

THE ARTIST AS PICARO

The Revelation of Margaret Atwood's "Lady Oracle"

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IN WRITING HER THIRD NOVEL, *Lady Oracle* (1976), Margaret Atwood earns for herself the title of seer which she applies to her book and to her protagonist. Casting her work in the picaresque mode, she turns on end the myths and fairy tales which have succoured and seduced women for ages. She satirizes the novels, magazines, films, and cultural patterns which have served them as escapes as well as traps, and in doing so, reveals the precarious and enigmatic fate of women in general and of the woman artist in particular. Dealing primarily with those aspects of the culture which affect women most, Atwood shows that, given this chaotic world, its pervasive romantic conditioning, and its traditional sexual arrangements, it is almost inevitable that a creative woman turn into a picaro in order to survive. Atwood's deftness in conveying her vision of the perplexity of woman's existence lies in the thoroughness and originality with which she exploits the conventions of the picaresque mode.

Since the picaresque novel emerged in sixteenth-century Spain, it has been adapted in diverse contexts. Representative works range from *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), *The Life of Buscon* (1626), *The Adventurous Simplissimus* (1668), and *Moll Flanders* (1722) to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Invisible Man* (1952), and *The Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man* (1954). The accretions of centuries make a clear definition difficult to formulate.¹ Although opinions differ, scholars do agree on some essentials. The story is told from the first-person point of view² by a protagonist usually of uncertain origins. Thrust into society early, and left totally dependent on the whims of Fortune, she or he is cast from one adventure to another, each of which allows freedom, in Guzman de Alfarache's terms, repeatedly "to beginne the world anew."³ The resulting story is, therefore, episodic in form. The protagonist also passes from one master to another. In order to survive within the master-slave relationship, the character learns to live by her or his wits and gradually develops into a picaro, or rogue — a protean figure who repeatedly changes forms and disguises to suit the occasion.⁴ The picaro consorts with rogues of all classes and from them learns the fine points of deception. Moving through various strata

of society, the picaro exposes a panoramic sweep of the culture. The chaotic world thus revealed burgeons with surprises and always threatens death. Despite the precariousness of the picaro's life, indeed because of it, the narrative is riotously comic.

Atwood obviously knows and utilizes not only these characteristics of the picaresque but also numerous variants evidenced in Spanish, German, British, and American works. She organizes *Lady Oracle* in an intricate five-part structure beginning and ending in Terremoto, Italy, with repeated shuttlings to and from Canada, England, and Italy. Atwood interrupts the linear progression with forecasts and flashbacks which pick up the threads of various relationships. Within this framework her protagonist Joan Delacourt Foster meets all the requisites of the picaro: Joan questions her parentage, sees herself as an outsider, becomes a rogue in the midst of rogues — several of whom she serves in master-slave relationships — externalizes her internal instability by assuming multiple roles, sometimes simultaneously, and tells her story so dramatically that the reader is vicariously drawn into her chaotic world. Atwood intersperses the episodic narrative with Joan's dreams, her fantasies, her automatic writing, and a parody of the gothic novel akin to Cervantes' parody of the romance in *Don Quixote*. In addition, she inserts a series of motifs which provide poetic cohesion to the structure and picaresque surprise to the narrative. Within this complex form, the protagonist-narrator appears as lonely, disoriented, and continually fearful of accidents, exposure, punishment, near madness, and even death.

Atwood alters the picaresque form slightly by adding a touch of the *Kunstslerroman*. Her protagonist gains insights through each experience, as does the protagonist of the *Kunstslerroman*, but realizes it only much later. Atwood also strays from the picaresque tradition by ending the narrative in the midst of an unfinished episode rather than in a period of stasis. Through these variations she suggests that while woman is coming to see the roots of her difficulties, her new role is still in the evolutionary process and the oracle's riddle is yet to be completely untangled.

ATWOOD'S MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT in the novel is the creation of her protagonist-narrator. To some extent, Joan is another version of the "divided self" which Atwood developed in Marian McAlpin of *The Edible Woman* (1969), the "I" of *Surfacing* (1972), and the personae of some of her poems.⁵ Like her predecessors, Joan sees herself as a victim, an outsider, in a hostile world which threatens to engulf her; she also senses, as they do, that there is within her another, capable self struggling to be born. She works out her struggle in a series of episodes, trans-oceanic in scope and increasingly threatening to her psyche. Yet, in picaresque fashion, she lives to tell the tale.

Atwood portrays Joan as a counterpart of Moll Flanders, a disarmingly honest narrator of a patently dishonest life. Throughout the narration, Joan emphasizes her victimization by repeatedly referring to her failure and her fears, telling the story of her searing pain in an offhand manner that makes for great comedy and wins sympathy for even her wildest schemes.⁶ Her absolute honesty in confessing her lies, tricks, and deceptions becomes, in itself, a confidence game which lulls the reader into a misguided trust in Joan's ability to interpret her experiences.

The sense of victimization which Joan endures throughout her life stems from three different but interlocking factors. Family, fortune, and fiction get her off to an uncertain start, and the instability which results is heightened by her imagination. Her parentage and home life are ambiguous. She realizes that she is "an accident," a child her mother does not want, and during her early years she experiences her father only as an "absence."⁷ Joan rather suspects that her mother was pregnant before marriage and wonders about her mother's relationship with the young man in white flannels pictured in the family album. Home is a series of increasingly larger houses which correspond to her father's upward mobility. Plastic covers keep the furniture clean for visitors. Bedroom slippers protect the floors. In this changeable, artificial atmosphere, Joan feels isolated and lonely.

Joan's sense of rejection and loneliness is intensified by a second factor: it is her fortune to be fat. Joan realizes that her ballooning figure is a constant affront to her mother; yet she continues to eat voraciously to gain weight which will put an even greater distance between them. Joan's hunger, unlike that of Lazarillo de Tormes, is a hunger for love; eating, therefore, becomes for her a means of psychological survival.⁸

Although Joan sees her obesity as a formidable weapon against her mother, she perceives its two-edge nature. She also realizes that it will keep her from having the romantic life which the myths, fairy tales, novels, magazines, movies, and television promise to those who are pretty and proper. By her own admission Joan is "hooked on plots." Her fictional world includes the Cinderella story and Andersen's mermaid myth, her mother's historical novels and her father's detective fiction, nineteenth-century gothics, good and bad, and countless romantic movies which she sees with Aunt Lou, her father's sister.⁹ Joan not only knows the romantic stories, she also understands their basic assumptions and implications. The great irony of her life is that one part of her wants to be beautiful and slim like her mother, wants the glass slipper to fit, wants the glamour of Joan Crawford, for whom her mother named her. The other part longs to achieve something significant. Seeing no possibility of attaining either goal, Joan turns trickster.

Atwood introduces Joan to roguery at an early age. When Joan's mother refuses to hold her daughter on her lap, Joan turns to Aunt Lou for love and

understanding. At intervals she attempts to please her mother, but these occasions always end in disaster. Gradually, Joan begins to associate her mother's image in the triple mirror of the dressing table with the three-headed monster in the museum. When her mother, humiliated by Joan's obesity, suggests to the ballet teacher that Joan can be changed from a butterfly into a mothball for the recital, Joan takes on the role with a vengeance. Having learned the dance to perfection, she is able to cause total confusion among the butterflies and win the "bravos" of the audience. The bittersweet success becomes a turning point in Joan's life. "Joan the exploiter" joins "Joan the victim," putting the world of romantic beauty on the defensive for ever after, even though it continues to maintain outposts in her head.

Power becomes Joan's substitute for the romance which other girls and women seem to have. Joan snoops among her mother's things, not out of curiosity — she already knows everything — but merely for the sense of danger which the ventures afford. She exploits her mother with a sinister glee, cheating her out of a life to manage. She watches as her mother compensates for this deprivation, first, through work, and later, by drinking. Joan plays her last tricks on her mother by beginning to lose weight and by leaving home, but not before she has pushed her mother to the point of physical violence.

Having given Joan this apprenticeship in roguery, Atwood turns her into a Protean picaro, who assumes many roles and guises, either successively or simultaneously, and who eventually becomes an expert escape artist. It is significant that throughout her life, Joan consciously chooses to have other lives and recognizes that she has had many. Even in her youth, she was "hoping for magic transformations." By the end of the novel, she admits that the real romance of her life has been that "between Houdini and his ropes and locked trunk; entering the embrace of bondage, slithering out again."

While shifting shape from fat to thin, Joan Delacourt becomes an international traveller and mistress of Paul, the "Polish Count." She adopts in secret the pseudonym of Louisa K. Delacourt and becomes the author of fifteen costume gothics, published by the Hermes Press, a company named for the god of thieves, tricksters, travellers, and artists, all of which she has become.¹⁰ Joan becomes both Charlotte and Felicia, the heroine and the villainess, the beloved and the wife, in each of the novels of her gothic canon. Subsequently, she marries Arthur and becomes Joan Foster. She fabricates a past that bears little relation to her own and labels the picture of her fat self "Aunt Dierdre." Because she cannot endure any of the jobs which she has had or claims to have had, she continues to pose as a failure. Meanwhile, she adheres to her secret role as the successful author of the costume gothics. Eventually, she becomes famous as the author of *Lady Oracle*, a book of poetry written under the self-hypnosis of automatic writing. Recognizing that Arthur will never meet her expectations any more than she will

meet his, she takes a lover, the Royal Porcupine. When Fraser Buchanan discovers her secret life, she turns blackmailer in self-defence. Finally, to maintain her sanity, she feigns drowning. Like the true picaresque, although she lives each of these lives with zest — often with excruciating pain — none of her lives seems real.

The devious world, which prompts or forces Joan to assume these many roles and guises, abounds with characters who themselves play multiple, often antithetical, roles. Her mother is both Beauty and the Beast, the rejector and the ubiquitous astral presence which Joan cannot elude. Her father, an anaesthetist, acts as a killer during the war and a reviver afterward. Joan's companions in scouting are both protectors and torturers. The daffodil man, a pervert who gives her flowers, seems replicated in the person who rescues her when the Brownies tie her to the bridge. Arthur, her prince, is a pauper in the realm of romance. Aunt Lou, Paul, and Leda Sprott also play dual roles. Exposure to these roguish figures convinces Joan that dishonesty is the norm rather than an aberration. In her words, "honesty and expressing your feelings could lead to only one thing. Disaster."

Atwood draws most heavily upon the versatility of the picaresque mode in treating the central experiences of Joan's adult life — those surrounding her marriage to Arthur. According to the romantic tradition, marriage should have become a stabilizing factor. Within the picaresque context, however, it becomes just the opposite. Joan finds herself constantly forced to rebuild her world, her chief resource and means of escape being her literary imagination.

Predictably, Joan meets Arthur by chance, but the circumstances are far from romantic. She walks through Hyde Park, composing *Escape from Love*, by which she hopes to escape from Paul. As her heroine feels "a hand on her arm, and a voice, hoarse with passion," breathe her name, Joan feels a hand on her arm and screams. The next thing she knows, she "is lying on top of a skinny, confused-looking young man." This inauspicious introduction and their grotesque wedding portend the hectic state of their life together.

Joan tries to be what Arthur expects, but just as she could not please her mother, neither can she please him. Just as she could not communicate with her father, she now finds it impossible to communicate with Arthur. In the beginning Joan pays the rent with the proceeds of her gothics, under the pretext that the money is coming from odd jobs and an inheritance — a minor dissimulation in relation to her future duplicity. Arthur follows his "paths" of reform one at a time, changing his theories constantly. Eventually, he returns to school and becomes a political science teacher, while Joan seems caught in "thickets, ditches, ponds, labyrinths, and morasses," metaphors for the picaresque's trail.

Sometimes, Arthur enjoys Joan's unpredictability, but at others he complains that she has no goals. Like Paul, who tells her that she has no discipline, and the Royal Porcupine, who accuses her of having no motives, Arthur never gives

her any support. The irony is that Joan surpasses all three men in creativity. A further irony is that Joan will not reveal her success with the gothics, because she thinks Arthur would not respect her for them. She is often irked by having to hide her success, but when even the Royal Porcupine tells her that she is a threat to men, she realizes that she must hide the truth from Arthur. She is convinced that the dishonesty of the picaro is the only safe policy for her. Since Arthur will not let her have children, she turns her entire energy to writing. What was at first a means of economic security becomes a secret career, a substitute for marriage, and a springboard to other lives — the taking of a lover and the writing of poetry.

The way in which Atwood intertwines Joan's multiple occupations heightens the tension and speeds up the action. In writing the gothics, Joan lives out the romance which her socialization has promised but which reality has not produced. She creates characters whose appearances and personalities are extensions of her own: both the men and the women have her fiery red hair, her green eyes, and her capacity for deception and intrigue. Charlotte and Felicia, the beloved and the wife respectively in *Stalked by Love*, correspond to the antitheses of her current dilemma. Through struggling with their problems, Joan strives to work out her own. Like herself, both are active characters: Charlotte repairs jewellery in order to be economically independent; Felicia takes lovers to satisfy herself when Redmond is otherwise engaged. In order to complete the novel in the gothic manner, Joan must kill one or the other. She has already saved Charlotte dozens of times. Now, when she is struggling to preserve her own marriage, she wants to save Felicia.

Having reached an impasse, Joan seeks the answer through automatic writing. Although the process does not furnish an immediate solution for the novel, it does produce the poetry which becomes *Lady Oracle*. The poems deal with male-female relations in terms and images which touch her life so closely that Arthur is totally alienated. He is angered that she published the poems without consulting him, and he is chagrined at the fame which they have brought her. Conscious of his frustrations, Joan sees herself as a monster like her mother. Typically, Joan finds a temporary escape. Fame brings the Royal Porcupine into her life.

As the writing helps Joan work out her romantic longings and marital problems, so does her subsequent affair with the Royal Porcupine enable her to sublimate her sexual desires. He is everything that Arthur is not. He dances with her eagerly — she wrapped in a lace tablecloth and he clad in only a top hat. He is an underwear freak, easily aroused by the sight of Joan in her bilingual weekend bikini briefs. He is so like Joan in his romantic notions and appearance that he seems to be one of her fantasies. When he shaves off his beard, scraps his opera cloak, and wants Joan to live with him, she drops him. Faced with her failure as a wife, the end of her affair, the pressures of success, the reappearance

of Paul, who wants to kidnap her, and the appearance of Fraser Buchanan, who threatens to blackmail her, Joan seems cornered at last. She steals Buchanan's notebook to silence him, plans her death by drowning, and escapes to Italy, where in her seaside hermitage, she struggles with the problem anew. But even in that retreat, Joan, like her German counterpart Simplissimus, realizes that her peace may be short-lived.¹¹

Still another aspect of the picaresque is brought out in Joan's relations to the men in her life. Paul, Arthur, the Royal Porcupine, and Fraser Buchanan serve successively as Joan's partners in the master-slave relationship. Paul functions as her mentor in the realm of fiction, but as soon as she learns to write the gothics, she escapes his grasp. Arthur acts as her master within their marriage, putting innumerable strictures on her, chiefly that of forbidding her to have a child. Joan eludes his domination at first by continuing to write the gothics and later by taking the Royal Porcupine as a lover. The Royal Porcupine in his turn begins as a benevolent master, but gradually, he, too, becomes so demanding that Joan needs to escape. Buchanan maintains his control over Joan only briefly, for as soon as he discovers her secret, she steals his blackmail notebook and turns him into her victim. The manipulation which Joan learns from each of these masters is subsequently employed in typical picaresque fashion to obtain her freedom.

IN THE FEW BRIEF CHAPTERS of Part Five, Atwood puts the final touches on Joan's struggle for freedom and brings the revelation of *Lady Oracle* into focus. She does not work out the solution in a logical narrative. Rather, she draws together the principal motifs of the novel: the mirror, clothes, apparitions, doors, the maze, and the dance, and filters their implications in episodic segments through Joan's distraught mind. Taunted by fear of discovery and of isolation, Joan reaches a degree of tension which almost completely fuses reality, fantasy, and dream. Like a true picaro, however, she thrives on even this psychic danger, and finally comes to terms with the problem of illusion and reality. In the isolation of her Italian retreat, she sees the images of her life fall into place like the fragments of a kaleidoscope and offer her a real escape.

All her life she has gazed into mirrors of physical and social composition and has been influenced by the images they reflected — her mother, the beauty and the monster; herself, like Alice in Wonderland, fat and thin; herself, in the costume gothics and mirrored in the eyes of Paul, Arthur, and the Royal Porcupine. She realizes that as long as she lived by these illusions, she was uncomfortable, but, in a sense, protected, like the Lady of Shalott weaving in her tower. But once she stepped to the window, looked on reality, allowed *Lady Oracle* to be pub-

lished, risked being a public figure, she was no longer safe. Like the Lady of Shalott, she had to pay for her freedom with death.

Joan's next illumination comes some days later, when Mr. Vitroni returns the escape clothes which she had buried beneath the house. She had always recognized the significance of clothes as reflective of the people who wore them: she treasured Aunt Lou's old fox scarf, shied from her mother's blue serge suit, and resented the disposal of the clothes of the dead. When she began writing the costume gothics, she studied books on clothes, believing that if she got the clothes right, everything else would fit, for clothes were the symbols which kept people in their places. When her heroine's clothes were slashed, burned, and buried, they would always be replaced with more fitting attire, indicative of the better life to come. The return of her old clothes indicates to Joan that she cannot really bury her old self. The picaro does not change character. Joan understands that the Italian people see through her disguise, even though she has dyed her hair, put on dark glasses, and donned a print dress. There is no escape from reality. In her isolation, the mirror begins to crack, the truth underlying the myth begins to emerge.

After a fearful day, Joan has a nightmare in which her mother's astral body appears at the window. Seeing her mother's tears, Joan tries to reach her, to tell her that she loves her. Her mother's spirit has appeared at important points in Joan's life. All this time, Joan thought that her mother was following and watching her disapprovingly. Now she senses that she, not her mother, produces these visions. She recognizes her mother's image as "a vortex, a dark vacuum" which she could never please. She realizes that she must not live to please her mother or anyone else, that she must "dance for herself alone." Joan had begun to sense this when she saw the fountain of Diana of Ephesus in Tivoli, which seemed to symbolize woman's being poured out for others. Now, that earlier inclination is confirmed.

This experience is central to the novel. Once Joan recognizes that the spirit is of her own conjuring, she sees her mother also as a victim, the Lady of Shalott, always looking at life through the mirror. When her mother finally looked on reality, she, too, died, or was killed by her husband, by Joan, by the roles which society expected her to play, but chiefly by the romantic conditioning which made beauty, wealth, and romance supreme. When the beauty and romance disappeared, the wealth did not satisfy. All her managerial gifts were unused, and, therefore, wasted.

Having shed the illusion of her mother's vigilance, Joan understands that she must stop hiding behind closed doors, that she must pursue her own life and develop her talents. She cannot expect Arthur to provide support. As Joan begins to dance, her butterfly wings return, the optimistic caterpillar of the "Road of Life" story comes out of the cocoon. But as she dances, Joan crosses the broken

glass and cuts her feet. She now has the real red shoes of the movie. Like the mermaid, she knows that if she wants to dance, or even to walk, she will have to give up something — the comfort of the traditional role. Joan props up her feet to stop the bleeding and determines to walk despite the pain. She recognizes the mermaid as a female monster and sees herself in a comparable role. She reasons that perhaps her mother named her for Joan of Arc, not Joan Crawford. Joan of Arc heard voices. She was burned at the stake and only her heart survived. In her pain, Joan goes to pick up her mail. She learns that Sam and Marlene have been accused of her murder and realizes that she must somehow save them. She also discovers that her gas tank has been drained, preventing her departure, and that a young reporter is on her trail. She decides not to panic but to complete *Stalked by Love* and to await the next whim of Fortune.

At this point Atwood once more exploits the Protean nature of the picaro to effect Joan's escape. Having realized that she must turn away from the mirror, shed her fear, and enter the maze of life, Joan attempts to write the final chapters of the costume gothic. Boldly, she sends Felicia into the maze. There Felicia finds the astral bodies of Charlotte, Joan's mother, Aunt Lou, and Joan herself as the Fat Lady, complete with butterfly wings and antennae. When all of them claim to be Lady Redmond, Felicia understands that all wives are one. She opens the door at the end of the maze, knowing that she will find the minotaur of the myth. When Redmond appears, he immediately begins a series of transformations: he turns first into Joan's father, then the Daffodil man, Paul, the Royal Porcupine, and Arthur. Joan's suspicions are confirmed: the men behind the doors are all Bluebeard. Having fantasized this incident, Joan is prepared when the reporter knocks at the door. She opens it and hits him with the Cinzano bottle. Surprising even herself, Joan does not take his car and escape. After all, she, like Joan of Arc, has a heart. Steeped in her nurturing role, she gets him to a hospital, stays around to see how he is, and prepares to return to Canada to rescue Sam and Marlene and to tell Arthur the whole truth, even if that means losing him. In a pensive moment, Joan decides that she will write no more gothics but will turn to science fiction. The gothics are somewhat passive and are based on hope. Science fiction, on the contrary, is active. Based on vision and invention, it can make things happen.

Joan does not reason these things out. Like a true picaro, she slips from one episode to another. In the end, she admits that only through striking the newspaper man did she learn that she could defend herself. Moreover, only through fantasizing the courage to open the door of the maze did she get the courage to open her own door.

Through the metaphor of Joan's life then, Atwood suggests that women must begin to imagine themselves capable of doing and being whatever they would like. They must no longer look into the mirrors which society holds up to them as

reality. They must no longer barter reality for a pseudo security, for in the end there will always be death. Rather, they must face life head-on. They must no longer hold to the wife-mother role as it has been interpreted in the past. They must exercise their autonomy, insisting that they, like men, have paths to take, that they no longer wish to be caught like scapegoats in the mazes, thickets, and brambles of life. They must demand that men share the nurturing role. When that arrangement is made, men will no longer be the minotaurs to whom women are sacrificed, women will be free to pursue interesting and challenging careers, and children will see both parents as autonomous beings, equally respected within the social framework. She suggests, too, that women must make paths for themselves; they must dance and try their wings, even if their feet bleed in the process. They must face the responsibility of telling the truth, or — and here Atwood leaves the door open — continue to be picaros.

NOTES

- ¹ Recent studies of the picaresque include the following: Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1967); Alexander A. Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1967); Ulrich Wicks, "The Nature of the Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach," *PMLA*, 89, No. 2 (March 1974), 240-49; and the special issue "The Picaresque Tradition," *College Literature*, 6, No. 3 (Fall 1979). The latter contains an excellent bibliographical article by John P. Kent and J. L. Gaunt.
- ² Claudio Guillen, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 71-106. Guillen considers the first-person point of view the *sine qua non* of the picaresque.
- ³ *The Rogue, or the Life of Guzman de Alfarache*, trans. James Mabbe, 4 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1924), IV, p. 220.
- ⁴ I have chosen to use the term *picaro* throughout rather than to employ the feminine form *picara* in some instances.
- ⁵ John Wilson Foster, "The Poetry of Margaret Atwood," *Canadian Literature*, 74 (Autumn 1977), 5-20, provides an excellent introduction to Atwood's work. Also see the special Atwood issue of the *Malahat Review*, 41 (1977).
- ⁶ A study of Atwood's generic use of the comic may be found in Frank Davey, "Lady Oracle's Secret: Atwood's Comic Novels," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 5, No. 2 (Fall 1980), 209-21.
- ⁷ Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).
- ⁸ Wicks, p. 246, identifies hunger as a picaresque theme: "Hunger is what Lazarillo's life is all about."
- ⁹ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), a study of traditional sexual arrangements and society's reluctance to change them, provides an excellent psychological counterpart to Atwood's novel. It is interesting that these two books drawing on the monster myths were published in the same year.

- ¹⁰ Throughout the novel, Atwood seems to use names and images from other picaresque novels for parodic effect. For example, the Hermes and Mercury figures form a significant motif in Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull*. In the same novel the protagonist's alter ego is Loulou. Madame Houpfle writes under her maiden name, Diane Philbert. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan refuses to identify any longer with the figure of Diana of Ephesus, the mammalian fountain in Rome. Howard Mancing, "The Picaresque Novel: A Protean Form," *College Literature*, 6, No. 3 (Fall 1979), 196, considers the "consciousness of genre" characteristic of the picaresque.
- ¹¹ Miller, pp. 116-17, discusses Simplissimus' recognition of the tentative nature of rest.

ANALYSIS WITH A SWIMMER

Ron Charach

The albums offend with the repetitive goodwill
of other people's families:
look! this one at the summer-house,
that one taken nude, yet smiling —
saying *you were afraid of being framed*
in the white-tiled room

and the painful brain would not let go
without them home;
the sound of their sedan
crushing gravel and lighting the hill
sent him off
till ineffective morning
and the long day with the working others,
. . . children who somehow work

and now in the empty dining-room,
the fireplace too troubled to know the fire,
he dreams of analysis with a swimmer
who can surface what was scuttled. Who
will refuse to let a thing go by,
the child's voice
calling all night into the hall?