

The Ducks Have Left the Pond

A HUGE MAN is on the pool patio outside his house in New Jersey. In the close-up, Tony Soprano's face is creased with effort on its various levels and terraces. He is wondering where the ducks have gone. Is he reflecting that they must have left for the winter, or has it occurred to him that he, too, might be subject to divine will? *Why hast Thou forsaken me?* It helps that the face belongs to James Gandolfini. It is massive. Even at only a first visit to the show, the viewer will already have realized that Gandolfini, who can so easily fade into the background in his movies, looms immensely on television. From *Get Shorty* you can barely remember him: he was just a failed torpedo that John Travolta threw downstairs. But in *The Sopranos* he is a magnetic mountain, pulling toward him all legends of haunted loneliness and seismic inner violence. Charles Laughton looked that size in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In *I,*