

out and count 'um and spread 'um out on the breffust room table and arrange 'um like they was in my mouth. And then diffunt ways, the back ones front . . ."

Crooked
Wisdom
Baby

I led Felice to where a dental-hygiene jingle was being sung, by the Cuspid Singers, in another part of the hall:

"Don't call it incidental—
It may be sentimental
But teeth are quite important in
romance.

Whether owned or rental,
Teeth to some extent'll
Sway the course of love as much as
pants.

So keep your dentifrice
Close by you, Bro or Sis,
When going out to dinner or to
dance.

If bad teeth make you hiss
While framing that first kiss,
It may be you won't have a second
chance.

Oh, whether owned or rental,
Teeth to some extent'll
Sway the course of love as much as
pants."

"There should be a crockery/mockery rhyme in there," I chuckled to Felice. "Listen," I added, for we were not the only enthusiasts present, and the air was filled with snappy talk:

"Molars are like nothing so much as the stumps of trees. What if the rest of the strange white trees were there: trunks, branches, leaves, burls, crotches, twigs, bark, moonlight through the branches, and acorns or whatever."

"We cherish teeth. Vide savage tribes. And chainsaws."

"Teeth are the only bones we have

that show. If we were arrows, they would be our heads."

Permanent
Grinding
Nice

We heard readings from that great symbolic naturalistic dental work *McTeague*, by Frank Norris—whose dentist hero, upon unwrapping the lustrous, four-rooted sign his betrothed has bought him, is beside himself: "It was the Tooth—the famous golden molar with its huge prongs—his sign, his ambition, the one unrealized dream of his life. . . . No danger of that tooth turning black with the weather . . ." Later, the dentist finally gains the upper hand over his wife, on the way toward utter ruin, when he develops the practice of biting the tips of her fingers till they turn black.

Erich von Stroheim, I told Felice, made of that great story an epic lost movie, *Greed*, whose original version ran longer and far more compellingly than a working day; and the studio—MGM, the one with the growling lion—chopped and ground that gargantuan, unprotected film down to a venal two and a half hours, for shopgirls to enjoy.

Bad
Lied-through
Loose

"The fathers have eaten a sour grape," I quoted to Felice, "'and the children's teeth are set on edge.'" We were passing a breathtaking exhibit: long, long ranks of teeth set just so; so delicately balanced, one upon the other, that it seemed a breath of wind would send them pittering to the floor like sleet; set just perilously shy of meshing; not short of, but just finely higher than, meshing; we do not appreciate enough teeth's flinty interaction.

Gritted
Jeweled
Aching

"Ah, but 'The Lord who made thy teeth,'" I continued, "'shall give thee bread.' And you are toothsome, Sweet. And all of mine are sweet for you. But will you still esteem me," I said to her lightly, "when my teeth are gone?"

"No," she said.

She bared hers for me.

Mine fell in my lap.

All around was a sound like castanets, only harder, whiter. □

BALLET

BALANCHINE'S TCHAIKOVSKY

BY HOLLY BRUBACH



GEORGE BALANCHINE WILL no doubt go down in history as the man who, with Stravinsky at his elbow, made classical ballet a modern art. That Balanchine has also—and often—found in Tchaikovsky's works the musical premise for dancing has not been so well celebrated. Stravinsky was a great composer who happened to write for the ballet: his ballet scores—*The Firebird*, *Petrouchka*—are routinely played in concert. Tchaikovsky is considered a "ballet composer," and the New York City Ballet this season is devoting fourteen performances (June 4-14) to a festival in his honor.

The distinguishing features of Tchaikovsky's music are the very qualities that make certain music—his or anyone's—so danceworthy. In a letter in 1878, Sergei Taneyev, Tchaikovsky's friend and former pupil, wrote to him:

In my opinion, the [Fourth] Symphony has one defect to which I shall never be reconciled: in every movement there are phrases which sound like ballet music. . . . Hearing the symphony, my inner eye sees involuntarily our prima ballerina which puts me out of humour and spoils my pleasure in the many beauties of the work.

Yes, yes, Tchaikovsky agreed, but wrote in reply: "I can never understand why 'ballet music' should be used as a contemptuous epithet."

Tchaikovsky's gifts were for melody, which Stravinsky called the "center of gravity" in all Tchaikovsky's music, and for orchestration. A piece built along melodic lines lends itself to more substantial, more coherent passages of dancing than music with a motivic structure (Beethoven's, for example), made up of smaller units, or motifs. Tchaikovsky's melodies are especially long and plangent—the violin solo that is the *White Swan pas de deux*, the disconsolate *Adagio cantabile* of the First

Holly Brubach has written about dance for *Vogue*, *Ballet News*, and *Ballet Review*.

Symphony, the opening line of the piano Romance (Op. 5), to name a few.

By felicitously distributing his melodies among various instruments of the orchestra, Tchaikovsky achieves vivid color as well as line. In the *Sleeping Beauty* prologue, for instance, he delineates six different fairies in their variations by the scoring; this goes beyond instruments that might seem like obvious choices for evoking fairies—say, a solo flute or piccolo—to a clarinet, oboe, and bassoon (the first fairy), and violin pizzicato over trombone chords (the third). The orchestration determines the fairies' individual characters and the scale of their dancing. The famous "finger" variation would look ditsy if it were danced to music played by any instrument other than the piccolo; it would also, I think, be harder to dance.

Music can support dancing in many ways, the most obvious of which is with a well-marked rhythm. And rhythm was, for much of the nineteenth century, the hallmark of a ballet score—of Adolphe Adam's music for *Giselle* or the four-square ditties for August Bournonville's ballets. This music was not very worldly; it was not up to the standards of the concert hall. But for dancing it was serviceable. Musicality is basically an ability on the part of the choreographer—or, in executing choreography, on the part of the dancer—to locate the physical impetus for movement in the music. In many nineteenth-century variations, Bournonville's in particular, this impulse is simply a strong push-off from the floor on the downbeat, but it makes the jumping and rebounding easy, almost effortless.

By Tchaikovsky's time, ballet music had already acquired more subtlety and interest, if not much more respect. Even today, the standard assumption is that rhythm is the only common denominator between music and dance. In our century, of course, dance rhythms have become increasingly complex. Balanchine's may actually run counter to those of the score, so that the dancing augments the music by adding another "voice," which is seen but not heard. This is, to my mind, when dance is truly musical—when, rather than slavishly abiding by the score, step-for-note, all along the way, the choreographer can devise dancing that plays off the music, as a composer might introduce a fifth instrument into a quartet.

TECHNICALLY, THE ONLY voice a choreographer can add to a score is a rhythmic one. So it's taken for granted that harmony in ballet music sets the mood and nothing more: musicians may puzzle over it, but dancers can turn a deaf ear to it, as long as they keep time. By these standards, the most sophisticated choreography could be reduced to a catchy beat, and *The Sleeping Beauty* to Dalcroze eurhythmics.

But musicians know better—that it's harmony that gives music its movement, that propels a score homeward, through a succession of related keys, back to the tonic again. Harmony creates tension, challenging the music's tonal structure with dissonance. It builds suspense, as, for example, when a

Always, his choreography determines how we hear the score. He can even persuade us by the dancing to hear already familiar music in a way we've never heard it before, as he does in the *Nutcracker's* two most famous waltzes—of the Snowflakes and of the Flowers—which most people, whether or not they've seen the ballet, could sing in their sleep. Both pieces seem tedious on recordings but fresh in the theater, where Balanchine keeps them constantly moving. The Snowflakes, with only a handful of steps, fall into formation and scatter again. The Flowers fold and open, and, like a broom, sweep the Dew-drop offstage. This is Balanchine using the dancing to vary the score, to sustain our interest in the music, as he does in



seventh chord yearns for resolution. It imparts a sense of restlessness or of repose. It either strengthens or weakens the rhythm, according to which chords fall on the accented counts and which fall in between. And, by the width of the melodic line's intervals, harmony suggests space—tight if the melody climbs the steps of the scale one at a time, larger if it leaps several at once.

In a letter to his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky affirmed that music is not the sum of its parts but the whole: "Every melodic idea carries its own inevitable harmony and rhythm," along with "the proper instrumentation for its expression." If, then, these elements are inextricable in the music, they must together have some bearing on the dancing.

BALANCHINE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD music is respectful but never reverent. He sometimes takes the liberty of using the dance to improve on the music.

Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2 (made in 1941 as *Ballet Imperial*, revised slightly and retitled in 1973): from a good, but by no means great, concerto, he has made a ballet that goes the music one better, a masterpiece.

As piano concertos go, Tchaikovsky's Second is an odd one—not well integrated, better defined as a symphony with piano obbligato. Balanchine justifies the boundary lines between piano and orchestra, which make for a stand-off in the music, by drawing the distinction between the ballerina (or the soloist) and the corps in exactly the same places.

The dancers in this ballet are very clearly ranked. It is not a democracy. And, because the lead is such a technical obstacle course, it sets the ballerina apart from the corps. Balanchine sees to it that we recognize her superiority right off. A long trill alerts us to her entrance: she comes in on a scale that slides down four octaves into a

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piano cadenza, and whips off a virtuoso cadenza of her own—flat-footed *pirouettes* that stop on a dime, a circle of the stage in leaps out of one turn into the next.

If, upon close listening, this concerto sounds long-winded, even bombastic—as it never does during the ballet—it is most likely because the material doesn't quite support its huge symphonic treatment, and because of the liberties Tchaikovsky takes with the piano cadenzas. According to classical form, the cadenza is the movement's climax, customarily positioned just after the recapitulation and before the coda. Other Romantic composers played with this convention (Brahms put the cadenza up front in his Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff incorporated the recap in the cadenza in his Third), but the cadenza remained in their concertos the focal point. Here Tchaikovsky, however, scatters solo, cadenza-like passages throughout the first and third movements, and the effect is relentlessly climactic. Balanchine mitigates this by dealing a few of these passages to a soloist, the rest to the ballerina.

Tchaikovsky rather neatly links the three movements of this concerto thematically: the outer two, both *allegro*, are complementary. The first movement's main theme emphasizes the interval between the tonic and the dominant, and the main theme, the third, completes the scale from the dominant to the tonic. Balanchine treats the movements as three separate, but related, poems, as in a cycle. The cast of characters is the same—same ballerina, same cavalier, same corps, though the soloist and the men sit out the *Andante*—but the tone and the subject of each are quite different. As in the music, the third movement seems to pick up where the first left off; the second takes place outside time.

The opening, a march announced by the full orchestra and passed along to the piano, is the ballet's overture. The curtain rises on sixteen men and women in two facing lines. As a clarinet and a trumpet introduce a calm, all's-well theme, the men approach the women and bow. This ballet is full of these moments of acknowledgment, genuinely respectful. They are never cued by the music, as in Mozart, when the cadence so often begs a curtsy or a bow; in *Concerto No. 2* these gestures lend

the music human detail. This ballet seems, as Balanchine's works on a grand scale inevitably do, to be about a society. It looks like a nice, well-planned place to live. The first movement unfolds in a very public-spirited way, with the corps filing into a circle, then staking out a square. When the man escorts the ballerina on a tour of the stage to review the troops, the corps pays her homage with a deep *reverence*.

Balanchine, at his most literal, may seize on a figure or theme in the music and magnify it in the dancing, with steps that perfectly conform to it, so that in the ballet it takes on more significance than in the score. In *Concerto No. 2*, as Tchaikovsky pushes the music uphill in insistent three-note phrases, Balanchine assigns the soloist and corps a series of *pirouettes* that double back on themselves on the same spot, alternating outside-inside-outside. The agitation these turns make with the music builds until the soloist exits and dispels it, but not without having brought the entire ballet up to a new, higher pitch of energy—higher than the energy of the music itself.

Tchaikovsky brings the all-hail march of the opening back for the first-movement recap, but the ballet never flags: the theme, though familiar, seems fresh because it's only now that we see dance steps set to it. The soloist returns with a man on each arm, and, leaping, the men promenade her in *arabesque*. The dance and the music gather steam. The melody, in the piano part, is written to fall a sixteenth beyond the beat, so that the music lurches ahead, carrying everyone along with it in a coda full of jumps and beats, in unison. So vivacious and conclusive is this ending that it might otherwise signal the close of a whole ballet. Here, it seals the first movement.

BALANCHINE'S *CONCERTO NO. 2* is not the original score but a version abridged, rewritten, and rearranged in parts by the pianist Alexander Siloti. Tchaikovsky, when consulted, apparently agreed to a few of these emendations and disallowed the rest. Siloti published his version anyway, after the composer's death. For years, when this concerto was performed, it was according to Siloti. His revisions in the first and last movements are mostly pianistic, to fit the music better to the hand. But

the *Andante* is drastically altered—shorter by 191 bars and dominated by the piano, as the original is not. Tchaikovsky assigns the movement's main theme to a solo violin, then to a cello and violin in counterpoint, and finally to the piano; Siloti gives it over to the piano right off. (The violin and cello join in later, for the reprise.) Siloti deletes the contrasting material in the middle, a restless tossing-and-turning. It might be argued that by doing so, he weakens the movement structurally: by his own account, it consists of only the main theme, two times through, cadenza, coda. On the other hand, his version keeps to the subject, a single melody. (The movement is in *a b a* form, and he omits *b*.) It is one of the most beautiful melodies Tchaikovsky wrote—a long, sighing legato line that comes to rest in what sounds like a benediction. With this theme entrusted to a trio, the movement is set on an intimate, chamber-music scale.

Balanchine's second movement is accordingly as private as the first is public. He restores the original structure,

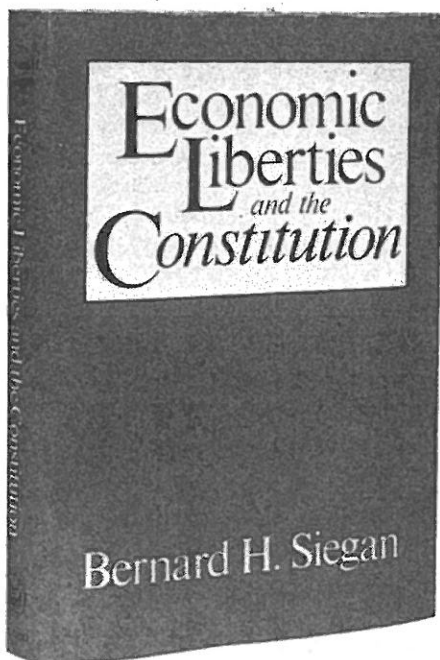
a b a, in the dancing. The course of events is this: The man takes hold of two lines of women who are holding hands, and gently waves them back and forth, like streamers. He swirls them one across the other, turns them inside out. The idea is playful, but the action is somehow grave: because the stage is so large and the lines are so long, they seem to swirl in slow motion, as if the air were very dense. The man rushes to the downstage corners, with the women at his back. He stops—whatever he was running toward has vanished. The two women flanking him stand lookout, poised in *arabesque*, their hands on his shoulders. Then, ceremoniously, the women return to lines on either side of the stage, the same columns that bracketed the *pas de deux* in the first movement. (This *Andante* is *Swan Lake* in a nutshell: the rows for the corps, the vision of a woman, and the male protagonist, searching.) The lines form a narrow alley down the center of the stage, and at the far end we see the ballerina. The man kneels. She comes to him, embraces him in a big *arabesque pen-*

chée, then disappears upstage, and the two lines of women, merging, cover her tracks for a moment. Next we penetrate to the heart of this ballet, a brief *pas de deux*, danced to the movement's main theme, this time shared by violin and cello, with elaborate piano accompaniment. Balanchine leads us back out along the route by which we came: the alley formed by the corps, the woman's entrance, embrace, exit. When the man goes looking for her, asking the women where she has gone, they look away—as in *Swan Lake's* last act: the answer is unspeakable. He takes hold of the two lines of women, waves them back and forth again. They *bouffée* quietly away, leaving him alone. He kneels.

The final movement is back in broad daylight, but the sobriety of the opening is gone, the stately march has given way to a boisterous mazurka. The women jump in *arabesque*, and the men throw them into the air with a boost at the hip. Tchaikovsky here puts his thematic material, which is not very extensive, through a rigorous workout, and when the music stands on its own the

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Bernard H. Siegan

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The result has been to give governments at all levels much greater power over the economic system and to harm society by inhibiting production, raising prices, curtailing competition and creating unemployment. Those most often harmed, concludes Siegan, are those who were supposed to be protected—people on the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

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June report on
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themes begin to sound exhausted by so many key changes. Balanchine, however, borrows this harmonic momentum and, leaving Tchaikovsky to his own devices, pulls dance ideas out of the air instead of the score. Throwing conventional arrangement to the winds, he tips the stage, with the corps on the left side and the ballerina, by herself, on the right. Having assigned her a series of *fouettés*, ordinarily a scene-stealing technical feat, he then washes the corps back and forth in lines around and in front of her, obstructing the view. The melody again chafes at the beat, and dance and music rush together headlong to the ballet's close, another full-cast finale.

TCHAIKOVSKY'S MUSIC IS highly theatrical by nature: melodies come and go, little episodes that suggest eventful choreography. *Concerto No. 2* is astounding, because Balanchine has made so much happen in it—more than most choreographers bring about in a full evening with the help of a plot—and because he has built it all with so few steps: *sauté arabesque*, *cabriole*, *tour jeté*, *fouetté* in *arabesque*, *arabesque penchée*, *jeté* in *arabesque*, turns of various types. The extent of these steps is even more limited than this list suggests, because so many of them pass through or land in *arabesque*. Of course, an *arabesque* is probably the most familiar and the most fascinating position in all ballet. It is the image of a ballerina that comes most readily to mind, the pose held by those little doll dancers in music boxes. If *Concerto No. 2* seems somehow surreal, I think it's because Balanchine has taken this ballerina insignia and rubber-stamped it all over, everywhere. Like *Diamonds* (set to Tchaikovsky's Third Symphony) and *Theme and Variations* (to the last movement of his Suite No. 3), this ballet is redolent of the Maryinsky. But the picture it presents is heightened—a caricature of classical Russian ballet that fulfills an audience's most naive expectations or the choreographer's own memories.

For a composer of such Romantic inclinations, Tchaikovsky seems to have had a fundamentally classical conscience. He was preoccupied with sonata form. What had been simply common practice among eighteenth-century composers became in the nineteenth century a blueprint by which some Ro-

mantic composers structured their own music. Unfortunately, the plan was not very well suited to building materials like Tchaikovsky's free-flowing melodies, and he perpetually struggled to reconcile classical form with his content. "All my life," he admitted, "I have been much troubled by my inability to grasp and manipulate form in music."

Tchaikovsky worshipped Mozart, whom he called "the Christ of music." In Suite No. 4, or *Mozartiana*, he orchestrated four of the master's late opuses, in order to promote them. The transcription is faithful, and the music is charming, witty, and varied, in pieces of an ideal length for dance variations. Like Tchaikovsky, Mozart wrote music to dance by. (Balanchine has choreographed this suite twice—first in 1933 and again this season for the festival.)

But the serenity and the clear-sighted wisdom that pervade Mozart's work eluded Tchaikovsky, in music and in life. Mozart, in writing operas, kept his distance: what happens onstage is an illusion, make-believe to be taken seriously. We understand this by the music and agree to play along. But Tchaikovsky seems willing—eager, even—to suspend his disbelief once and for all: there is in his ballet scores an almost desperate longing to go and live inside the music. The overture to *The Sleeping Beauty* doesn't merely describe King Florimund's realm but sets us down smack in the middle of it. Tchaikovsky bridges the distance between the stage and the audience immediately, enfolding us in the music, convincing us that the ballet is real, is actually happening. To see *Così fan Tutte* is to be an accomplice; to see *Swan Lake* is to be a witness.

It is the forthright discontent in Tchaikovsky's music that makes some people uncomfortable, slightly embarrassed. Self-pity and sadness are not the same, but the difference is perhaps too subtle, too literal, to be clear in music. Tchaikovsky certainly composed melodies of dark despair. On the other hand, he could be sanguine and forbearing. In a confidential letter to Mme. von Meck, he described the finale of the Fourth Symphony, which he dedicated to her: "There still is happiness, simple naive happiness. Rejoice in the happiness of others—and you can still live." In the ballet scores, we hear a delight in the most mundane, everyday occur-

rences; in *Nutcracker*, for instance, the guests arrive in the music, with a gust of cold air every time the front door opens. The polonaise the children dance at the party is immediately reprised, not louder but larger—given a broader instrumentation—for the adults' dance. And the snow, which by the end of the first act is a blizzard, begins with only a few flakes whorling in on the piccolos and flutes, drifting down through the registers of the orchestra to the bass. At the start of *The Sleeping Beauty's* first act, the busywork in the music informs us that the whole kingdom is making ready for Aurora's birthday party.

The legend surrounding Tchaikovsky's death—that during a cholera epidemic he drank a glass of unpurified water, came down with the disease, and died, an accidental suicide—has now come into question. According to the latest edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*: "In 1979, the Russian scholar Alexandra Orlova revealed some substantiation for the theory that the composer's death was suicide by poison, ordered by a private court of his former law-student colleagues to prevent revelation of a homosexual scandal involving the aristocracy."

In his letters, Tchaikovsky fiercely longed for a more conventional way of life; in his music, he persistently aspires to classical forms. It is when he circumvents these prescribed notions of the way music ought to be that he becomes a truly great composer—that is, in the ballet scores, fresh and unconstrained by pre-existing forms, and in his last symphony, the *Pathétique*, which the critic James Huneker in 1899 nicknamed "the Suicide Symphony," first performed nine days before Tchaikovsky's death. In it, he scraps the classical formula, which dictates that the *Adagio* fall as one of the middle movements; the *Pathétique's Adagio* comes last, draining the entire symphony of its vigor. He substitutes for a minuet, the requisite dance movement, a loping waltz in five beats to the measure (2+3), and that one beat short of true waltz time is like a missing leg. The suggestion of dancing is as pronounced in this last symphony as in the rest of Tchaikovsky's music. But here—there is no mistaking it—the dancing has the lurch and reel, the faltering step, of death. □

BOOKS

LESS IS LESS

BY JAMES ATLAS

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE
by Raymond Carver. Knopf, \$9.95.



LITERATURE IS SLOW to register its own historical moment. Only in the past few years has a literature announcing the end of the 1960s emerged. It isn't generally a literature about that decade; apart from the novels of Marge Piercy and a few scenes in Mary Gordon's *The Company of Women*, there isn't much description of the tableaux that represent the sixties: rock concerts, riots, campus demonstrations. Purposeful collective acts have given way to private anomie. The predominant mood in the novels and stories of Jayne Anne Phillips, Richard Ford, Mary Robison, Ann Beattie, and Raymond Carver—to mention five younger writers who have begun to command an audience—is indifference, depression, even criminality. Such is fiction's bleak requiem for that turbulent era.

In the midst of it, things were a lot more lively. The turmoil of the sixties provoked a certain despairing vitality in American literature. Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler, however fearful of the world's acceleration toward doom, was eloquent in his prophecies, and the voluble confessions of Philip Roth's Portnoy may well have been as inspired by the frantic, newly liberated world around him as by the memories of a claustrophobic Jewish childhood. The society generated agitation, and the novelists reflected it.

That agitation seems innocent beside the savage parables so prevalent in fiction now. The stories of Raymond Carver are rife with assault and murder, and fistfights break out with scarcely any provocation in Mary Robison's novel *Oh!* Jayne Anne Phillips's widely praised first collection of stories, *Black Tickets*, features among its characters a mass murderer, a man in a jail cell who dreams of beating up his lover, vicious drug addicts, and whores. In Richard Ford's *The Ultimate Good Luck*, three

young Americans find themselves entangled in the drug underworld of Mexico, and the bloodshed is profuse. So much for the old refrain "Give peace a chance."

What does all this violence mean? It is as if the revolutionary fervor of the sixties, thwarted in the reactionary period that ensued, had surfaced again in a different form. The blunt fury of the drifters, alcoholics, and psychopaths depicted in these works represents the same impulse once expressed in political demonstrations: a protest against a world perceived to be ever more impersonal, ever more out of control. Hostage to a volatile, dangerous technology, unnerved by the apparent randomness of fate, the bruised characters in a typical Robison or Carver story can articulate their misery only through brutal language and brutal deeds.

Still, why should characters in fiction be immune to a phenomenon one reads about in the newspaper every day? The conditions for an increased incidence of crime in fiction are the same as they are in life: a transient population, a shrinking of possibilities, the lack of a distinct cultural tradition. The lives Carver depicts are narrow, starved of context. One knows virtually nothing about these people: where they're from, what they look like, what they do for a living. They inhabit a featureless landscape. The only way for them to validate themselves is through the performance of some act—any act—that gives them the illusion of free will. In "A Serious Talk," a man visits his estranged wife and sits mutely at the kitchen table drinking vodka from a cup. "There were things he wanted to say, grieving things, consoling things, things like that"—but instead he cuts the telephone cord while his wife is on the phone. In "Tell the Women We're Going," two young married men get drunk and try to seduce a pair of girls, but end up stoning them to death. There is no motive, nothing to explain it—yet it seems plausible, a reminder that men

James Atlas, the author of *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet*, is at work on a new book.