

## FROM THE EDITOR

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# SACRIFICE

LARRY BROWN DIED RECENTLY, an occasion of great sadness for those of us blessed enough to have read his work, and a great opportunity for those of you out there who haven't. I'd been pursuing him and his fiction – unsuccessfully, sad to say – off and on for the duration of *Night Train's* existence, as he is one of the reasons I write, one of the writers I admire, and the frustrating reasons we never got a story of his are probably of little interest except to me, so I'll spare you. However, I recently managed the great good fortune, as I paused in the layout of the journal you hold in your hands, of seeing the Gary Hawkins documentary "The Rough South of Larry Brown," which led me on a bit of a thought-tangent as good art will do.

In this documentary, the viewer is presented with the various techniques of documentary, the skillful blend of home movies, old photographs, stock footage, and dramatizations of three of Brown's stories. It's respectful, though not always positive. Mary Annie Brown is frank about the effects of writing on their family, and Brown himself talks about the damage drink has done, but interestingly enough, only the damage it has done to his work, mentioning little or nothing about his family. Again, oddly, interestingly, neither shows much remorse for the choices they made in the face of supporting Brown's art: Larry eventually ended up on a schedule where he woke at 6 p.m. and wrote all night, while Mary Annie ran the family and the household, more or less.

I find that very curious indeed, both as someone who pretends to art himself in the face of an understanding but more often than not extremely demanding family, and someone who sits back and contemplates the meaning of it all in the larger scheme of literary things in my life. It's axiomatic, if not cliché, that the writer's, the artist's necessary solitude causes problems, often exacerbated by substances or sex or whatever the artist's personal tension-releasing bugbear is, and the Browns' lack of remorse in the face of the sacrifice for the art –

notwithstanding the solitude and its inevitable, attendant problem-causing countermeasure, whatever it may be — is a thing I, who suffer from guilt for not writing, and when I do, regret not spending more time with my family — will treasure. I may not emulate him, but I treasure the notion nonetheless, because I empathize so readily with the desire to do something extreme to buy myself time for what I want to do at the cost of everything else. Of course the decision isn't that simple, nor should it be.

Writers sacrifice, yes. Of course. We're very glad they do, those of us who read, and those who write as well — maybe more so. It's an act of supreme ego — the idea that what we have to say is somehow more important, more worthy of preservation in diary or desk or internet or print journal than someone else's — but a selfless act too, that subtracts — from one's family, paying job, or other pursuits — in the mean time for a possible benefit in some nebulous future time, and ultimately benefits someone other than you, other than your family. The sacrifice doesn't need validation, of course, but it's nice to get it, and how much nicer it is to see a prominent artist like Brown acknowledge not only the cliché sacrifice, but also to say he wouldn't have done it any other way, and to have little remorse at the consequences of that sacrifice. Which is not to say there's no regret, that the Browns have blithely continued on without calculating the cost or feeling the effects. There's a telling moment when Brown is speaking at some length and with passion about what he's done with his life since beginning to write, pontificates just a bit, as is his perfect right — it's his damned movie — and the camera quickly cuts to Mary Annie, who simply raises an eyebrow, a great moment in a film filled with many others.

And so I come to Night Train V, the third-anniversary issue, more or less, time-wise, if not issue-wise. It ought to be our sixth issue coming out now, but the long funding-related gap between issues I and II makes it our fifth, and so be it. Funding for the future — fingers crossed — appears to be in order with the Rail Stop program, and all signs — *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Boston Phoenix*, The Pushcart Prize, National Public Radio, many other newspapers in our Rail Stops: Galesburg, Illinois; Kings Park, New York; our newest Rail Stop: Petaluma, California — point to Night Train's continued success, as do the fine writers in Issue V, and the stories we receive in the email, from writers who have all made their own various peace with the notion of sacrifice.

Now these stories, these sacrifices, change and take on their more hallowed role by the engagement of brain and word in a dance familiar to all of us as among the most sublime of common human events: reading, for pleasure, for edification, for the hell of it.

— Rusty Barnes