert, date.

II. Thomas, James, date

PS648.S5S83 1996

813'.0108—dc20 95-39355

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
<http://web.wwnorton.com>

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 10 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1PU
5 6 7 8 9 0

*For their invaluable assistance,
the editors would especially like to thank:*

*Revé Shapard, Denise Thomas,
Jerry Saviano, Charlene Gilmore,
Byron Crews, and C. J. Baker.*