



Deep subjectivity : Harold Bloom

AUTHOR(S)

Cassandra Atherton

PUBLICATION DATE

01-01-2007

HANDLE

[10536/DRO/DU:30023033](#)

Downloaded from Deakin University's Figshare repository

Deakin University CRICOS Provider Code: 00113B

Deakin Research Online

This is the published version:

Atherton, Cassandra 2007, Deep subjectivity : Harold Bloom, *Writing on the edge : a journal about writing and teaching writing*, vol. 17, no. 2, Spring, pp. 1-9.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30023033>

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that permission has been obtained for items included in Deakin Research Online. If you believe that your rights have been infringed by this repository, please contact drosupport@deakin.edu.au

Copyright: 2007, University of California.

“Deep Subjectivity: Harold Bloom”, in the University of California’s *Writing on the Edge*, Spring 2007: 31-41.

*Most kids have posters of rock stars or actors on their bedroom walls; I have pictures of Harold Bloom. After reading *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, I devoured everything he wrote. *The Western Canon* is my favourite book and I subject my students in *Literary Classics at The University of Melbourne* to many chapters of his work and wit. He says he comes out of the Northrup Frye tradition and I tell everyone that I come out of the Bloom tradition. I bloomed with Bloom. I can barely believe that he has granted me this interview on the basis of one email I sent in my lunch break, an email I never expected would be answered. Surely Bloom was too important and too busy to make contact with an Australian academic and self-professed Bloom-groupie. His publication record is formidable; his internal library is one akin to the Royal Library of Alexandria. He can quote from millions of different sources and makes incredible web-like connections between them, substantiating his view with more quotations from the primary texts. His emphasis on the texts themselves and his defence of 19th century Romantic poetry is what I find most appealing. And of course, who can resist his controversial comments about Feminist, Marxist, New Historicist, Post-Modernist critiques of literature and other forms of academic criticism which are daring, often titillating? If Bloom is denounced as elitist, then I find myself allying myself with him; there is indeed a hierarchy in literature and I’m interested in reading the best: I only have one lifetime. I could fill a page with his credentials but his life’s work has culminated in two incredibly elevated positions in academia. Bloom is currently a Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University and Berg Professor of English and American Literature at New York University.*

*So I am staying in Boston when I purchase my ticket to New Haven at Back Bay station. The train ride seems a lot shorter than it actually is as I check my tape recorder dozens of times and silently rehearse my questions. When I get to New Haven I hail a taxi which takes me to his house (he also has an apartment in New York). It is cold but I am hot, sweaty and nervous in my pink parka. My backpack is full of all the books I want him to sign and it weighs me down. Bloom lives in a gingerbread house and as I walk up to the door, classical music wafts out through the doorjamb. After he greets me and takes my jacket, Bloom tells me that he is having surgery in the next few days. He looks quite well but I can see that he is a little stressed and preoccupied, that is, until I begin asking my questions and he becomes animated and charismatic. His wife is in the lounge room reading, I suspect she’s there to ascertain whether or not I am an antagonistic postmodernist. She leaves when she realises I’m not and he takes me into sit at the kitchen table. He gives me a copy of *Where Wisdom is Found* and politely signs my bag full of his books. Then I sit, perched on the edge of my seat and begin asking my questions.*

CA. I never get tired of hearing how much you love teaching, your passion for teaching.

HB. I still do. I have a new semester starting at Yale next week. At Yale, if you’re a full professor, you teach five semesters in a row and then you get a semester off to do your own work and I was out for a year with an open-heart operation and a bad reaction to it. But since then I’ve taught five semesters, two and a half years, so I have this term off and I’ll turn seventy-six next July but I will come back next September and begin another five terms and one term off cycle. And then I’ll have to make a decision about the one after that because I will have turned seventy-nine and I don’t think there is any precedent for anybody quite that old continuing to teach at Yale. Perhaps there is but I don’t know. I don’t think I used to be a very good teacher because I talked too much. But now in old age I don’t have the driving energy that I used to have and I’ve found that in this last semester in particular, even though occasionally I would come home on particular days and say to my wife Jean, “I wasn’t very good today.” or something like that. In general I think just that sheer lack of overdrive had begun to help me as a teacher. I was much more patient in asking questions and not just answering them myself.

CA. You've said you also find that you bring a lot of yourself and that you can be very personal when you're teaching...

HB. I am unfortunately an extremely personal writer, as you know. And I've been denounced as an instance of what is called the 'personalist heresy' but I really don't know what they are talking about because as I have frequently said in print and out of it, objectivity, in what calls itself literary criticism, is always shallow and superficial. Each subjectivity takes you a lifetime to authentically establish and only I think what arises out of a deep subjectivity can ultimately be of use to anyone.

CA. I think students find that really appealing though if you are willing to give a bit of yourself and talk about your own experiences they are more trusting...

HB. I'm afraid in my case I give rather too much of myself but no it is a definite consideration. (Harold's wife, Jean, comes home at this point.)

Oh you're holding up pretty well. I was worried about her because she went off to see the doctor. You're back. Did you take that pill?

I'm a terrible worrywart.

Also you see me a little more jumpy than usual because next Wednesday, though I'm assured as a friend in New York who is a doctor said "Think of it as a tune-up, not even as a procedure, let alone an operation." But my heart has a flutter now and it beats too slowly so they are going to take me in overnight next Wednesday and give me a pacemaker.

CA. When can you come home from that?

HB. Well I hope, if no complications develop, I will be away from my wife for only one night, Wednesday, and they'll let me home on Thursday. I think that is standard now and I think with a pacemaker.

CA. I want to ask you why you think the teaching profession is so often maligned. In Australia teachers aren't always well respected.

HB. Australia is a very strange country for one thing. I know this only from a distance as I have never been in Australia and.... at my advanced age I rather doubt that Jean and I will ever get on an airplane again, let alone go back to Europe, let alone go off to the ends of the earth.

I do know a lot of Australian novelists. Elliot Perlman, whom we know, my wife and I, in New York together with his young lady Deborah, and a very nice man Peter Carey, Kinsella, Keneally who is very nice. I did not know of course the best of the Australian novelists, Patrick White. I still think *Riders in the Chariot* is the best novel to come out of Australia but I get the impression from talking to Kevin Hart, who couldn't take it any more and left Monash to go to Notre Dame and from what John Kinsella tells me and others that there's been a displacement from what was already bad, which was all those horrible Leavisites with their horrible moralisings about literature they have been replaced by my enemies, what I call the six-fold school of resentment: pseudo-feminists, pseudo-Marxists, not real Marxists and the whole French gang, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan etc.etc. and now of course we have the sexual orientationists, the queer theorists and the closet theorists and I gather that all of that claptrap has replaced Leavisitism and if I was in Australia I wouldn't much like the teaching profession either. If that's all they had. There must be a fair amount of that at Melbourne?

CA. There's certainly some of that.

HB. Chris Wallace-Crabbe wouldn't be like that?

CA. No not at all. But he is now at The Australian Centre, a little removed from the department.

HB. I don't feel removed from the department at Yale. First of all because I removed myself. Thirty years ago I left the English Department and got re-appointed by the corporation Bloom Professor of

Bloom. I don't have colleagues and I just give classes and I stopped teaching graduate students a couple of years ago.

CA. Why?

HB. I decided at my age I was something of a dinosaur and that if I could do anyone any good it would be undergraduates. So I gave two undergraduate seminars each semester. One on Shakespeare and one in the art of reading poetry.

CA. I am always interested in the way people say their teaching informs their writing. Do you find that?

HB. I think in my case I've written thirty books and I must have written by now 1500 introductions and god knows how many forewords and introductions. Everything I have ever written is more a product of teaching than the teaching is a product of the writing. I think I am primarily a teacher and whether I read, write or teach I am doing the same thing.

CA. Yes I agree with that but many people would argue especially...

HB. But I don't agree with the social value, in the immediate social value of literature or teaching or writing about it. I think that always produces a disaster. I mean look at the wretchedness of the United States. First we had the counter-culture which has now pretty much become the official culture that in turn provoked a terrible reaction on the part of the south and the west and that is why we now have... I mean I know there are worse monsters in the world than George W Bush. There is the dictator of North Korea, there is the President of Iran, there are all these Ayatollahs and so on and so forth. But of any so-called democratic nation none of them has a monster as atrocious as George W Bush. And in the end I think he is partly the product of the national revulsion against what I would call my former profession. I would think that in Australia too there'll be a backlash and you will get a right wing national regime unless you have one already. There was a very nice man who I think has now left office. He used to write me very nice letters because he read my books. He was the premier of NSW. He seemed very, very educated. I think he's left office now.

CA. Was it Bob Carr?

HB. But I think he's left office now.

CA. Yes he has.

HB. He is very literate. Very, very literate. I think it is a great shame because Australian literature has really been very eminent. To have had Judith Wright, Alec Hope, Les Murray can be very difficult personality. We have had our moments but still he is a very powerful poet. John Kinsella I think is potentially a great poet. To have had a novelist as great as Patrick White and Malouf is very good.

CA. I like Malouf. The strange thing is that so many Australians love Tim Winton. He's not one of my favourites.

HB. He doesn't do anything for me. Peter Carey is very funny and very good and I like Perlman, this new fellow.

CA. He's good.

HB. The one called *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a wonderful novel.

CA. One of his books has been made into a film

HB. I didn't know that.

CA. I read that when you were teaching at Yale on Thursday that you would all read Shakespeare together. I wondered what that entailed because it sounded marvellous.

HB. Well, what I like to do, I do it less often now than I used to, but I used to when I had more stamina both in the core I tend to teach one class in the reading of poetry. Thus I'll go back next Fall and Spring and in the fall term Shakespeare's histories, comedies and poems and in the spring term I usually do a course in the four twentieth century poets writing in English who most impress me. William Butler Yeats, D.H. Lawrence, Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane. I try sometimes to tell the students 'Instead of reading a particular play for next week pick out one of the following groups of passages and sit down in a room by yourself when nobody else is around and just keep reading it out loud to yourself out loud until you really understand it and you will find that involuntarily you have mostly memorised it.' And I tell them to do that with poems like Tennyson's 'Ulysses', Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' or Keats 'To Autumn.' Memorising by rote of course, Cassandra dear, is no good for anyone but memorising that comes out of deep reading and reading out loud to yourself so that you are really struggling with something that finds you and won't leave you. That, I think, does a great deal for people because to a considerable extent I think the proper use of the best imaginative literature has a great deal to do with memory. (I'm just getting rid of this. Removes jumper. I'm what they call Coumadin, a blood thinner...)

I have found that what I have never been able to do though because it embarrasses them too much I always, when I am teaching a particular poem or some parts of a passage of Shakespeare, I recite them out loud to the class, usually by memory, and what I am really tempted to do is to ask one of the young women or the young men there to read it out loud but then they get too shy.

CA. They do.

HB. It seems better not to get them to do it.

CA. It's good if you can get them to read it out loud at home or somewhere private though.

HB. I think I've got them to cultivate that a great deal.

CA. It's a great thing especially with Shakespeare which should be read out loud.

HB. It think all poetry, no matter how deeply reflective...It's astonishing what happens when you recite Tennyson's 'Ulysses' to yourself. I find it enters into my head all the time, sometimes rather sadly.

Though much is taken, much abides.
And though we are not now that which we were
That which we are we are
When equal temper of heroic hearts
To strive to seek to find and not to yield.

There's a kind of sadness there. Ulysses who speaks it is about to go on his last voyage is old.

CA. Many students that I teach at university say they were turned off the selection of classics at high school or that they don't read. How do you get students to love the classics?

HB. Well I have noticed through the years at Yale and I have taught fifty-one years here now, I've noticed that the students read much less, even when a lot of them are the sons and daughters of my former students, and I get a lot of that now. In one case I even had the granddaughter of a former student. But that was because in my second year that I taught here when I wasn't more than twenty-five or so there were some lady graduate students of twenty-nine or thirty. I was walking out of a class a year ago and I looked at a young lady and I said, "Why do you look so familiar?" I said, "I must have taught your mother." She said, "No Professor Bloom it was my grandmother." I got so staggered I said, "Would you mind if I sit down?" I had to absorb that. I said, "How old is your grandmother?" At that time I was seventy-four and she said, "She is now seventy nine Professor Bloom." But she was in a graduate class. I gave a graduate class the second year. I remember that class and I remembered. Sometimes a face skips a generation. She said she doesn't look at all like her mother but she looks exactly like her grandmother. And I thought, quite spookily, that it was her

grandmother who had come again. A charming lady her grandmother. This is a charming lady. I've noticed that even at Yale, which is an elitist institution with high admission standards, that compared to frequently their actual appearance... when students, and I don't get Yale students usually until they are juniors or seniors but sometimes I make an exception and take a sophomore. They come here reading much less than their parents did and the reason is quite simple. We've turned into a visual culture. As I'm of the old generation being now seventy five, there was no television, there was a radio in the house but I didn't listen much to it and I don't think I went to the movies more than two or three times and the computer didn't exist. I've never learned to type. I have research assistants when I write, who put it on a computer for me and my wife does the email. I just can't type even. So if you are used to information reaching you visually by the computer, by the television screen, by the motion picture screen it's difficult to learn how to read deeply and to really be alone with what you are reading. And I think there just aren't enough dedicated teachers in high schools and grade schools, whether in the United States or Australia, to really fight that tendency.

CA. Yes it's a shame. Do you think film adaptations, which are always awful, but do you think that they can positively lead students back to the classics? So they can see *Pride and Prejudice*, because they are visual students who go to movies all the time, that that will lead them back to the classics?

HB. The three writers in English who seem to translate well to the screen are Shakespeare, Dickens and Jane Austen, I suppose because all of them abound in fascinating personalities. I don't know what to say about that. I don't think it is a good substitute for reading *Pride and Prejudice* or for reading *Great Expectations* or for reading *Hamlet* or *Henry IV* to confront it in the film or on the screen instead. I don't know what to say about that Cassandra dear but I mean I think we have to face the truth which is that on a worldwide basis there's now a lot of what you would call semi literacy. People who have been taught to read and who've had full-scale educations but who are basically not very literate.

CA. Yes it's sad. I wanted to ask you about one of my favourite books which is the *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages*.

HB. I put that together really as a kind of protest against the Harry Potter phenomenon.

CA. I hate Harry Potter. I was very pleased to read that you had taken it on.

HB. But on the other hand there is no fighting Harry Potter. She is now writing what she says will be the final one in the series. Do you know, and I don't begrudge her this to her, that she is now the richest woman in England. She is richer than Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

CA. Incredible.

HB. And I guess she will soon be the richest woman in the world. But it also shows that the debasement of taste is an international phenomenon. The latest Harry Potter is read, if that is the right word for it, everywhere. It instantly gets translated into seventy languages and it is not a literary phenomenon of course. I'm not sure what we should call it Cassandra but it certainly is always there.

CA. It has taken hold of people of all ages too, which is so surprising.

HB. I know, I know child. It's a substitute for reading.

CA. Yes it is. There are so many wonderful other things in the imaginative fantasy genre.

HB. Yes but you know although you know that even though they're better they're not very good as literature. There's Tolkien I find very badly written.

CA. Yes so do I.

HB. And the C.S. Lewis *Chronicles of Narnia*, which is about to come out as a motion picture. I find it despicable because it is just overt Christian propaganda. And I knew the guy and he was most dogmatic and aggressive human being I ever knew.

CA. Gosh

HB. He was horribly dogmatic. The great fantasy writer in English is Lewis Carroll, unless you want to regard Jonathan Swift as a fantasy writer. No one is ever going to do as well as the two Alice books. Beautiful books.

CA. They are.

HB. Permanent books.

CA. Most of the selections in your book are poems and I wondered why so little poetry is read these days and enjoyed.

HB. I can't answer the question except to say that really good poetry, not all, but a lot of really good poetry is rather difficult. It depends upon having an inner ear and so few people are now encouraged or trained to read out loud to themselves or to read to other people. But you know Chaucer wrote in order to be read out loud to court audiences, just as Homer had written to read out loud and in Shakespeare obviously, everything was intended to be read out loud, except for the sonnets. Dickens killed himself he was so great a reader and performer of his own work. He used to give these enormous things which would go on for hours in which he used to act out all the parts in the novel. That phenomenon we don't have any more that's almost too bad it would exhaust a novelist. I don't exactly see Philip Roth going around giving public readings of his novels. I think he is probably the best novelist we have now in the United States. Poets still give readings, it's become a standard thing, particularly at universities. People have gotten very inhibited about poetry in fact you know what cheers me up in the end Cassandra. I used to be very gloomy about these things but now I'm getting to be old proper, I'm not so gloomy as I used to be. It seems to me, well look at yourself, in all countries, almost in all social classes at all ages there are always going to be real readers who are born. People who have something solitary in their souls. People who won't feel that they are themselves unless they are alone with a book. And a good book. Something that speaks to their inner self. *Don Quixote* will always be read, Shakespeare will always be read, Jane Austen will always be read. Some writers perhaps have gotten too difficult. I mean Dante is hardly read anymore even in Italy, he is after all the glory of the language, because he's too difficult. What will happen to difficult poetry and difficult literature, in the future? I don't know? Joyce gambled everything on *Finnegan's Wake* and it's too difficult. Only a few people, I read it again all the time, but only a few people do that and even *Ulysses* now seems too difficult for most readers. I don't know why.

CA. People struggle with stream of consciousness.

HB. I suppose there is a problem with that, and Proust is not as much read as he should be for he is so funny. Don't know. The greatest poets of the twentieth century are difficult. Paul Valery, Yeats with his private mythology, Wallace Stevens in the United States, Hart Crane who is my favourite poet, He has a very high, powerful driving rhetoric. A Spanish poet like Luis Cernuda or a Catalan poet like Salvador Espriu, a kind of deep inwardness begins to be cultivated in poetry which is a good sort of thing. Someone like Alec Hope was a wonderful poet but very much in the mode of WH Auden, who influenced him strongly. That's still, it's interesting, but it's not necessarily the most difficult or complex. In that sense I suppose Australia has not produced a sort of difficult great poet the way say the current British poet who matters most, Geoffrey Hill, is difficult or the way John Ashbery in the United States can be very difficult.

CA. That's true.

HB. I think the most difficult book of highest quality yet written by an Australian writer would be Patrick White's greater books.

CA. Do you think that poets and playwrights and novelists make good teachers in universities? Are there many at Yale?

HB. John Crowley, who is a very good fantasy writer, who wrote a great book which I recommend to you called *Little, Big*. It's a very marvellous book. He teaches very well. My old friend, the poet John Hollander, is retired but he occasionally still teaches a course in poetry writing. There's a poet Louise Gluck, is here and she is a famously good teacher. I think it just varies from person to person. Teaching, to a considerable extent, I mean obviously character has a lot to do with it and learning has a lot to do with it and a capacity for care has a lot to do with it. But in the end undoubtedly there is an element of personality in it. If you think about the great teachers of history, like Socrates, personality clearly plays a part.

CA. Do you think creative writing has a place in an undergraduate or post-graduate degree?

HB. Yes, most certainly, most certainly. It, you might say, it helps keep the whole enterprise honest. It reminds one, of the strain to get a really good creative writer who teaches is sometimes difficult though poets, since they can't really earn livings otherwise are usually available. Good poets. If a novelist is good enough then they earn enough so that someone like Philip Roth would never teach although he did when he was a much younger man. Patrick White was never a teacher was he?

CA. No. At The University of Melbourne, none of our students can get an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in creative writing with an analytical component.

HB. Yes what makes me sad is the amount of politicising that now goes on. So far as I know Australian Aboriginals have not yet written much?

CA. Not much at all.

HB. There was one Australian film. I forget who made it, which moved me in particular. You will have to remind me of what it was called. It had the actor Richard Chamberlain and the rain kept falling through it and it was about Aboriginals.

CA. I'm not sure I know it.

HB. It was fascinating. The rain was raining frogs and things like that. There were wonderful Aboriginal actors in it.

CA. I'll look it up. (It is *The Last Wave*). I was going to ask you if you went to the theatre very often given your love of Shakespeare?

HB. No, precisely because I love Shakespeare I don't go to the theatre. We have high concept directors and their concepts don't seem to be Shakespeare's own so that makes me unhappy.

CA. No, I have problems with modern clothes Shakespeare and changing the setting to a modern context.

HB. I also have problems with, you know, everything that goes on. It gets very tiresome child.

CA. You re-read Shakespeare and Proust and Swift and White, all of these amazing writers. I wondered how on earth you managed to combine this with teaching and writing and reading new books?

HB. I don't sleep. I've always been a bad sleeper. And of course I've had a long time now at seventy-five. I hope I have longer but a pacemaker I think is not a serious thing. Annoying, but not serious. I don't do anything else. I always spend my time reading, writing and teaching. It's all I've ever done with my life and I'm still fascinated by it. I get a little sad sometimes because it seems to me there has been a kind of treason of the clerics as it were and I don't think it does any good. What

these people who have politicised study I mean it not only doesn't do them any good it doesn't do their students any good. I think it is a lie anyway because they are not really (political). If they really wished to do something about the horrible way in which all societies, western as well as eastern, still treat women they would be spending their nights in shelters for battered women and for unwed mothers. They would be actively trying to do something politically in local elections about how badly African Americans and Hispanic Americans are treated and they're not. I think they're hypocrites. The result of their culture wars has been to frighten large, and admittedly very stupid, portions of American society, the evangelical Christians, so called, the people who throughout the south and the south west and the middle west now dominate American politics. A democracy as I understand it can only function if its citizens are able to think. Thought depends upon memory. What are you going to remember? If what you are going to remember is Potter and Stephen King you haven't got anything to remember. If you have Shakespeare and Jane Austen and George Eliot and Emily Bronte to remember then you've got something to remember and it's a better chance that you will learn how to think. But the result is that the United States, which is conducting this hideous and vicious illegal war in Iraq for no reason that I can understand, or that anybody else there would understand. The United States, when I was young, was still what I think full of inequalities particularly in terms of civil rights for the African Americans and Hispanic Americans, still it was relatively speaking a democracy. Now I would say it's one-third an oligarchy, one-third a plutocracy and one-third a theocracy, which is very bad news indeed. I suspect that Australian individualism is so fierce that that won't happen. You have a ferocious national temperament as befits so many people who are descended from people who frequently, through no fault of their own, were kicked out of England and sent across as convicts and indentured types and so forth. So there's a kind of rugged spirit in Australia, which goes with that vast rugged outback of yours, which is mostly a wasteland isn't it? A harsh place, I gather from talking to my friend John Kinsella, but I don't think, I don't see Australia ever becoming a plutocracy or even an oligarchy or a theocracy. But in this country it has already happened. This is a sick society and it is partly because education has failed here. I don't understand how, I mean it's a disgrace to this university that George Bush got an undergraduate degree here. He is semi-literate at best and he has never in his life read a book all the way through, even when he was a Yale student.

CA. Yes.

HB. He gets his supposed information just from what his aides tell him. I understand that Seymour Hirsch, writing about our Iraqi madness in the *New Yorker* magazine, wrote that Bush tells his friends that he invaded Iraq at the direct suggestion of God himself, of Jesus Christ and that his attempts to bring, what he calls democracy to Iraq, is what Seymour Hirsch rather nicely calls utopianism without information. He has got no information at all; he's got nothing in his head. He certainly can't think. Yet the people of this country they didn't really elect him the first time the election was stolen, but they did elect him the second time.

CA. No one could believe it in Australia either when he was elected for the second time.

HB. He must be the most unpopular person in the world today. He stands for militarism. He stands for. He makes me never forget. There was a very great but sinister man in this country, Huey long, who was Governor of Louisiana and he was assassinated back in 1935. He once said shortly before his assassination "Of course you will have fascism in America but we will call it democracy." We are sliding towards that now. I hear less and less of protest. I am frequently interviewed over the international phone by Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian, South American journalists and so on and I speak my mind. I say how horrible I find George Bush. How outrageous is a policy which says that all these Mexicans coming into the country are illegal immigrants. That's an outrage. We stole the entire southwest, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, all of California, we stole that from the Mexicans. These people are just trying to get back to where their own great-grandparents lived. We put them in jail and call it illegal immigration. I don't know what the future of the United States is.

It seems to me that as a nation we are getting stupider every day and less able to see when we are being imposed upon.

CA. Well I only have one question, and I guess it's bearing in mind that you have had some health problems in the last couple of years, how does literature console you at times when any of us are going through a rough patch with our health?

HB. Child, I did have a very hard time three and a half to four years ago when first I had a terrible bleeding ulcer which I lost six pints of blood. And then that brought on a, I was a total of seven weeks in hospital because they had to do an open heart three way by-pass and this is not serious compared to that it is just putting in a pacemaker...

CA. How does literature get you through that?

HB. I recited poems. I recited poems to myself out loud all of the time if I was alone. If people were nearby and it would bother them I just recited them to myself. I know practically all the poetry I have ever cared for by heart. So I just recite it to myself. And of course there's my wife. We've been married for forty-eight years.

CA. And you have a wonderful relationship.

HB. A wonderful relationship. She has great experience of me. She is the boss. It's better that way. I think in the western world, and I think this is what Shakespeare teaches us, really superior women are all in a sense condemned to marry down. There are a few exceptions.