

An account of my two-month journey, by Greyhound Bus and thumb, around the USA during its Bicentennial summer of 1976. It was a time of renewed American optimism after dark days, and the mood was strikingly different from that of the Semiquincentennial that has just passed. That said, in many ways Americans haven't changed in the past fifty years.

Gone To Look for America: June-July 1976

Toronto. At 11:30 pm on 1 June 1976, I'm sipping a coffee and waiting to board the Calgary Express Greyhound at the Coach Terminal at Bay and Dundas. Though I don't normally smoke cigarettes, I'm nervously puffing my way through a pack of unfiltered Camels. I can hardly believe my luck. I have just bought for \$200 a sixty-day Ameripass giving me unlimited travel on Greyhound buses throughout Canada and the USA. Until I handed over the cash I had no idea that the price of the pass would be rising to an unaffordable \$350 ... at midnight, thirty minutes from now.

It's America's Bicentennial Summer. Nixon, Watergate, and Vietnam are history, Gerald Ford has just defeated Ronald Reagan in the Republican primaries, and now's my chance to take a two-month leave from reality and explore my adopted continent. I'm 23 years old, I've successfully defended my Master's thesis on Sylvia Plath, and I'll start work this fall on my PhD on Emily Dickinson at McMaster University. I have no teaching duties this summer, no important relationship to tie me to Hamilton, enough money (I wrongly reckon) to subsist for a couple of months. Whenever possible, I'll sleep on the bus or camp for free in the wild.

Northern Ontario. In Sault Ste. Marie, I sit on a rock overlooking the channel connecting Lakes Superior and Huron, the ferry *Norgoma* plying in the foreground, two bridges TO THE USA in back. Sleep deprivation generates sensory overload: elephant-grey and salmon-pink rocks, lurid late spring verdancy, brilliant yellow road stripe. At Wawa, cops enter the bus at the driver's request to eject three troublemakers from the rear seats. A gnarled greyface and his travelling companion, an XXL red T-shirt over his huge beer belly, have been rowdily chugging rye and gin from paper bags. The third, a silent youth with a black beret, is not actually with them, but has an offensive smirk and arm tattoos of snakes and naked women, and that's enough. Greyface blasphemes as the cops cuff him, drag him up the aisle, then, as he won't shut up, slam his head on the doorframe as they "assist" him into the cruiser. Beer-gut calls the driver a prick as he's escorted out. The tattooed youth goes quietly. The driver asks the cops to take the trio straight from the lockup to the first westbound bus tomorrow morning, so they won't have time to tank up at the Bootleggers before continuing their journey.

At Marathon, the sun is reddened by smoke from a forest fire and the underbrush is covered by blue-green lichen, crumbling to dust underfoot. At Thunder Bay, two women my age share

memories of their wrecked marriages to a soldier and junkie respectively, of friends who have blown their heads off with shotguns or found oblivion in single-car rollovers.

The Prairies. I buy a cowboy hat for \$1 in an Amity store in Winnipeg. Farther west, the topsoil blows over the road, a dust bowl in the making. In Brandon I buy a used copy of Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*. Overheard at Summerberry, Saskatchewan: an atheist tripped over the edge of the Grand Canyon, clutching a small shrub to break his fall. He prayed to God to save him. "Only if you believe in Me," replied God. "I believe in You." "Then let go of that shrub and I'll catch you."

Near Moose Jaw, a Texan regales the driver with the true story of the Kennedy assassination. Jack Ruby was paid to silence Oswald who was on the trail of a youth-corrupting organization based in Cuba. The Cubans, with the collusion of credit card companies, seduced America's best youth into acquiring massive debt, so they could be turned into easily manipulated addicts and prostitutes. JFK was shot by a CIA agent from the railroad tracks. The Texan knows this because he was in Dallas that day and saw the mobile crane used as a platform by the gunman. Oh, and they don't want you to know that there's a new kind of cheap electricity they get by revolving a steel post in concrete. Before Swift Current, there are lightning bolts everywhere on the endless horizon, then a storm strikes so violently that the driver, unable to see the road ahead, pulls the bus over to the shoulder. "You have nothing to fear but fear itself," intones the Texan, as a large hail-battered brown animal (a cow? a deer?) is flung by a wind gust against the front of the stationary bus. After the storm has passed, branches are down, power lines toppled, flooding in the villages, trailers overturned.

Alberta. But by Medicine Hat there's no sign that it has even rained. At Banff, I camp on Tunnel Mountain, exhausted from eight hours' total sleep over three bus nights. Mount Rundle, its exposed strata lined with snow, towers opposite, and the Hoodoos, white pillars of eroded limestone, stand down in the Valley. As there's no Greyhound service along the Icefields Parkway, I hitch a ride from Lake Louise to Jasper from a tall Glaswegian accountant based in Montreal. The toe of the Athabasca Glacier is receding rapidly. I glimpse my first black bear as it vaults a roadside barrier. At Jasper Free Camp, a last resort for alternative lifestyles, aging longhairs live all summer in makeshift shelters made from Indian bedspreads and plastic sheeting. A 19-year-old from Palmers Green tells of a bear that last night ripped down a birch tree in which his food store was suspended. He listened to the bear munching in the dark while the camp dogs whimpered at a safe distance. On Sunset Cliffs, among the Indian paintbrushes, I smoke dope with a jokey Québécois and some maidens from Jasper.

British Columbia (1). We approach Prince George through a hundred miles of dense spruce. The sole highlight: two moose cows and a calf burst into a lurching run alongside the bus before plunging into the forest. R & R possibilities are limited in P.G.: a Hi-Boy Everything Burger at the Dog 'n' Suds then the Silver Pussy, not a bordello but a porn movie house. On the way to Dawson Creek: abandoned gas stations, soft shoulder dropping off into impenetrable forest,

three vehicles an hour coming the other way, the bus driver waving minimally to each passing truck while keeping both hands on the steering wheel so he's not jolted by a pothole into a head-on. Grey snow-capped mountains against a scarlet sunset sky littered with the wreckage of massive fists of cloud. Next to me, an American, shortish, slender, bearded, his head triangular, brown tapered pants, eyes like rainwater, drones on about his job (computer programming), his vocation (technical writing), his dreams (writing mystery stories). His wife is a medical student who likes to study at home when he's at work. (I mentally place scare quotes around "study.") His friends are so sensitive to each other that they often pick up the phone just before it starts to ring ...

Yukon (1). I hitch a ride from Whitehorse north up the Alaska Highway with six foot nine Warren, going to work on the pipeline for \$2,500 per month. He tells me approvingly that in Minnesota they put a spark plug attached to a coil in a car's tail pipe, and when a N*****--- wants to pass, they turn off the engine, wind the coil, and a jet of ignited exhaust gas shoots out forty feet from the back of the car like a flame thrower. He is full of Anchorage stories: how a husband beat up his new bride because she wouldn't work the streets for him on their wedding night, how muggers make you sign over your travellers' checks at gunpoint ...

Alaska. Marijuana possession is not illegal here, though importation and dealing are federal offenses. Warren hides his cassette tape box with the LEGALIZE POT sticker as we go through US customs. To Alaskans, the rest of the USA is "The Lower 48." 2,400 miles from end to end, Alaska is far bigger than its li'l bro, Texas. Hamburgers here cost \$2.70 each. I pitch my tent at Dead Man's Lake but rain washes me out and I lose my water bottle. There's no southbound traffic at this time of year, as Steve from Cleveland has discovered, having so far waited 24 hours to catch a ride to Haines. I get no farther north than Tok Junction, but I'm pleased to have dipped my toe in the Last Wilderness. After the rough gravel of the Highway through the Yukon, in Alaska it's all smooth blacktop. I take the first bus south. We swish past Steve, still waiting for a ride.

Yukon (2). Beaver Creek at the Canadian border is three motels, a gas station, and a cleared patch to land helicopters. Immigration officers at this outpost are on edge, as terrorists may be planning to use Beaver Creek as their back door to the Montreal Olympics, opening in mid-July. A rat-faced customs official goes through all my stuff and even makes me turn out my pockets. The bar at Ida's Motel is decorated with fairy lights, a flickering Orange Crush sign, a felt picture of a curvaceous moose with a big grin, and a pair of ceramic flying chickens. If you ask for a Molson Golden, the barman announces loudly to universal scorn that you are obviously from Ontario: here we only serve Labatt's Blue.

I meet Trish, a teacher of English for Yu'pik speakers in Bethel, Alaska, on her way home to New York. She makes \$1,800 per month but lives in a trailer with no running water or toilet. In the winter you fill a bucket with shit and you have to keep it warm enough to be emptied weekly.

We exchange our favourite local proper names: Destruction Bay, Alien Creek, Chicken, Eagle, and a place near Bethel called Eek. I put up my tent on pillowy muskeg a half-mile south of the border. Trish is camping nearby, and we decide to share a tent that night ... for “warmth.” Next day, we reach Whitehorse, Trish’s first big city since December. At the Robert Service Campground we erect only one tent. The weather has turned rainy and cold, and by day we keep warm by throwing rocks at ice floes on the Yukon River, eat onion soup, raisins, cheddar, diet crackers, and peanut butter. Next day at Skagway we go our separate ways.

British Columbia (2). Here in northern B.C. the Rockies seem to have been forced up by tectonic action the day before yesterday. The road hugs lurid green Muncho Lake, glacial silt somehow responsible for its unnatural colour. At Toad River the full moon, flecked with weird cloud-shapes, rises over a mountain’s grey shoulder. At the road to Pink Mountain, the snow-brushed hills look like clouds on the horizon, and the long shadows cast by the early morning sun lend a sharp clarity to the arrow-straight firebreaks through the forest. At Watson Lake, a homesick G.I. on highway construction in 1942 put up a sign saying how far it was to his hometown, and hundreds of other signs have since been placed around it in homage. My favourite is the one to Embarrass, Minnesota. The Alaska Highway was built in seven months to defend against a Japanese invasion. Now the locals fear that the Japanese are buying up all the local timber to construct fallout shelters, believing Alaskan pine to be impervious to atomic radiation. The Hart Pass is the lowest east-west pass in the Rockies, and many of the local birds are electric blue.

Near Williams Lake, the tedium of the forest is alleviated by conversation with Jason, who plans to construct a log cabin with a concrete basement for \$1,400. To raise the cash, he’s been working at a camp near Revelstoke, attaching chokers to felled logs. It pays \$50 per week, a pittance compared to Warren’s \$625 pw on the pipeline or Trish’s \$450 pw teaching English on the tundra. But he’s just graduated with a diploma in taxidermy, so things will be easier. Birds are the hardest to stuff. You have to remove the contents of the skull with a tiny brainspoon, then remove the bones from the legs and fill them with paper-covered wire. Don’t get blood on the feathers! Jason sold his first coyote for \$60, and it cost him only \$2.50 to stuff. That outlay was for the eyes, which are made of glass, are species-specific, and you get them from the same outfit that produces the course textbook. Taxidermy done right is slow as molasses running uphill in January. A black bear can sell for \$600 and a grizzly for twice that. The hunter gives the taxidermist the skin and whole head, skull, brain, and all. American hunters will pay through the nose to get their trophies stuffed, but no respectable taxidermist will work on an endangered species, because the Mounties’ll take a listed creature apart and if they find a bullet-hole they’ll confiscate it and hit both hunter and taxidermist with big fines.

Jason has great respect for bears’ intelligence. He and a friend shot a black bear once, wounding it. They followed its tracks in the snow until suddenly the prints stopped abruptly in the middle of nowhere ... The bear had backtracked some distance and had been lying in wait for them behind a rock. You better believe it: the wounded bear had gone *carefully backwards over its*

own prints. They had passed within eight feet of the hidden bear, but fortunately by then it was too weak to jump them. Experienced hunters follow wounded bears slowly, giving them chance to sit and rest, and then the animal, bleeding internally, finds it very hard to rise again.

Vancouver. Derek, with whom I'm staying in Deep Cove, comes out right away with the big family secret: two of his great-grandparents were never married. Quasi-cynical Derek and his wife, pseudo-mystical Sharon, are currently disputing the sincerity of the Findhorn settlement. Derek owns an Olde Englysshe Sweetshoppe where expat Brits satisfy their cravings for Pontefract cakes, dewdrops, dolly mixtures, floral gums, fruit pastilles, cherry lips, gobstoppers, bullseyes, aniseed balls, sherbert fountains, licorice torpedoes, jelly beans, wine gums, and snowballs. As I have long hair, straight Derek regales me with hippie-speak: the sheer variety of English candy "really blows my mind," he is "freaked out" by the precocity of his children, Sharon does things that are "so screwed up it's unreal." Sally, Sharon's American friend, looks too directly at you. Her thesis was a genetic study of Keats, she has abandoned liberalism for theology and Paul Tillich. In Stanley Park, full of geese and huge trees, a car has just slid over a precipice and ended upside down in English Bay. A Vancouver fish and chip shop has a red telephone booth outside, English football team shirts on the walls, and serves Whitbread.

Deep Cove is Malcolm Lowry territory. In *Under the Volcano*, which I'm reading, it's the Eden that the Consul wants to share with Yvonne. Lowry on Vancouver: "it has a sort of Pango Pango quality mingled with sausage and mash and generally a rather Puritan atmosphere. Everyone fast asleep and when you prick them a Union Jack flows out of the hole." Out after 36 solid hours of rain, I sit on a boulder in Cates Park. Lowry's rented shack where he wrote *Volcano* is long gone, his beloved wharf likewise. Crows flap lazily over the placid water, sailboats moored to incandescent red buoys barely rise and fall, a flag hangs limply at the end of the neat jetty, green moss softens the shingle around a little creek, clouds hang over Burrard Inlet like smoke, starlings pick their way over pebbles like old ladies with long skirts and bare feet. Lowry's [S]HELL sign is gone from the oil refinery, and the shaping mill across the bay, last trace of fire and brimstone, is about to fall into the hands of environmental vigilantes. I order tea and muffins at the Owl's Nest Tea Shop where a man with a BBC accent is talking in a loud voice about "my life in television." Near Squamish, there's a fabulous vista of mountain and blue ocean, and a bald eagle is perched nonchalantly in a roadside tree.

Sharon tells me of her cousin in South Africa who loved a man whose hand was blown off in an emerald mining accident. The cousin washed her hands carefully before dressing his wound, but he died anyway, so thereafter she wore rubber gloves and a veil permanently, retreating first to her room, then to her bed, where, as far as Sharon knows, she is still being "seen to" by an elderly aunt. For the would-be suicide, once the means is established, the act becomes inevitable. Sharon confides to me that she and Derek are incompatible, he's so boring, she's so ... unsatisfied. Time to be on my way.

Victoria, BC. The one chic bar here has a hybrid décor: Victorian/Belle Epoque with notes of Ibiza. Victoria is an urban-sized retirement community, and the last bastion (it even has a Bastion Square) of Empire. Derek's not-so-little brother Stan, with whom I crash for a night, is flying to Vancouver next day to be a co-respondent in a divorce case. His apartment's full of gourmet cookbooks and girlie magazines. Back in Deep Cove, Derek revealed that Stan's latest woman is a nympho, so poor Stan has to lose weight, 75 lbs or thereabouts, to keep up with her. I finish *Under the Volcano*: very good in parts but lacks cohesion. Last unlikely impression of genteel, lace-fringed Victoria: a police siege of perhaps the only run-down residence in town, cops with high-powered rifles crouched behind cruisers as I pass on the bus to the ferry.

Washington State. Lower 48 here we come. A fine breezy day on the *Coho*, the Olympics looming clear across the Salish Sea. A brown seal pops up in a floating patch of seaweed. The US customs officer at Port Angeles is old and deaf but waves me through quickly. By contrast, he gives Tom, a resident physician from Phoenix, a thorough going-over, infuriating him as he's trying to make a flight connection. In Seattle, Leta, starting her sophomore year at Evergreen College, Olympia, tells me, "You make your own courses there, you can even get a diploma in street-sweeping." She's been campaigning against nuclear power stations in Spokane.

Portland, Oregon. At the main Greyhound depot, one guy asks if I want to buy cocaine, another if I have any acid to sell. The call boxes here all reject Canadian dimes impassively. At the youth hostel, a gentle married couple with a small child claim to have walked here from North Carolina in six days. I work it out: if they walked twelve hours a day every day it would have taken them about two and a half months to cover the 3,000 miles. Pointless to contradict such bullshit. The warden here seems a trifle jaded. Americans seem eager to help you, but find it hard to conceal their contempt for your lack of self-reliance.

Cannon Beach, Oregon. We hit the Coastal Range, with its deep narrow ravines and red earth, at Forest Grove. Mountains, when remote, evoke utopias that evaporate as their massive solidity looms closer. For some reason my odyssey at the moment seems a displacement activity: I'm a bird preening itself rather than acknowledge the cat under the tree. Or I'm a child playing with his back to the ocean as dark clouds gather. I'm actually sitting on a white log on a grey midsummer day by a gunmetal ocean, a giant canine-tooth-shaped slab of rock offshore, topped with green vegetation and speckled with gulls. I recall Robbe-Grillet's haunting story "La Plage." I mentally start a novel: a vast expanse of beach; three figures, the middle one small and frail, swathed in a duffelcoat, supported by the other two ... no idea where it, or anything else, goes from here.

The hostel at Cannon Beach is run by a salesman turned Jesus-freak and his silent wife. Its bookshelf is full of Good News for Modern Man. I go into town and buy a copy of *The American* by Henry James. Can Hank pull off something worthy of that super-ambitious title? I have dinner with Bob, a communist from Portland heading to California to petition farmworkers. Bob

considers this hostel a conspiracy of the Presbyterian Church, in fact just about everything is a conspiracy to Bob. And don't get him started on JFK. Before communal breakfast, the warden recites a long grace, reassuring himself that the Good Lord, in His Infinite Wisdom, is pleased by His ex-salesman's life choices. As the next bus south isn't for hours, I start thumbing, only to be ticketed by a local cop for "standing on the pavement," i.e., having the toe of one shoe two inches over the white line marking the hard shoulder. When the cop learns I'm a foreigner, he reassures me the ticket's only a warning, not a felony. However, the next time I "impede a state highway," I'll have to pay a \$17 fine.

The Oregon Coast. When hitchhiking, you can psych drivers into stopping, but only on your first attempt that day. Terry, a coastguard, is going to Crescent City in his '68 Chevy pickup. This is a great coast: Pacific-pounded rockstacks, grey with green caps, curdled surf at their feet, Highway 1 dipping and swerving over creeks, gorse, foxgloves, and Queen-Anne's-lace at the roadside. At Charleston, Terry drops me at the Marine Biology Center, where undergrads at Portland U. get an immersive experience. You can leave your backpack in a shack full of pickled octopi. Coos Bay is the largest lumber port in the world. I watch fishing boats silhouetted by the evening sun, their rigging making them seem like giant mosquitoes astride the surface. To walk the beach is to scatter a thousand sand fleas at every step. Nancy, minister's daughter, apprentice marine biologist, tells me she's spiritual rather than religious. I'm not tempted to inquire further as she is very plain. Breakfast *chez* Ivan, a longhaired southerner who has rented an ancient trailer from a woman who has disappeared for the summer. Inside there's a wood stove, mobiles made from shells and driftwood, a blackboard with GONE FISHING: WRITE TO P.O. BOX 360, CHARLESTON chalked on it, bunches of rusty keys on pegs, dolls on shelves, old skillets and corn griddles hanging on the walls, curtains made of burlap, a tilted schooldesk, and a semi-resident cat.

San Francisco. The California "Fruit Customs" at the border with Oregon confiscate a passenger's bunch of grapes. We cross the Golden Gate Bridge, a waning moon over the Bay. Even the bus driver remarks on the beauty of the scene. At the downtown depot, a middle-aged black couple, he in a stetson, are having a public shouting match while transvestites sidle past. I stay at a hostel off Haight Street. Bat-eared Max Bobbitt is a 26-year-old ex-soldier from Stafford who is now a "man of letters" (i.e., a mailman) in Australia. I learn of his Italian mother, now separated from his father and insane, his twin brother, how he tried to become an army musician but failed at pipes, then at drums, finally at the flute. He has a granddad in Sydney called Sydney. He is always being ripped off, most recently by a wax museum at Fisherman's Wharf that had only ten figures, all inconsequential like Adlai Stevenson or mythical like Jesus. He insists on visiting the "wiggly street," then plans to sit in a restaurant to write postcards while ordering only a glass of water.

It's well over 100°F, the highest temperature ever recorded on this day in SF. I play sweaty soccer with some Swedes and a ginger Scot; black kids wearing woolly berets watch the

unfamiliar game with fascination. At a Japanese restaurant, Gottfried, a German anglophile, tells me that once in a pub in Keswick he met a group of former WWII parachutists who all admired Rommel more than Monty. Gottfried prefers French girls as British ones pursue men too vigorously. Little remains of Flower Power in Haight-Ashbury: a few decrepit boutiques like SHOES TO BOOT, some badly executed murals depicting naked goddesses in earthly paradises, unedifying graffiti of the SF IS COSMIC variety, fly-blown convenience stores run by Latin Americans. In the Art Museum in Golden Gate Park there's a fine El Greco of St. Francis with a knotted scourge, reading a bible propped up on a skull. In the Aquarium the seals enjoy swimming upside down, and there are moray eels, boa constrictors, and reticulated pythons, all in lively phallic motion. At a gallery in Lincoln Park, there's a highly erotic painting of a Latin tart smoking a cigarette, and a not-at-all-erotic odalisque by Ingres that I overhear someone say is the finest artwork they've ever seen. Filling the contemporary room are draped, roped forms with titles like "Image Trapped in Its Own Enigma." At the City Lights Bookstore I buy a collection of what turn out to be truly dreadful poems by Malcolm Lowry. In Chinatown I eat duck noodles at one place, then fried wonton and prawns at another: as the French say, "*l'appétit vient en mangeant*." Gottfried, *à rebours*, has taken up with Linda, an English girl who was once the only female taxi driver in Bristol and is now in the US illegally. We mistakenly enter a dyke bar full of cropped women in plaid shirts and leather pants, where the waitress slams down our pitcher in case we haven't got the message.

San Francisco is a city of sleazy romance, singles mags and soft porn in roadside vending machines. McDonald's bookshop on Turk Street is wonderful: so many books, so little time. We cannot find the International Gallery of Erotic Art, as the ad gives what seems to be a fictional address. The Greyhound depot is full of Brits from Hertfordshire off to confront bears in Yosemite. The bus driver's in a foul temper and we speed dangerously out of town. On the freeway, the sun flashes off thousands of windshields, California's daytime constellations.

Monterey, California. The bus reaches Monterey deviously, via Aromas, where no one ever gets on or off; Castroville, artichoke capital of the world, where you can buy forty for \$1; Fort Ord, the massive base of the 7th Infantry; and nondescript Seaside. Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey is very touristy, with a new underpass leading the hordes to Cannery Row. Gone are the whorehouses and squalid dives, now there's a Steinbeck theatre and a bust of the great man. There's a long walk up a hill to the one campsite in town, which turns out to be full. So I crash in the scrubby dunes with just a groundsheet and sleeping bag. In the morning, coffee at Eddy's Café, the only place open at 7:00 am on Sunday.

I'm enjoying *The American*. I wait for a bus to Big Sur, immersed in the doomed courtship of Christopher Newman and Claire de Cintré. Eventually one arrives, the first of only two outbound that day, driven by a plump girl called Meg. I get into conversation with Meg's blonde friend, currently a passenger but herself also a bus driver for the Monterey Transit Authority. When we get to Big Sur, I invite her to join me on the beach, but she says she's meeting an Apache friend

to celebrate the centenary of Custer's Last Stand. The campsite is rudimentary and there's nowhere to buy provisions. There's a circle of friendly freaks under a tree, passing around an eternal joint. I sit next to a spaced guy from Montreal whose VW camper is in a ditch somewhere ... or maybe that was last year. The subject of conversation is "wall-to-wall Winnebagos." Much later the blonde bus driver reappears ... she has come back because "it feels unfinished." The beach is beautiful, enclosed, rocky, the mountains behind look like buried pyramids, the eucalyptus trees are toothpicks for the giants who built the pyramids, and one tree has forced its way through a two-foot-thick concrete slab leaving not a crack. I have a freezing baptism in the Pacific. Anne-Marie, the blonde, is from Indiana where they make the Winnebagos, though now she's a California girl forever.

On the way back to Monterey, an oncoming Winnebago smashes the bus's wing mirror. Mike the driver is showered with broken glass through his open window and stops the bus, the car behind flashing him repeatedly. It has a puncture from the glass and its driver wants Mike to know that the Winnebago, which didn't stop, was totally on the wrong side of the white line. At the harbour in Monterey, a sea-otter among driftwood and kelp cracks an abalone shell on its stomach, a brown pelican swallows a fish whole with a few spasms of its beak membrane.

Carmel Valley, California. Anne-Marie's place is the lower floor of a wooden two-storey in an acre of land. She has a German shepherd called Phaedra. Upstairs live a sailor and his heavily pregnant wife. He's at the naval station at Point Sur, which, he likes to hint, is really an ICBM site. Anne-Marie's adoptive parents were pious Mennonites so she came west at the first opportunity. She's a qualified social worker but prefers driving bus. I'm only the third "sensitive man" she has ever met. She's had only women for ages, but is glad of the change. The edges of the day are blunted by joints, snacks, and coolers, the last of which are made according to a recipe from a local Zen monastery: beaten eggs, honey, yogurt, orange juice, and ice.

In the huge yard Anne-Marie cultivates peas and squash, while the upstairs sailor grows broccoli and marigolds to keep the rabbits off. The upstairs cat is called Clarence, and the upstairs dog has three names depending on what's she's up to: Sativa, Snaky, Mona. We make preparations for the Fourth of July People's Independence Day Bicentennial Celebration. Anne-Marie has ordered six beer kegs and we move picnic tables into place. She drives nail-bitingly fast into Salinas to pick up tortillas, red and green sauce, guacamole, tacos, enchiladas, stuffed peppers, Spanish rice, and refried beans from Rosita's Armory Café. I'll be back for the Fourth but in the meantime I have a canyon to visit.

Los Angeles. I arrive at dawn, past suburbs and down boulevards that surely don't exist in the real world. Downtown LA, however, is a few half-abandoned blocks of seedy hotels, retro diners, and dodgy drug stores. From the San Bernardino Freeway out of town there's an excellent view of the evil pall of smog lapping at the foot of the encircling mountains.

Mojave County, California. The desert is brown gravel dotted with scrub. No cacti. It's 120°F and the bus's a/c can't hack it. Fortunately I bought a water bottle in Barstow to replace the one I lost in Alaska. The landscape embodies hostility to life in any form, the road languishes into the hazy distance.

Flagstaff, Arizona. Rocky buttes and mesas, an ancient, moribund terrain you pass through to reach the high plateau. I stumble around Flagstaff, so exhausted from sleeplessness that I don't know or care where I'm going. Suddenly there's a huge explosion: a gas station I walked past a few minutes earlier has blown up. The whole town descends to examine the damage, no one knows what's behind it. A UFO crashing and burning? At the hostel, a kindergarten by day, two Germans converse loudly in the dorm as I try to sleep. Finally, like a dust storm enveloping the bus, oblivion.

Grand Canyon. This I could not miss. A white rock, mottled with orange lichen, behind it a vast wall of fawn stone, behind that an orange, then a red, then a green wall, then grey-green shale, then a deep vertical cleft, dark grey, at the bottom of which you glimpse the bright green river. A cloud sends arrows of lightning into the gorge, thunder rolls till all Nature reverberates like a bass drum. I walk awestruck along the south rim from Bright Angel Lodge to the Hermitage, watching vultures soar in the thermals below, storm clouds swallowed up in the canyon's vastness. This is the Earth Goddess at her most sublime: the Lake Poets are speechless. The loquacious driver of the little bus along the rim claims that all humanity could fit in one side canyon. The water of the Colorado River, dammed upstream, is a cool 50°F, erosion slowed and ecology transformed. The air temperature of the canyon increases 4°F for every thousand feet of descent.

Denver, Colorado. No room at the inn. At the hostel, the warden, a curt holy man, is diverting backpackers to Boulder. I've become shameless about contacting total strangers on my list of potentially crashable addresses. So: Pete Jolley, a softspoken midwesterner, is the son of the owner of a corn-mash producer from Kansas City. A business prof at U. of Denver, he's as salt-of-the-earth as James Stewart, whom he resembles, while his wife Barbara is small and feisty. They are Anglophiles with a favourite boarding house in King's Cross. They have two dogs and a cat, a huge psychedelic Dylan poster on the wall of their living room, a son who writes articles about backpacking, and a daughter about whom they do not talk. I give them an excuse to reminisce about driving their old pickup all the way up the Alaska Highway in the 1950s. *The American* was good; before I leave Denver, I buy a used copy of *The Ambassadors* for 35 cents.

The Great Plains. In Greeley, bicentennial flags are going up along Main Street. We voyage over Parkman's prairies "like a rolling sea" to Cheyenne, via numerous automobile graveyards. Not even a food store downtown, just cowboy clothiers and gun shops. Someone shouting obscenities deliberately tries to reverse into me; my long hair offends him. On the way to Laramie, bus driver A converses with another, B, who's off duty. Greyhound drivers operate out

of one centre and hardly ever get more than 250 miles from it. During their entire lives A has been as far as Butte, Montana, while B once went to Chicago. They prefer school charters to regular timetabled routes, as they're a break from routine and there are nubile chaperones they can fantasize about. So much for Knights of the Road. Here the continental divide's barely discernible in the oceanic waste of the Plains.

Salt Lake City, Utah. There's a loud, boorish group of Brits at large downtown, apprentice engineers from Stratford-upon-Avon. What would Henry James make of that?

Nevada. A barren, rocky state with just a fringe of vegetation along its dried-up riverbeds. Mike Ernst, an overgrown, excessively energetic youth from Illinois, holds court at the rear of the bus. From a fifth of Smirnoff and jug of orange juice, he mixes screwdrivers for his entourage, talking loudly about his VW camper whose engine has blown up twice. At the rest stop in Reno, Mike lets off steam by vaulting a row of parking meters.

Sacramento, California. The bus climbs from the Nevada desert up into the Sierras. The driver discourses over the PA like a tour guide: "highest mountains in North America ... pass rises to 6,000 feet ... took ten years to build." Descending into the flowers and orchards of the San Joaquin Valley is like returning to Eden. In downtown Sacramento I'm surrounded by a group of young blacks: "Hey man, this is a stick-up!" Giggling at my terrified expression, they fade away on both sides. Mike invites me to the back of the bus for hashpipe and vodka cocktails. The bus driver, hearing the revelries at the rear, jokes to the passengers, "sounds like we keep running over wild turkeys." Mike whoops every time he sees a palm tree—it's his first time in California. The passengers must all be high on secondary hash fumes as we enter the Bay Bridge from Oakland, then plunge into a pall of fog at Treasure Island halfway across.

Carmel Valley, California (2). Fourth of July. Happy 200th, USA. By one in the afternoon there are over a hundred people in Anne-Marie's yard. I meet her Apache friend, the one she stood up to meet me at Big Sur, he's wearing a T-shirt that says U.S. OUT OF NORTH AMERICA. He tells me he was recruited by the CIA who sent him to the Defense Language Institute to learn Vietnamese and be groomed as a spy. In California one drowns in bullshit and buzz words. People have an individual ENERGY so a couple must create an ENERGY BALANCE between them, but only if their DANCES mesh. Everyone's into CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING, no one quite knows how or what for. The Apache is now MELLOW enough to admit that he wouldn't get rid of *all* the whites. At dusk people drift away and we go in Meg's MG down to Carmel Beach to watch the fireworks. The ride in the back of the two-seater almost sucks out my eyeballs. But we're too late for the fireworks, so we retire to a Hungry Tiger for supper. Then to Meg's, who rooms at Pat's, Anne-Marie's former shrink. Pat has a ten-year-old daughter, Juliet, who wants to be an actress and has fun imitating my accent. I tell her *I* don't have an accent, *she* does, which causes hilarity. Juliet then brings out her extensive cosmetic collection, lavishly applying lipstick and eyeshadow.

Next day back in the Valley, an old friend of Anne-Marie's arrives. In Tahiti she got pregnant, but miscarried before an abortion was necessary. That's because, being a healthy California girl, her mind and body were so attuned that the embryo knew it was unwanted. Next day we take the empty kegs back to Seaside. Anne-Marie has never been in love with a man, though she's had infatuations for women. She smokes Thai stick, killer weed at \$12 per stick, and has no hobbies or pastimes save caring for herself, Phaedra, and her garden. Next morning she drives me too fast along Laureles Grade Road to Salinas, where I get out at a stop light near the Greyhound station. I say I'll write, but she says she probably won't reply, being "no great writer."

San Luis Obispo, California. The Salinas valley is narrow and fertile, golden hills sprinkled with green crops. On the bus from San Luis, Rick sits next to me. He's short, bearded, dark-haired, blue-eyed, wears a raffia trilby, reveals his heritage as "Irish, German, some Jewish I think." In other words, a pure-bred American. He's from San Diego, and is now en route to the Santa Ana campus of the U. of California where he's taking a course on parapsychology, Uri Geller specifically. His father died in an accident when he was in sixth grade, he's had a nervous breakdown, hasn't socialized for years, is now into conscious-raising, doesn't do drugs or alcohol ... much at all.

Los Angeles (2). We enter at rush hour from the north, so progress is glacial. Downtown at last, we take a city bus for Santa Ana, as Rick insists I accompany him to the lecture. He has the disconcerting habit of being artlessly friendly to everyone he meets, bringing smiles to the faces of some very hostile-looking people: a security guard on the RTD, a lost soul just in from Minnesota, a marine from San Clemente. The bus takes two hours on the freeway to get through LA suburbia. East LA doesn't seem to have any habitable dwellings at all, just factory estates, railroad lines, and billboards. At Anaheim, an ersatz mini-Matterhorn pokes above the Disneyland parking lots.

Santa Ana, California. We're too late for the lecture, so Rick concludes that we were not meant to attend it. Rick's closest recent relationship was a platonic one with a woman over 30 who lived with her two kids in a trailer. He likes all music without exception, as it's "just like life." He shrugs when I ask what that means. As we wait in line at the depot I notice that he's been staring intently at the San Diego Greyhound for some time. I ask him what's going on and he tells me he's just figured out that the door is on the other side.

San Diego. Rick is propositioned by a guy as we wait for a city bus near Broadway Plaza. This is always happening to him. The bus driver's a cute black lady who tells everyone that she's "just waiting for the right man to come along." We have to break into Rick's parents' house in Kensington as there's no one home and the screen door is locked. Rick heats up some lasagne from the fridge, then we crash on the veranda. Rick's stepfather wakes us up; his mother never

appears. Rick claims to get on fine with both parents, but not a trace of warmth on stepdad's part is evident.

The zoo in Balboa Park has the widest collection of animals in the world. There are tree kangaroos, Przewalski's horses, aardvarks, three kinds of zebra, a couple of okapis, several tapirs, and a large family of orang-utans. The Art Museum must have the largest collection of eighth-rate Old Masters on Earth. We then drive down to the beach at La Jolla. There we watch pubescent girls flaunt their emergent secondary sexual characteristics in the surf. With some friends that Rick has just met, we go to The Halcyon, a local meet market, reeking of adolescent lust. One girl there just loves my accent and wants me to "say things." Later I discover Rick meditating in the parking lot. We go back to his parents' house but now it's locked up tight, no one answers the door, and we have to sleep on the lawn at the side of the house.

Phoenix, Arizona. The bus leaves behind the hot, bleak, rocky hills of the southern Sierras, the road levelling out into a flat, hostile wilderness relieved only by sparse roadside saguaros. Before Yuma there's an area of pure sandy desert where nothing grows, and then we cross the Colorado River, a mere creek thanks to the dams upstream. It's 116°F outside, so at the rest stop we're confined to the airconditioned depot. As we approach Phoenix there are surreally bright green patches in the khaki landscape, where crops are cultivated under ceaseless, intense irrigation.

Phoenix is a sprawling city built last week with no downtown to speak of. From the depot I call Tom, the medic I met in Seattle. My timing is good, his woman's away, he's looking for some action. He's in his last postgrad year, preying (as he puts it) on the Arizona nursing home circuit. He has a fridge full of Coors, a beer claiming to be "brewed with Rocky Mountain spring water" and now selling big in the East. In Phoenix at this time of year, where the temp never drops below 95°F, any ice-cold beer tastes great, and all American beer tastes the same at any time of year.

We drive out into the desert to view the highest fountain in the world, spouting punctually at 1:00 pm daily. I get to inspect cacti up close. The saguaro is a surreal beast, ancient and disturbing, each limb taking a century to form, sprouting from the main stem at man-height, some of them hollowed-out with birds' nests or rotten with ants. You'd need a machete with a long handle to get the water out of a barrel cactus; they rip bare flesh to shreds. Avoid the jumping cholla: touch it and a small spiky ball leaps off and embeds itself in your flesh. People around here die every day in broken-down vehicles at the roadside, there's simply no shade. I wear my Winnipeg cowboy hat outside at all times. Dick van Dyke has built his house on a craggy eminence in North Cave Creek, in the self-styled Most Beautiful Desert in the World. In the evening Tom wants to go Formula One racing, but my quaint red British driving license isn't good for that so we go go-karting instead, then play fussball. You make sun tea in Phoenix by leaving a teabag in cold water in full sunlight; it's delicious. Good times in the desert!

Texas. Every male on the bus—or “car” as they call it down here—cannot take his eyes off a compact sensual Latina sitting across the aisle from me. She’s a cocktail waitress on her way back to boyfriend and mamma in Fredericksburg. She resists any association with Mexico (“I’ve visited but I wouldn’t want to live there”), feels there are way too many Mexicans in San Antonio, way too many blacks in Houston. She’s 5’ 2” but looks six inches taller in her heels, and at 21 she’s the oldest of five sisters, two of whom are already married. Travel makes you horny as a toad, and, as it happens, The Horny Toad is the name of the bar at the next rest stop. At the stop after that, the waitress at the counter, with a frigid stare straight out of *The Last Picture Show*, tells me “there ain’t no fries,” though there are three trays piled high with them on the shelf behind her. You feel hostility everywhere, Texan faces scream “Go fuck yourself, hippie scum!” without a word being said. I had planned to make a side trip to Mexico City, but decide against it: it’d be out of the frying pan into the fire.

Lake Charles, Louisiana. At the depot I wake up just as the driver is calling the cops to remove a young black from the bus for not having a ticket. Seven cops show up, all barrel-chested, trigger-happy, slapping their thighs with their nightsticks. The black, an off-duty soldier, is in tears as he’s dragged off the bus. “All it’s made me,” says the driver to no one in particular, “is late.” This is the Deepest South, the interstate taking flying leaps over bayous and swamps, until, just before Baton Rouge, it vaults the Mississippi itself. A country palustrine and epiphytic, and, so far as race relations are concerned, irremediable.

New Orleans. We enter via the flat reaches of Lake Pontchartrain, a landscape that doesn’t even hint at the proximity of a large city. The Head Inn is a scruffy dive on Chartres Street where you can sleep on the balcony for \$1.50. I sit on the Moon Walk, watching the brown Mississippi surge by. I have just seen an Altman film, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, the timing of whose Bicentennial release cannot be accidental. Bill was a bewigged drunken buffoon, his vaunted marksmanship was a con, he used shot, not bullets. New Orleans, by contrast, is nothing if not authentic. Buster Holmes’ restaurant is famous, but it’s dirty and the service is sullen. Still, you can get a fine breakfast of ham, egg, and grits there for \$1.40.

Down Esplanade Avenue past Degas’s house in the sweltering heat to the Art Museum for a Munch exhibition. Tubercular girls, red-haired vampires, reflections of the moon in water that resemble phalluses or crucifixes or both, the three stages of Eternal Woman, lonely men in rooms where the carpets are covered with blood, neurotic maidens the moment after they’ve been deflowered, etc., etc. Munch’s crude portrait of Strindberg has the sitter’s name misspelt as STINDBERG: a put-down, or just carelessness? There’s a photo exhibition, “Ghosts of Louisiana,” of crumbling plantation architecture entangled in malevolent vegetation. Some modernists on show actually infuriate me: Kandinsky, Klee, Chagall, Dufy, repeating their empty gestures ad nauseam. I retreat to a bench in the park to calm myself with a chapter of *The Ambassadors*. In Cemetery #3, a new surface mausoleum is being constructed called “The

Resurrection”; a nearby billboard warns you that front row seats for the Last Judgement are *GOING FAST!* On Esplanade I buy some plums that taste, deliciously, of death. And eating these plums shocks me out of morbidity. Death alone lends life its fullest savour ... why did I not know this?

At the Greyhound depot Gilles bums a cigarette from me. He’s a French ex-commercial traveller who’s gone on the road for real. His English is worse than my French, which is saying something. We go to a bar in the Vieux Carré for an absinthe *frappé*—I don’t at first believe that the green fairy is legit in N.O.—then I translate for him what the rednecks on the patio are saying about their guns. Gilles thinks American girls are “very big,” and asks why so many stores sell *bijoux* in N.O. *Qui sait?* We take the free ferry across the tawny Mississippi to Algiers. It’s a rundown black suburb, where we eat watermelon on some church steps, sheltering from a downpour that has the streets under water in five minutes. We’ve heard that Resto Vaucresson is excellent but can only find the Café Creole. It’ll do: stuffed crevettes, crawfish bisque, jambalaya. There are plenty more French tourists about: we get into a lively argument with some on Bourbon Street about the dimensions of the Grand Canyon. Aside from New Orleans Gilles doesn’t much like the USA—he wants to go to South America.

Tallahassee, Florida. I sleep as the bus passes through the rumps of Mississippi and Alabama, wake up at Pensacola in the Florida Panhandle. I phone Mrs. K., known to her daughter as The Bitch, but who is superfriendly to me and more than happy to pick me up at the depot in Tallahassee. Her husband, a prof at Florida State U, looks a bit like Henry Kissinger, and is also very pleasant. Iced tea and martinis round the pool! Their younger daughter is temporarily managing a cemetery, and tells me I’ll be sleeping among the dead tonight. She explains (privately) that I’ll definitely want to sample some of her graveyard-grown weed.

Daughter and I, accompanied by two German shepherds, visit two alligators on the other side of the cemetery’s chainlink perimeter fence. The reptiles, excited by the dogs, leap up and gnash wildly at the fence. They can accelerate from torpid stasis with such terrifying speed that we and the dogs wouldn’t stand an earthly without that fence. After we sample the weed, Ms. K. leaves, and I crash on a mattress usually used by the German shepherds ... with an unpleasant consequence that I don’t discover till later in Atlanta. Back at the K.s next day, more poolside cocktails, cheese grits, and fried mullet. Then Mrs. K. drives me to the depot so I can catch the midnight bus for Miami.

Miami. On the coast road every usable piece of land is built upon or about to be. We go through West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, then up on an elevated expressway through the megalopolis of Miami. Downtown is quite run down; who wants to stay at a Hotel Detroit voluntarily? Cubans abound, so I sample some *pollo y arroz amarillo con plátanos* at a cafeteria with the menu written all over the walls. *¡Muy bien!*

Key West, Florida. The seascape and sunset are spectacular from Highway 1. We pass the mangrove swamps of the Everglades, then sawgrass marsh, then we're on the Keys with their scrub vegetation. On Key Largo I meet Anders (Swedish, 20) and we plan to camp at Key West. But at the town limit there's a sign saying THERE ARE NO CAMPING FACILITIES. I find us a double room in a motel for \$3.50 each. At a seafood place in town we eat turtle steak, black beans, and rice, and wash it all down with burgundy. When it's dark we trespass on to the nearest beach and swim in the bathwater ocean, behind "The Southernmost Hotel in the Continental US". Then we solve the problems of the world in the bar until three in the morning, drinking and smoking Camels.

Delightful Key West is a true fishing port with Bahamian architecture, wooden balconies, a dry dock, bougainvillea, palm trees, huge non-spiny cacti, turtle kraals, and needle gars in the lucid shallows. Anders says, "This is the life, I would like to live here." I wonder what's it like in winter. Hemingway's house is swarming with tourists and overrun with cats, more than fifty six-toed descendants of Papa's Snow White. That evening the State Park campground outside town is full so we have to tramp to a private one along busy Hwy 1, no shoulder. It's a ridiculous \$6 per night and I struggle in vain to knock tent pegs into rock-hard coral. The woman offers us a box of "special" pegs, but as they require a "special" mallet, we ask her for a refund—and she gives us one! So far so good, but there's a \$25 fine for unauthorized camping on the Keys. So we hitch a ride north from a gay guy in a '67 Cadillac convertible. He's from Cleveland and tells us he's very close to his sister who works at Disney World and who's always trying to straighten him out with one of her Orlando girlfriends. Is there much of a gay scene in Stockholm? I become loquacious, talking about everything but sexual preference. He drops us pettishly in Miami at 11:00 pm, and I hop on the first bus northbound.

Atlanta, Georgia. I wake up near Jacksonville, the bus heading for Georgia. The I-95 scenery is just billboards, motels undercutting each other, rooms \$6 single, \$10 family, endless Howard Johnson's with red roofs and green spires, all the fried clams ya kin eat for \$2.99. But the interstate ride is so smooth I can read on the bus. Problems finding affordable lodging in Atlanta, as I'm close to broke and need to stay here so I can get some cash wired to the American Express. Finally, a Y with a room for \$4.60, very high ... and it's in the black part of downtown. I feel they should have warned me on the phone, then realize how ridiculous I am to think that.

The Y is decrepit, prison-style steel grilles everywhere, an elevator that only works with a key. But the desk is sympathetic to my racial plight and gives me a double room to myself. There's a guy in the hallway who tells me to stay cool as there are folks here who don't like whites but he's not one of them as he met this white guy awhile back who was real cool, really together, man, and though he'd never been down on a white guy before as he wasn't into that (though he wasn't against it either) he sure as hell went down on that white guy, man he was cool ... I excuse myself, briefly check out the room—peeling white walls, ramshackle green blind over the

window, empty coke bottles on the table, crumpled kleenex under the beds. I leave the Y, go down Coca-Cola Place (this is Atlanta), eat a hot dog at the Baptist Student Union, then regain my room at the Y, lock the door, draw the green blind. It's when I strip to get into bed that I notice ... *bugs in the bush*, the legacy of that mattress in Tallahassee! I'm now in a panic ... hot, heavy Georgia night, wrong side of the tracks, naked, pubic hair infested with tiny blood-sucking wingless insects, there's a loud banging on the flimsy door that goes on for ten minutes ... I do not pass a restful night.

In the morning I walk along Peach Tree Street, past tall hotels, Roman Baths offering "Love Tussles," 18+ admission. I have only a couple of dollars left but the drugstore can't wait. "Do you have anything to get rid of fleas?" "D'ya mean, in a room ...?" "No, on me!" The pharmacist, rolling his eyes, retrieves a box of flea powder from under the counter and hands it to me in the tips of his fingers.

Greensboro, North Carolina. Amex had \$50 for me before I left Atlanta, should keep me going for a week or so. The end is nigh. Sue from Putney is round-faced with glasses and has large breasts. She's travelling with mousy Rosemary, also from London, who never says a word. Sue, training to be a lawyer, is envious of my Canadian residency, speaks RP, and tells me approvingly that I don't sound as if I come from Manchester. She asks the black cafeteria waitress for some chips to go with her burger and, when the waitress apologizes for not having any even though there's a vat of freshly cooked fries in front of her, wonders what's causing the "communications breakdown." I say I have no idea.

Washington, DC. I walk to the Capitol, view Trumbull's patriotic canvases in the rotunda under the dome: Cornwallis surrendering at Yorktown, the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Stirring statuary from Jefferson to Huey Long. I flash my sturdy blue British passport for admission to the House of Representatives, adopt a humble mien, as here, and not the neo-Gothic confection by the Thames, is the cradle of one's liberty these days. The House tediously and illogically debates a bill to stimulate employment now the economy's "on the upswing." Legislators half-heartedly spew party lines: "thanks to the tough policies of the Ford administration I can confidently state" Thence to the Senate, VP Nelson Rockefeller presiding. A letter from the President is brought in by a schoolgirl dressed in an ill-fitting trouser suit, presumably to deter senatorial upskirting. Ex-VP Hubert Humphrey, D-Minnesota since the Stone Age, leans languidly on his historic desk trying to stay awake. No other recognizable faces, topic of debate impossible to discern.

To the Folger to see the "Bard in America" exhibit: etchings of Edwin Booth as Hamlet and Charlotte Cushman's Farewell to the Stage. I sit in on a "Muse at Midday" poetry reading in the Globe Theatre mockup, poems all execrable. Then briefly to the Supreme Court (just to say I've been) and on to the National Gallery. Good examples of most of my faves: Quattrocento Italian masters, Raphael, Titian, Leonardo, Ingres, Poussin, Claude, Rembrandt, Courbet, Turner, Monet

... my taste is nothing if not conservative. If I thought Sue from Putney dim for not knowing what *chips* means in America, I'm not much brighter myself: I didn't realize that Americans don't know what a *queue* is (they do line up, of course), and only use *yards* as a measure in NFL and golf. The Science Museum is bursting with unassimilable info about bridge-building, the internal combustion engine, old typewriters. At the Natural History Museum there's a stuffed elephant, a brontosaurus skeleton, the Hope Diamond, and some moonrock. There's also an exhibition of neon signs and a photograph of oil sheiks eating big Macs in one of the Trucial States, its décor identical to the McDonald's around the corner here. Under a tree by the Potomac, in the long shadow cast by the Washington Monument, I read some more of the *Ambassadors*.

At the Hirschhorn is a congeries of modernists, Calder and Klee, Kandinsky and Miró, nothing in them to salve our need for beauty skilfully rendered. Just clumsily executed wallpaper. Douanier Rousseau was a naïve amateur wilfully misread as a radical pioneer. Gauguin had something, though: I love those half-naked women with the mango blossom. There's a special exhibition showing how Americans came to define themselves visually: bare-breasted Liberty, plain-spoken country cousin whittling sticks, etc. No mention of Emily Dickinson anywhere. The new Air/Space Museum opened on the Fourth and is magnificent, with its WWII warplanes, Apollo capsules, and interactive displays that work. The Aquarium has a painted carp given to Nixon by the Japanese Emperor, and piranhas. Ridiculous, all these museums in one day! This summer I missed Habitat in Vancouver, the Bicentennial fireworks in Washington, the Democratic Convention in New York, and the Olympics in Montreal. But I don't feel as if I've *missed* anything at all.

Philadelphia. Past Baltimore's brick terraces, reminiscent of Coronation Street. Later we lurch over the Delaware near Veterans Stadium where the Phillies are playing their state rivals, the Pirates. Overhead six planes skywrite GREAT ADVENTURE. I call the operator to locate the address of a S. Lee but she says there are hundreds. I make a lucky guess and get hold of Steve, a former fellow grad student at Mac who lives in Schuylkill Drive and has just been laid off from a factory. His parents, still not good with English, came from Hong Kong eight years ago, and only his mother has become an American citizen. There's nothing like democracy in H.K., yet most people are happy. But papa's business was on the rocks and it was time for a fresh start.

We go for a beer downtown at a bar called San Francisco East, then visit the actual Cradle of Liberty. The old Bell's behind plate glass, and the Brits have just cast the US a new, uncracked one as a birthday present. We take a frightening ear-piercing ride on an ancient subway train through the Allegheny district. Few of sound mind ride the Philly subway after 6:00 pm. There's a Rodin museum on Ben Franklin Parkway with the works: Thinker, Burghers of Calais, Age of Bronze, Cathedral, Martyr, Gates of Hell, busts of Mahler and Shaw, monstrous head of Balzac, Balzac as demented penguin. At the Art Gallery there's the Large Glass by that con artist Duchamp, good medieval Italian stuff, and lovely rooms lifted from Europe including a cloister

from a French monastery. I catch the Greyhound on the Delaware Bridge in the morning rush and we crawl through most of New Jersey.

New York City. On the twelve-lane Jersey Turnpike, the Trade Towers loom twenty miles away across the Hudson flats, power stations, chemical works, storage tanks, marshes. At the Port Authority I get the IRT uptown to Larry's on 125th St. He's not working, his girlfriend's away, my cousin Gertrude's in DC. My only US relative, she was just fired for missing work too often, her fault, she has breast cancer. New York noises as I crash: kids playing basketball, the elevated trains on Broadway a block away.

Next day I take the subway to 42nd St. to book my seat for *The Belle of Amherst*, Julie Harris's one-woman Emily Dickinson show. At the Morgan Library, I admire the facsimile of J.P.'s study, his Old Masters casually spaced on the walls, his silver paper knife and magnifying glass, his superb chairs and expensive bindings. A bus to 61st St. to catch a couple of Lina Wertmuller movies at a \$1.50 house on First Ave. A female director does male-oriented eroticism: women brutalized into submission, gently melting lovers, a butch Nazi she-wolf seduced by a stereotypical Italian Romeo. Heavy-handed irony or sell-out? Walk crosstown for Chinese-Spanish special soup. Old men sit in cigarette-butt-covered parks, blacks street-dance in front of grocery stores, the bookstores are full till 9:00 pm. Strangers ask me continually for time and directions. There have been three murders and at least one male rape in the past two weeks in Central Park. By the pond at the south end, a guy with drumsticks is sitting on a rock and playing it like a drumset. He has short red hair, wears a blue denim jumpsuit, and is seriously focused.

Next day, I take the bus at St. John the Divine for Fifth Avenue and the Met Museum. In the Early Italian Renaissance gallery, the Sienese Virgins have Byzantine-style slanting eyes. In the Quattrocento, it seems that Giotto's and Cimabue's lessons were unlearned. A special exhibition of 100 American masterpieces: luminous landscapes, trappers in canoes, placid lakes. Also eight Goyas including both Majas on loan from the Prado. El Greco's vision of St. John preempts Picasso's Blue Period, not to mention Cézanne and Munch. Burne-Jones' women are fuel for infatuations; a beautiful blossoming orchard and a Seine scene in purple and magenta by Monet. All too much to take in. Down as far as 8th St. in the Village but too much trash jewellery on show.

Subway uptown to see *The Belle*. Was Emily quite as sane as that? Julie Harris understands the poems well, though is a trifle over-declarative. I liked the scenes when Emily tries to get her poems published as she wrote them. Luce captures Emily's fascination with words; she "takes her hat off to the way they sit up on the page." The audience was moved. Perhaps now there'll be a rush on Emily as there was on Sylvia. Times Square is the centre of the world all right. Meanwhile, Larry is in Connecticut; his stated pleasure at hosting me probably derives from not having to see me. As a freeloader, I have tried to be easy to please and a stickler for house rules.

The bus pulls out of the Port Authority, creeps up Tenth Ave. and through Harlem. I sit next to a Frenchman who says not a word all the way to Massachusetts.

Boston. Impossible to find affordable accommodation. Wondering if I should just give up and go to Buffalo, I wander aimlessly. At McDonald's, all I can afford, I'm joined by Sepla, a West Indian who plays in a reggae band. Keeps talking of ganja, offers me a place to stay, I follow him fatalistically to South Boston, where we sit on a step while he goes through my things. "Do you trust me?" he asks. "Can I have some money, just as a loan, just to score?" I have \$27 left, I say I have \$7, which he then demands. He's taken me for a ride, fearing what's next I leave abruptly, hoping the pouring rain'll make him reluctant to follow. I'm an idiot to have put myself in this situation, and get thoroughly drenched for my stupidity.

Schenectady, New York. A terrible sense of an ending that's been with me since Atlanta. I can't face Buffalo, prefer to wait four hours at the depot here for a bus to Montreal, just don't want this to be over. Read *Daisy Miller*, and find that Daisy hails from ... Schenectady! Nice trip through the Adirondacks once past Animal World and Storyland at Lake George. No hassle at the frontier, but I'm more than a little sad: *au revoir*, America, you are fucking crazy but you are ... amazing! The Quebec Townships south of the St. Lawrence are delightful, bicycling women and poplar-lined avenues.

Montreal. The Olympics are still on, though aside from a few banners you wouldn't know it. To Hugh and Dimmy's, but they've moved. The occupants give me their new address and I take over their mail and some beer. Dimmy says she's slimmer and healthier than Christmas 1974, and cooks better too. But my pass is running out. At the bus depot there are hordes lining up for the overnight to Toronto, including some boisterous lads from Manchester. A sleepless night on the 401, the driver going much too fast through thick fog.

Toronto. The morning of 31 July. I satisfy the unities of place and action by breakfasting at the same spot where I bought coffee two months ago. Practically have to fight to get on the Hamilton Express. Can't see the attraction. I sit next to a fat guy who works as a kitchen hand at McMaster Faculty Club. Small world. At home in Hamilton, I slowly figure it out: I covered 17,209 miles and didn't get killed. Worth every cent.