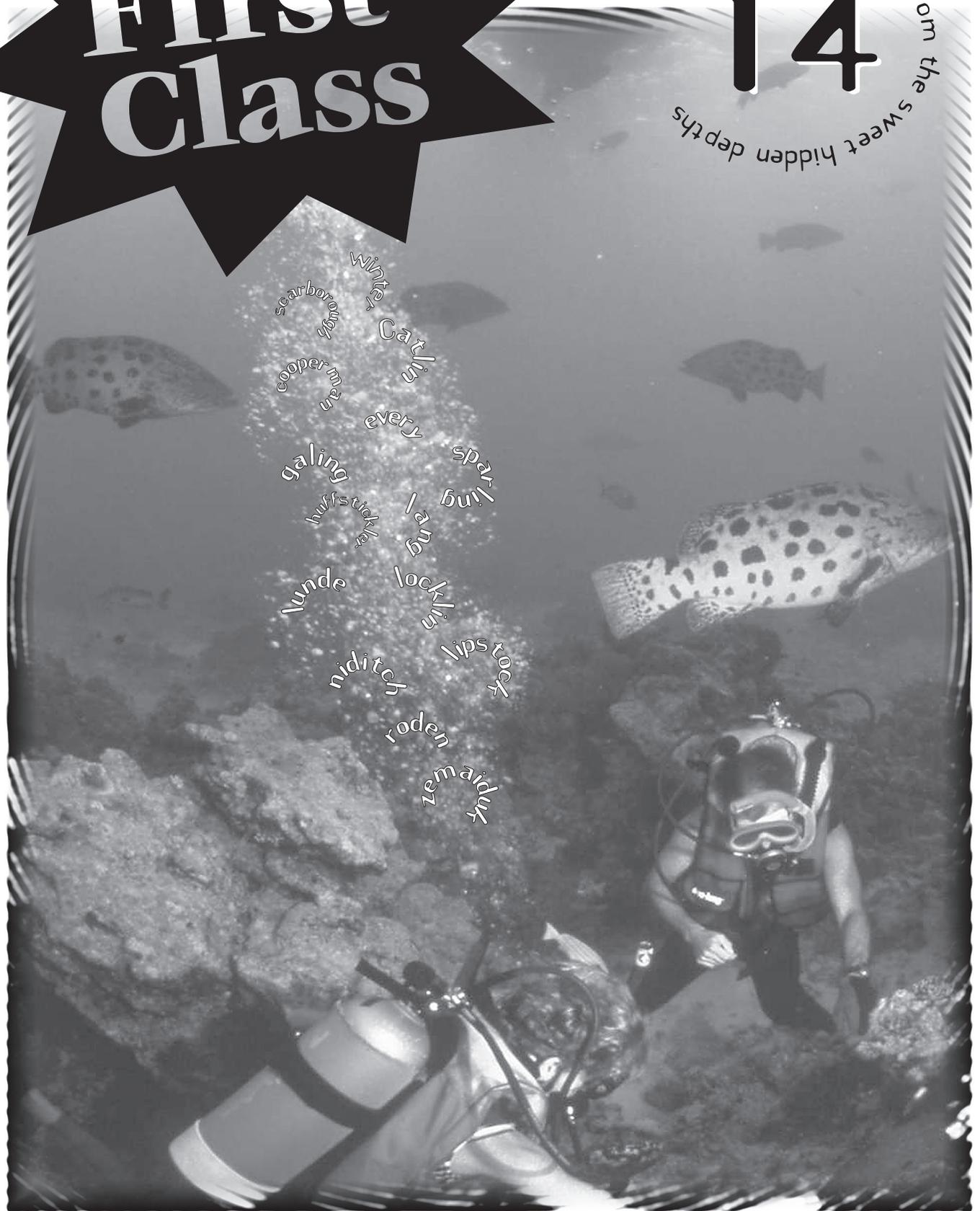


# First Class

words surfacing from the sweet hidden depths  
**14**







**ISSUE  
FOURTEEN**

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*GREETINGS: This issue features a killer mix of what's been appearing in the pobox lately. I've been getting more short fiction than ever, which means more time spent reading, reviewing and editing. Alas, less time for reviews! No new entries in "Try These" this time, but I promise triple the number of new reviews next issue, so keep sending your chaps and books. Also, although I have a bias toward short fiction, I will never abandon sweet poetics, as evidenced by the variety in this issue: long poetics, short poetics, short fiction, and drama. I publish in FC what I believe are the best reads. Perhaps you agree, perhaps not, but please enjoy. - Christopher M.*

## IMAGES

 **COVER DESIGN and ALL PHOTOGRAPHS** *by Christopher M.*



# Death and Transfiguration in Real Life

*Alan Catlin*

## **“my thoughts are aliens”**

communicated on  
parallel levels  
of existence,  
maintaining lives  
extracted from  
ozone  
a planet and  
a particle at  
a time  
formulating new  
worlds like  
interplanetary  
subway cars  
derailing in  
a tunnel of  
black holes inside  
passengers accept  
transfer tickets for,  
rushing head on  
enclosing  
indecipherable  
messages,  
surrendered  
before they can  
leave the lips

It wasn't always that way

I had dreams

Aspirations

Plans that weren't all that unrealistic

I was going to do something with my life beside sitting on the dead end side of a bar  
drinking whiskey through a straw

Chilled or unchilled

It didn't matter

I was in for some anaphylactic shocks

Was going to learn that I was allergic to things both human and non-

Things that came in bodies

but were poor excuses for the human race

## **Satan in a Barrel**

Maybe he thought  
the Prince of Darkness  
was somehow contained  
inside those empty  
oil cans he crushed  
each time he emptied

a new one pushing  
down on the drained  
ones with the flat  
of his hand  
veins straining  
in his forearms  
from the effort  
as he pushed  
as if he what he was  
doing was some kind  
of act of contrition  
penance and excuse  
for all the dead  
soldiers he was  
creating and  
was ultimately  
going to be  
responsible for

And it seemed the more I walked into this infernal nightlife, the more I was  
responsible for all the lost causes, burst visions and open veins left bleeding along  
the bars and in the locked barrooms and filthy bathroom stalls  
That even the business end of the bar was a locked vault with demons in it  
Evil spirits that caused strange visions that could not be swept or drowned by a vat  
of 69 scotches  
kegs of Imported beer  
It  
Life became a death march of the marionettes and a quarter may change the tunes  
they were singing but not the visions they impart

### **In Dreams**

*“The candy colored clown they call the sandman tiptoes to your room every night—”*

In dreams he is the black  
and white knight alive,  
a cool vibrato, a breeze,  
pained eyes behind dark  
glasses, iron cross pinning  
black shirt closed, a revenant  
unleashed in sleep, bodies  
superimposed upon his singing  
to a concert audience like  
the lovers writhing in adust  
in Hiroshima Mon Amour,  
the palsied survivors of  
the unthinkable shedding  
snake skins and radioactive  
bones, a death and transfiguration  
in real life, too horrible to be  
filmed in color, spellbound  
as they all are in a Dali  
dream sequence, naked as  
something culled from

the deepest subconscious,  
Ingrid Bergman's detached  
voice something from a blue  
bayou, a Chagall horse and moon,  
the abeyant hounds of hell,  
swaying in slo mo  
like Dean Stockwell in drag,  
a pretty woman in blue velvet,  
Dennis Hopper floating high  
on nitrous above the roof tops  
so involuted, so twisted, the candy  
colored Picasso clown enacts  
a harliquinade holding a death's  
head in one hand, a cat of nine  
tails in the other, bells strapped  
to the lashes ringing in a new  
year, masquerading a red death,  
singing: Go to sleep everything  
is all right.

But it isn't alright

Not by a long shot

The legions of shapes moving in the shadows of the ever present night are the visions  
that kept you up past the dawn

A kind of delirium tremens in denim trousers and cowboy boots

There's something in the way he moves that makes you wonder if he is entirely real

### **The Man Who Fell to Earth**

He looked like  
The Man Who Fell  
to Earth but I  
couldn't tell if  
it was before or  
after the contacts  
concealing his alien  
eyes had been removed  
because of his wrap  
around shades, sd.,  
"I have transmitters  
in my teeth that relay  
messages from outer  
space." Sat smiling  
as if I should be  
impressed so I sd.,  
"Canines, incisors or molars?"  
"All three." He said,  
barely missing a beat  
though I sensed a  
distinct lessening in  
his perceived command  
of the situation he was  
attempting to create  
so I sd., "Let me know  
when you get one tuned  
in for Uranus. I'd really  
like to hear about that

one.” “Very funny.”  
he replied, not meaning it.  
“Let me guess,” I sd.,  
“You wear dark glasses  
inside at night so no one  
can see the cameras behind  
you eyes.”  
“Very perceptive, any other  
observations or comments?”  
“Yeah, there were a couple  
of your guys in here last  
week. Maybe you should  
hook up and trade pointers  
or, at least, get your stories straight.”  
“You’re a real know it all,  
aren’t you?” “Yeah, you broke  
my cover, I do work for the  
thought police and what  
you’re thinking now could  
get you life without parole  
on a desert planet like ours.”

They leave a kind of vapor that gradually dissipates behind them after they are  
finished spreading their kind of cheer in your life  
An aura that never completely goes away  
A memory like an unremovable stain  
A brain scar that pouring alcohol on is only like adding more fuel to the fire  
But it doesn’t stop the process  
It has become the only fuel in your life  
And it gets you where you think you need to go  
Her t-shirt said,

BUMP and GRIND, gold lettering  
on fading black and it looked  
as if the shirt was made for a  
much taller frame the way it  
hung long at the arms and  
shoulders, barely containing  
the enormous bulk of her waist,  
those thundering thighs only  
a real Mack truck driving, hard  
loving man could drive through,  
an observation that led me to  
believe that the shirt’s slogan  
referred to his occupation as  
an auto body repair man rather  
than to hers as an exotic dancer.

Out on the street, visions coalesce rather than clarify  
The human comedy becomes some kind of side show freak show you have to pay a  
dollar thirty five to fully appreciate  
The Transit Authority thinks of it as bus fare but in reality it is just a forum for the

freak show to achieve greater mobility  
Greater flexibility

### **Don't Drink the Water**

No subject was safe  
with him, especially  
the weather.  
I watched as he worked  
the aisle of the bus,  
moving from seat to seat,  
diagonally along the rows  
attempting to engage  
the unwary in conversation,  
“Lousy weather we’re  
having, isn’t it?  
I’ll bet you don’t know  
why either, it’s them  
weather satellites  
the government’s been  
putting up in the sky.  
Messes up the atmosphere,  
that’s really what  
they’re for why do you  
think they’re called  
weather satellites?  
I’ll bet you never  
thought of that before  
did you? And that’s not  
the half of it.  
The government’s been  
putting stuff in our  
drinking water,  
supposed to be for your  
teeth but it makes  
people crazy.”  
“That would explain  
what happened to you,”  
I said, “wouldn’t it?  
I’ll bet the moral  
of your story is,  
Don’t Drink the Water.”  
“Who are you, anyway?”  
he asked me.  
“A government agent  
in disguise.” I said.  
He turned pure white,  
pulled the stop rope  
muttering, “I think  
I’ll walk from now on.”  
I haven’t seen him since.

In a way, it’s all in a day’s work  
Interacting with lunatics and borderline psychotics looking for someone whose mental  
emanations are weaker than theirs to prey on  
Once subjected to some kind of formal analysis, the probers don’t see the connections

Why you seem uptight and fraught with uncommon habits and unspeakable anxieties  
Seem stressed out to the max  
Wear custom made shirts with slogans like: Up Against it all the way.  
You might event take to analysis if they start using some of your outrageous for the  
fifty minute hour fee to provide good unblended scotch to keep the steam of  
consciousness flowing-  
But not in this lifetime-  
Might explain why you feel certain ways  
when they give you water instead of Glenlivet  
The buried child must remain safe where he is, hidden in a cloak of repressive  
attitudes  
Elaborate codes of behavior each more forbidding than the next  
It is the code of survival: give me alcohol or give me death you take refuge in  
Maybe  
Maybe not  
Time will tell as it always does  
Driven Insane Totally Insane

as  
some kind  
of joyridden  
stolen car  
under aged  
kids steered  
one handed  
stoned  
drunk and  
crazy down  
some pot  
holed  
straight  
away  
toward a  
blood red  
moon screaming  
bloody hell  
bloody murder  
no longer  
catch phrases  
but a last  
minute  
philosophy  
of life

# "To Juliet"

**Robert Cooperman**

*From Dottore Luigi Falcone, of the Cavalcanti Asylum,  
to Juliet, Advice Writer for the Verona, Italy, Post Office*

Signorina,  
While you consider your correspondence  
with poor, benighted souls  
a diversion for a young woman  
witty as a Shakespearean heroine,  
I must insist you cease communicating  
with my patient Raphael Colucci,  
a schizophrenic so variable  
that one hour he believes himself Petrarch,  
the next Dante or Virgil,  
the poor man without a gift for poetry.

Now he has fixated on you, Signorina,  
in your charade as the Bard's Giulietta  
in your Lonelyhearts letters.  
Shame on you: playing with a wretch  
whose brain-waves shudder  
like an electrician gripping a naked wire.  
Should you attempt to persecute  
my patient with any further correspondence—  
which I shall intercept and destroy—  
I will notify the authorities.

I suggest you place a personals' ad,  
rather than plague patients  
whose mental states can shatter  
like badly manufactured light bulbs.  
Let your fantasies fly, by all means,  
but not at the expense of a man  
teetering like a top.

This need for advice and control  
is a sublimation for your compulsion  
to play Iago's two-backed beast;  
you should consider a reputable analyst,  
whom I could recommend;  
or save the world some trouble  
and just ply the streetwalker's trade:  
the men you entertain will curb  
your craving to interfere  
where you can only cause greater pain.

***Juliet replies to Dottore Luigi Falcone***

Dottore,  
How dare you!  
I am no temptress seducing  
the emotionally fragile into flinging  
themselves into siren-filled surf,

just a woman hired by our post office  
to write harmless advice.

But since you have analyzed me,  
let me return the favor.  
You were an only, coddled child  
who threw tantrums whenever  
your battered parents didn't buy you  
more toys than there are statues  
in the Castelvechio.

I pity your assistants, staff,  
but most, your patients: your asylum,  
a prison for tortured souls.  
You would have flourished  
as Mussolini's Minister of Health;  
and if you ever need employment,  
the Inquisition was never  
officially abolished in Italy.

Reread my letter to Signor Colucci,  
and you will find it inoffensive  
as a cup of weak tea or broth.  
Any future epistles from him,  
I will forward, unopened, to you.

But I must protest, Dottore,  
if your own security system  
had not been as incompetent  
as our military commanders  
during the Second World War,  
his call of distress  
would never have reached me.

*(A few years ago, the Verona, Italy, post office hired someone to answer all the mail it received addressed only "To Juliet." So much is true, but everything else in these two poems is fictional.)*

# The Death of Sitting Bull

**Gary Every**

For his sins at the Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull was pardoned only on the condition that he tour the world as a star actor in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Every performance ended with the same grand finale; a reenactment of Custer's Last Stand. Buffalo Bill gave Sitting Bull a one trick pony and when bullets began to fly on stage the horse would pretend to be shot, rear up on his hind legs and do a slow death dance.

Bang! Bang! went the gavel.

"Order! Order!" demanded the Senate Committee Chairman.

The Native Americans whispered among themselves before Sitting Bull rose as spokesperson. The senators did not trust the wily red man and sometimes the senators would ask the other Indians direct questions. But only Sitting Bull answered.

The senators were outraged.

"Who do you think you are?" the man with the gavel asked. "You are just another Indian."

Sitting Bull replied.

"My heart must be red and sweet because whatever passes by puts out its tongue to taste me. I want to tell you that if the Great Spirit has chosen anyone to be president of this land it is myself."

There was chaos in the Congressional chambers.

The great Sioux chief Red Cloud never lost a war against the United States Army and he signed treaties after each and every war which guaranteed his people the land they had defended until the grasses stopped growing, the rivers stopped flowing and the end of time.

Red Cloud used to joke that apparently the end of time came about every seven years. Red Cloud was part of a Sioux delegation which traveled to Washington DC to speak about treaty abuses and as he toured the Atlantic seaboard and saw the industrial muscle of the emerging fledgling nation, he realized that the Indian Wars were doomed. Red Cloud vowed never to fight again.

Sitting Bull toured the same eastern cities and played Wild West shows before royalty in the European capitals of Berlin, London, and Paris and remained unimpressed by the wonders of technology or the advantages of celebrity.

What struck Sitting Bull was the dire poverty of the squalid tenements and slums. Although Buffalo Bill paid Sitting Bull a pretty penny, it was said that Sitting Bull returned to the reservation without a single dime. All his money ended up in the scruffy pockets of the rag tag young orphan boys who scurried, stole, and hustled a living, homeless in the new metropolises. Sitting Bull vowed his children would never live in that kind of poverty and vowed to fight until his death.

The archangel of Sitting Bull's death was a member of the Sioux nation, a proud member of the reservation police. It was Sergeant Red Tomahawk who fired the fatal bullet into the back of Sitting Bull's skull. Sitting Bull never personally participated in a Ghost Dance but he did encourage the dancers to gather on his reservation. Sitting Bull invited the rebel prophet Kicking Bear to perform Ghost Dance ceremonies at his reservation. Sitting Bull broke the pipe of peace which he had kept since he surrendered in 1881.

The Sioux reservation police were given the orders to arrest Sitting Bull and led by Lieutenant Bull Head, the reservation policeman rode on horseback through the night, pounding hooves racing in the darkness. They crept inside Sitting Bull's lodge and awakened him to arrest him.

Sitting Bull complied and asked that his favorite horse be saddled to ride. Over 150 Ghost

Dancers had gathered outside, protesting the arrest of this great chief and as the 43 policeman tried to take Sitting Bull away, the crowd pushed and shoved.

Sitting Bull called out to be rescued. A man named Catch the Bear shot Lieutenant Bull Head and Sergeant Shave Head shot Catch the Bear. Almost instantly, Red Tomahawk raised his pistol and fired into the back of Sitting Bull's skull.

At the sound of gunfire, Sitting Bull's favorite horse, the one given to him by Buffalo Bill Cody, performed the same trick he did at the end of every Wild West Show. The horse reared up on his hind legs and began to bob and weave, waving his front hooves.

The crowd gasped—the horse was ghost dancing.

Everything came to a standstill while the horse finished his routine and then suddenly battle was resumed. It was hand to hand combat, the police used sticks and clubs, the women used knives, the warriors armed themselves with lances. It was a savage battle; Sioux against Sioux, brother against brother, aunt against nephew, and when it was over, Lieutenant Bull Head, Sergeant Shave Head, Sitting Bull, and his 17 year old son, were all dead.

Sitting Bull followed the crow's road to the other world and never returned.



**Swing, Vilnius, Swing**  
*Christopher M.*

# Duty Night on the Base

*Ed Galing*

night duty on  
the base

they had me down  
at the far end of  
the runway  
guarding the fuckin  
airplanes,

hell, who did they  
think would come along  
and steal 'em, anyway...  
this was landbased, man,  
this was a naval air station,  
and we were all fuckin  
reserves on active duty,  
but shit, we were just  
makin believe that the  
russians were gonna come  
over here and blow us up.  
cold war shit,  
right after ww2,  
and i slept in this  
cold duty bunk room,  
guys snorin and fartin,  
and a flashlight in my  
fuckin eyes at 3 in the  
morning...

up, buddy, and the sunofabitch  
duty guy is pullin off my covers,  
and i get up still half asleep,  
and damn, i was just dreamin  
of a fuckin blow job when i  
was so rudely interrupted,

out on the truck, they  
take me down to this lonely  
spot in the middle of fuckin  
nowhere, drop me off at this  
sentry booth, and leave me  
there in the night,  
damn freezin in february,  
and i sit in this damn booth,  
playin with myself,

outside there is a fence,  
and across the fence there is  
a main highway, 611, and a  
diner open all night, and

hell, we're all just makin  
believe, cause this is all  
civilian shit, and we're all  
a bunch of crazy sailors who  
think its all a crock,

cause outside the fence  
cars are headlightin up and back,  
and even in the dark i know

damn well there aint anyone gonna  
come along and blow up this  
air station,  
    and the hangar is there,  
a few feet away, all those jets  
in there that the weekend jet  
jockeys fly on days off,  
    and all those mechs on the line,  
but it aint like someone is  
really gonna do somethin stupid in  
this country.  
    then i got the phone inside,  
and i call up, and the duty guy on  
the main gate says post one, and  
i say this is post five, all is well,  
and he says okay, gotcha, and i hang up,  
and every half hour i call in to make  
sure they know i am on the job,  
    and its cold as fuckin hell in this  
little box,  
    and lonely as a bitch, and dark,  
and i keep talkin to myself,  
    and then i got this idea to call up  
the diner cross the road and order some  
coffee,  
    cause i heard there is a waitress over  
there who likes sailors,  
    and she will bring me the coffee, cross  
the road in the dark,  
    and pass the coffee over to me through  
the fence, where there is just enough room  
to do some business...  
    and soon, in the dark, i see her  
crossin the road,  
    she hands me the coffee, and smiles,  
and i pull out my dick and pass it through  
the fence,  
    and she don't get excited or nuthin,  
just looks at my hardon, and then she  
bends over, i feel her lips, and it feels  
so damn good, gettin a blow job through  
the fence, and when she is done, she smiles,  
and takes off without another word, back across  
the road, back to the diner on the other side,  
cause she likes sailors, and does this as a good  
will deed, cause hell, after all, this is the  
price you gotta pay for democracy...  
    and feelin so damn good at five in the  
mornin, like i dont give a shit if the russians  
came or not, feelin the afterglow now, hell,  
i get back in my booth and call the main gate...  
and the damn coffee is cold!

# The Visitation

*Albert Huffstickler*

She said she was the Madonna of Ancient Sorrows, here to redeem men from themselves. Her rags were a disguise, she told me, because she worked purely by telepathy. She was beautiful in the way that old things are beautiful, burnished and scarred but glowing still as old things glow sometimes as though their very age created a luster that youth could never emulate. She stood there in the mouth of the alley silent then raised her arms in blessing. The rags parted to reveal a small, round, perfect breast then the starlight gathered on the point of the tiny nipple and a moment later she was gone. A stray cat, thin as hope, ran across my feet and vanished into the darkness while I stood on.

Dolce Vita  
Austin, Texas  
Sep. 15, 1998



**Mopping Mama**  
*Christopher M.*

# Beethoven Attends the First Performance of the Ninth Symphony

***Albert Huffstickler***

I see him standing in a loft  
looking down on the stage,  
shaggy head bowed as though listening—  
but not listening: feeling the sounds  
through his feet, pulsing up to him  
through the floor as he wonders  
if they are hearing now what  
he thought he heard in those  
crystalline moments when,  
deaf, he was deaf no longer to  
those beings of light who  
swarmed around him like so many  
luminous moths, their voices  
flooding his consciousness til  
he lifted that shaggy head and  
strange, horrific sounds gushed  
from the writhing mouth as  
his hand flew across the pages,  
scurried and scribbled and scratched  
out and went back and, head  
tilted, listening, scrawled again  
til, with a shudder, he turned  
the last page and flung it  
from him in a rage—or in  
ecstasy: it was difficulty  
to say. But done it was  
and someone else's now to  
shape and gild and give while  
he stood apart looking now  
like nothing so much as a  
wolf at bay, his old feet trembling  
on the trembling floor and  
it seemed for a moment that  
light itself streamed upward  
from that worn wood as  
it streamed simultaneously  
down on that bent form, face  
twisted in rage while the  
tears poured down the ravaged cheeks  
to course like comets the  
incandescent, living air, alive  
as air had never been alive before.

# High Windows

**James M. Lang**

(with apologies to Philip Larkin)

*...and immediately*

It dislodges itself from the sill clumsily, but gently, as if it were especially concerned not to give way to the impulse to shatter before it achieves its appointed destiny. From over forty stories into the sky it begins its wind-tossed and erratic descent into the street below, slicing and sluicing through a clear blue fall morning. It knives intensely downward, catches a sudden gust of wind and pulls up nearly to a complete halt before it returns to its fall, bobbing and weaving through the complex of air currents battling one another for supremacy.

In a basement classroom of a small downtown college, she struggles with a question on the analytic portion of the SATs. The question presents her with a logical problem around which she is having difficulty wrapping her mind.

She puts down her pencil, rubs her face in her hands slowly, her fingertips moving from her cheeks up into her hair and back down again. She thinks of her father, reading his newspaper and relaxing in some coffee bar while she struggles to loosen these tangled logical knots.

He will be in a good mood on the drive home; he will be satisfied with fifteen minutes of talking—he'll have some interesting facts about Chicago that he picked up in a bookstore to share with her. But that won't last, and before they reach Gary she'll be listening to her radio station; they won't talk for the remaining three hours of the drive back downstate.

And then tonight... tonight...?

In May there are two extra bills to pay: car insurance and newspaper subscription. Count total of \$800. Bonus check from June \$1000 without taxes; count \$700. In June one extra bill to pay: summer camp; count \$300. \$1100 extra bills to pay from May and June, and \$700 bonus check. Leaves \$400.

Exasperated, she drops her pencil and pushes her hair back. She has decided finally to let it grow in gray and to leave it that way. He will not like it—but she has decided.

“John, you are not thinking. What are you thinking about? Where is your head?”

She stands and takes a pitcher from the refrigerator, pours herself a glass of iced tea. Her son takes a cookie from a plate full of them in the middle of the table, chews it meditatively.

“Dad helps me with my homework.”

“Honey,” she says, sitting down with her iced tea and a renewed feeling of commitment to helpfulness and patience, “I have already explained that your father will not be home until after your bedtime tonight, and we will be spending all day tomorrow at your grandmother's. You need to get this finished tonight, and I am helping you now. Now let's try again.”

John finishes his cookie, wipes crumbs from his math sheet.

They try again.

I was not more than ten feet behind him. I happened to be watching him at that moment by complete chance. There were a thousand other pedestrians crowding the sidewalks that day, a thousand cars braying and muscling their way into my consciousness, a thousand skyscrapers arching their multi-windowed spines into the morning sky. I had little opportunity or inclination

to study him, though in the immediate aftermath I had occasion to recollect what I had seen beforehand.

Maybe forty years old, balding, brown hair in a ringed tonsure around a clean scalp. Wearing a raincoat and a scarf wrapped around his neck. He walked with his head down, as if studying the pavement, or as if he were engaged in deep thought and couldn't be bothered to catch the eyes of pedestrians approaching him. His step was firm and purposeful, as if he were en route to an appointment. Though we walked at roughly the same pace, I believe I was moving slightly quicker, and eventually I would have caught up to him and passed him by.

***Rather than words comes the thought of high windows***

Falling, dancing, catching rays of light and bouncing them from the sun to the windows it passes in its descent, those windows not—yet!—brave enough to thrust themselves from the safety of their sheltered existence into the empty atmosphere. As it catches momentum it no longer finds itself pulled up and arrested by sudden gusts, poised in near-complete mid-air suspension; the trajectory has settled itself into a thinly vertical descent. The air around the glass whistles, softly, almost a sizzle, and one almost expects to see smoke emerging from its painful ripping apart of the fall city horizon.

“What is this?”

“I don't know.”

“Is this notes for the story? Are these quotes or something?”

“No. I wrote those.”

“For this story? For this paper?”

“No. Or yes. I guess so.”

“You know we can't publish anything like this. We need a news story, man. If you're too upset to do that let me know and I'll put Porter on it. I'll have him interview you as an eyewitness.”

“I was an eyewitness.”

“I know that, but you're not writing an eyewitness account. You're writing... I don't know what you're writing. Stick to the story.”

“I need to work through some stuff with this story—it'll come around.”

“Listen, if you want to talk philosophically about this, I'll buy you a beer later and we can relax and take it all in. But right now I need a story. Give me a story.”

Q: A jagged-edged sheet of glass, traveling at 100 miles per hour, falls one half of a mile from near the top of a tall skyscraper. Assuming that the glass travels at a uniform speed, and is not buffeted by winds, how long will it take for the glass to chop the head off of a man wandering smiling and aimless through the streets of Chicago?

A:

\$400. Pay \$400 less on credit card. No: if you don't pay it off every month they charge you interest for the entire amount you have charged, not just the \$400 you didn't pay. Withdraw \$400 from savings. Savings total \$500 right now. Goes below \$250 get charged \$10. Can take \$250. Count \$150 remaining.

Homework finished, John sits perched on the couch in front of a video. She absentmindedly straightens up the house. In their bedroom she reaches for a sock halfway underneath the bed and her knuckle knocks against something hard. She feels for the object and pulls out an ashtray,

half-full with cigarette butts, spilling ashes onto the brown carpeting.

God damn him, she thinks. He has been sitting in here smoking in secret for God knows how long. He must do it after I leave for work. I leave for work, take John to school, and he wakes up and sits in bed and has a cigarette right in our bedroom. While I am driving to work, and our children are in school, he lies in here on the bed smoking a cigarette.

She can see him sitting there, no shirt on, chest hair ruffled and flattened, still half under the covers, smoking and staring off into the distance. He is gathering his thoughts for the day, making his endless financial calculations for the household budget, or rehearsing his prepared speeches for Heather about the importance of good grades and a college education.

God damn him. She will put that ashtray on his pillow and let him see that she found it. He'll find that ashtray on his pillow when he gets home tonight. God damn.

### *The sun-comprehending glass*

One moment, he had a head like a man. The next moment, the head was gone. It was as if he were a marionette, and someone had simply set his head atop his shoulders, with nothing attaching it to the neck, and a sudden gust of wind blew it off. It was not until the blood began to spurt that I realized that the head indeed must have once been attached. By the time I understood what had happened and saw the blood I was stepping into it.

The body acted as if controlled by remote operation. As the head detached itself, the body lifted up slightly, as if he were standing on tiptoe in order to catch a glimpse of some distant object. The head gone, the body continued two further steps, thanks to the force of its forward momentum or to the inertia of a nervous system unable to comprehend, for that briefest of moments, its separation from the organ which issued its orders.

A downstate man was killed on Saturday morning when a piece of glass from the

A Springfield man, walking through downtown Chicago while his daughter took a college-entrance exam, was killed Saturday morning in a tragic accident when

In downtown Chicago, a piece of glass fell from a skyscraper and cut tragically short the life of a visitor from downstate Illinois

Cut tragically short the body of

Cut the head off of

A man with his head cut off

A decapitated Springfield man took a very brief stroll on Saturday morning through the streets of downtown Chicago, managing three or four steps before his condition eventually got the best of him and

De-capitate

De-cap-itate

A visiting Springfield man lost his cap on Saturday morning—and the head that it was keeping warm!—When a jagged sheet of glass from a nearby skyscraper

A jagged sheet of glass from a downtown skyscraper

A downstate man

Another new hazard for world-weary Chicagoans—walking around beneath skyscrapers. The warning comes too late for one downstate man whose stroll through the arteries of downtown Chicago led to the opening of an artery

“Lane, you got that story for me yet?”

“I’m working on the lead.”

“What the hell is this? Are these supposed to be a joke?”

“No, listen, I’m just working the bugs out of my head—don’t worry, I’ll have the story in thirty minutes.”

“Goddamn, Lane, this is sick stuff. You know what, I’m gonna take you off this story. Why don’t you take the rest of the day off, man. I insist. Go on home.”

*Quiet but insistent.* “No. This is my story. I’ll have it for you in thirty minutes.”

“OK, OK, listen. Take thirty minutes—if you have a story for me at the end of that time, we’ll run it—if not, I’ll give it to Porter—no big deal, right? Take your mind off it for a few minutes—go grab yourself a cup of coffee and come back to it fresh.”

***And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows***

The window, nearing the earth now, skyrockets towards a point where the sidewalk meets the base of the building from which it fell, where it should shatter loudly and perhaps painfully for local passersby—but not fatally. The window creases and electrifies the air like lightning, maddeningly determined in its trajectory to its final destination.

But, that is, for a sudden and forceful gust of wind that comes whipping through a nearby alley, and disperses itself around the corner of the building just as the window reaches a point at which—had he time both to realize and to act upon that realization—a passerby would have detected the faint hiss of glass shearing through the morning sky, and looked up into the sky with curiosity to find its source.

That gust of wind caught the bottom edge—the jagged edge—of the window, and quickly turned it to a near horizontal position, from which it continued its descent at a more oblique trajectory, on a downward diagonal away from the building and towards the street.

And into the neck of a downstate man

And into the neck

And into

Where \$150?

She steps out onto the back porch of her home, and stares off at the water tower and the crows wheeling and diving around it in the distance. In another year her baby will be gone, far away from the rituals of daily meals and weekend morning television and summer outings to see the Cardinals in St. Louis. In another year their lives will change irrevocably, and she will have only John and him left.

She has thought about leaving him—not just the cigarettes but the little lies that the cigarettes are a symbol of, the little lies that buy him an extra beer at the bar, that buy him an extra night at a conference in another city, away from her and his family responsibilities, that buy him his little indulgences and buy him God knows what else. She wonders sometimes if she will ever leave him. She is not resigned yet enough—at forty-four—that her life must continue along the path that it has been following these past twenty years. There might be time and cause for change yet.

She steps back into the house and finds that John has closed his eyes, lays quietly asleep before the television which pitches him sugary cereals she won't let him eat. She could not do that to John and Heather—not now, anyway. Whatever his faults, he always comes home eventually and he always gives those children his heart, however much he struggles to keep it for himself. He always loses that battle.

And then a knock, and a glance at the screen door, and two policeman standing there framed in it.

And tonight she will let him have what he wants. She will be away at school in 10 months from now, and she will leave him behind. And she knows it, and he knows it. And when she comes back neither of them will be the same.

Last Saturday they walked up Wheelock's Hill with a six-pack of beer and a blanket and found a spot among the rocks. It was warm and there were stars and she pulled down her shirt and her pants and let him feel her all around. His tongue flicked between her breasts, her thighs, and she took him in her hands and they spent themselves onto the rocks, exhausted. But she would not let him have what he wanted.

Afterward they made their way down the hill quickly, running and stumbling and kicking rocks and laughing like children. He jumped on her back and she carried him twenty paces before she fell, laughing, and they collapsed onto the grassy slope. And they lay there and kissed again, and felt the heat rising from one another, but she pulled away and jumped up and ran off calling back and taunting him as she bounded in long steps down the final slope of the hill.

She did not let him have what he wanted, but tonight she will.

And then she looks up—in a momentary panic—to see how many precious moments her reverie has stolen from her and instead of the clock she sees two policemen standing framed in the door, and then they are walking towards her desk.

This is not a story I can tell. Stories make sense of the world and this story—or perhaps it is this world—will not tolerate that.

There is a man standing in the office from which the window has fallen, and he knows nothing of what has happened below. He has been on the phone all day consoling and soothing customers who fly into a panic when the chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank sneezes. He didn't notice the window when it fell, and only realized what had happened several minutes later when a gust of wind blew the papers on his desk into disarray.

At home he has a wife and two small children, and he thinks of them as he waits for the maintenance crew, sitting at his desk between calls, sipping a cup of coffee. He stands and approaches the window—cautiously—until he is just a foot or two from the sill.

His office faces the north side of the city, and through the window's opening he imagines he can see his home in a distant north shore suburb. He imagines a thin filament, like a spider's thread, connecting him to the lives of his wife and children—she taps away on their home computer, checking her e-mail, while the children struggle and fight against their afternoon naps.

He turns his back to find, not the maintenance men, but two policeman standing in his doorway. And the filament is snapped, leaving an empty blue sky, which shows

*Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.*

# For the Price of a Two Pound Brisket

**Mike Lipstock**

My old man could do anything with his hands; fix cars, elevators, even telephones. He always made a living but suddenly he was confronted with a depression and all the jobs dried up. Go on a bread line, sell apples on the street? Nah, that wasn't for my old man. He had time to read now and as my mother later said, "It poisoned his brain. As a result of his reading he became 100% Communist and made a big decision. He was taking his family to Russia and we were all going to live on a commune.

Every night he read to us from the Daily Worker and drove us nuts. I was lucky though, my mother was on my side. In no way was she leaving America! Even though she was crazy about the guy. She also knew how to needle him for self-preservation.

"Hey Al," she'd counterattack, "don't forget how the Cossaks busted our Jewish heads! That's why we came here. Remember?"

"Aah, that was in the Old Russia," he'd answer back. "The Cossaks are finished and so is anti-semitism. Not like here in the USA, understand?"

"There's prosperity in the Soviet Union?" she'd snap back, "they love Jews now? We're gonna get pie in the sky on a collective in central Asia? Who you kiddin' Al?"

So Pop went back to reading his red manifesto and each night came home from the library with a bundle of new ideas. Fixing railroads in Australia, patching up airplanes in Central America... anything to put his anxious hands to work.

One summer night in 1933 when I was eleven he sprang a new surprise on us.

"I got a big announcement to make," he said.

I thought his news was aimed at me so I answered quickly.

"Pa, I don't wanna be a Young Bolshevik Pioneer, I just wanna be a Boy Scout."

"Nah, this isn't about the Pioneers, Harry. We're going to the Shady Pines Hotel." Mom raised a brow. This was a lot better than the news about the commune.

"Whatta you mean Al?" she asked.

"I won a raffle for a weekend at a hotel in the Catskills and everything is free from Friday until Sunday."

"How much was the raffle Al?"

"That's the good part, only half a buck."

"That's the good part, huh? You blow the price of a two pound brisket on a raffle and we're broke."

"Whatta you talking about briskets for? At Shady Pines you'll be eating steaks and roast beef three times a day."

I was thrilled. No lecture on communism tonight and a chance to see the country for the first time in my life. It was settled, Ma agreed to the vacation and Pop stopped pushing me to join the Young Bolsheviks... temporarily.

In the morning I got into our old Nash sedan and held the throttle down and the spark up as pop cranked with all his might. Self starters hadn't been invented yet, you had to crank the engine to start up. He cranked his arms off but couldn't get a peep out of the Nash.

I watched as his face turned a deep purple. Boy! Was he mad! Suddenly he started to curse in Yiddish...&@%\$#%, and then in English. I didn't know my old man knew so many dirty words.

Mom walked over to calm him down. She held his cranking arm in her hands and whispered softly.

“Al, take it easy, you’re working an a heart attack.”

That seemed to do the trick. The purple drained from his face and he gripped Mom’s waist with a powerful hug and kissed her on the lips. He picked up the crank handle and with a slow backswing and fluid follow through started the Nash in seconds.

We were traveling up route 9W and I could feel pop’s nervousness as we drove through the small mountain towns. The speed limit was forty but his foot didn’t budge off thirty.

He turned to me for a second and said. “We’re coming to the town of Tuxedo Park, Harry.”

“So what Pa?”

“So what? Those momser (bastard) Cossak cops hate Jews and give everyone from Brooklyn a ticket! Thanks to Stalin we don’t have that in Russia anymore!”

Mom was laughing in the back seat. “Who you kiddin’ Al?”

He didn’t answer her.

“How do they know we’re Jewish,” I asked.

“They got us by the license plates kid. Brooklyn plates have only K’s and L’s, the rest of New York has the whole alphabet.”

“Ma, is Pop kiddin?”

“Harry,” she said, “look out the window, see all those signs on the front lawns of the hotels and rooming houses? It’s that way all the way up.”

I could see big lettered signs with just one word...RESTRICTED!

“What’s that mean Ma?”

“It means we’re not wanted, like we had diptheria or leprosy.”

We almost made it through the town of Tuxedo Park but a few blocks before town’s end a cop pulled us over. The charge, going too slow. The K in our plates did us in.

Five bucks later we pulled into the Shady Pines Hotel. But at thirty miles an hour we came too late for lunch. It was over. Poor Mom, that five dollar fine ruined her budget for a month. She even had maps out on the front seat looking for another way home.

At 6pm we were the first in the dining room and Pop wasn’t kidding about the food. Soup, salads, steaks, chicken, veal, and desserts that knocked your socks off. After dinner Mom went to the social hall and pop meandered into the casino where they had slot machines. It was 1933 and New York State permitted one armed bandits in hotels.

He took to the slots like a May Day parade in Moscow. He loved them both. My father, the working class proletarian was tossing dough into a hungry gambling machine. He needs three fruits of a kind to win but all he got was a mixture of fruit salad: lemons, plums, and cherries that didn’t pay off. Fortunately for him Mom had no idea what kind of dough Pop was running through. His whole life was now centered around six bandits who never heard of Lenin, Stalin or Marx. He kept company with them during the day. While we were having fun at the lake, poor Al was going broke and spraining his cranking arm. How would we ever get home?

On Saturday night he took me into his confidence.

“Harry,” he said, “the machines are killing me and if Mom finds out I’ll have trouble for the rest of my life.”

“So quit Pa!”

“Nah, I’ll get it back tonight, or else.”

“Or else what Pa?”

He didn’t answer me, just walked into the casino and started to pump bandits. It wasn’t long until we heard a familiar voice coming from the gambling den. It was Pop. He had a monkey wrench and pliers in his hands and had stripped the slot machine apart. Wheels and springs were everywhere and the floor was littered with nickels, dimes and quarters.

“Fascist bastards! Ku Klux Klanners! You steal everyone’s money, you sonovabitches!” he yelled.

Ma grabbed his cranking arm and I held him by the waist, the rest of him was being held by two big guys from management.

What a night! What a disaster until Mr. Shady Pines, the owner himself, negotiated a settlement with Mom. I thought she’d have a heart attack peeling off her savings, thirty bucks to bring the one arm bandit back to life.

In the morning Pa went with us to the lake and never left Mom’s sight. But after a few hours he pleaded for a bathroom break and she let him go. I joined him and he immediately swore me to secrecy; I was so proud that he trusted me.

“Harry,” he said, “all I got left are my four lucky quarters and I’m gonna play the GOLDEN SLOT MACHINE! You gotta keep an eye out for your mother.”

“You’re playing the Golden Slot? Pa you need four of a kind to win and all ya got is the quarters.”

“I know Harry, but Manny our waiter tipped me off. Once a month they let some cherries and lemons come in and once in six month’s there’s a winner on the Golden Slot. Tonight’s the night kid.”

“Is he sure Pa?” I wanted him to win so bad.

“Yeah Harry, and if I win, you got my word, I’ll cancel the trip to Russia. OK with you kid?”

And how was it OK. I took my position at the casino entrance and kept one eye out for Mom and the other for Pop and his bankroll of quarters. He used the same slow back swing that started the Nash and his follow through was as smooth as silk. In later years people spoke with reverence of Al’s beautiful swing on that fateful night.

I couldn’t see what the golden wheels had spun but suddenly all hell broke loose. There were screams, shrieks! People were shoving, pushing just to get a glimpse.

“JACKPOT! JACKPOT! AL JUST GOT FOUR BLACK SEVENS ON THE GOLDEN SLOT!”

You could hear the uproar all over the hotel!

Pa leaned against his wondrous bandit, kissing the golden arm and clutching the machine to his chest. Just about then Mr. Shady Pines came dashing into the casino and turned white when he saw the FOUR MIRACLE SEVENS!

“How’d that happen?” he gasped, “that machine only comes up with three lemons.”

“And how much do the lemons pay?” Pa asked.

“Five hundred dollars.”

“And FOUR BLACK SEVENS?”

Shady Pines whipped out a handkerchief and mopped his sweating brow. By now Mom had arrived and asked with a trembling voice, “How much does Al win?”

Shady gulped and answered... “Two Thousand Dollars!”

Can you imagine what it was like to win that kind of dough in the bankrupt world of 1933? Pop was in shock and Mom the saver, the worrier, was delirious with joy. For the first time in years she wouldn't have to pinch pennies to survive.

We left Shady Pines like Rockefellers; why Mom even threw away her new routing as we zipped down 9W going *over* forty miles an hour.

"To hell with the cops Al," she said. "Lets go home."

"And the hell with Russia too. That's what I promised Harry just before I hit the sevens!"

He stepped on the gas a little harder as we flew through Tuxedo Park. Why not? He was a capitalist now and couldn't care less about cops on that wonderful Sunday afternoon.

A final note on that weekend in the Catskill mountains. Many years later we read about the Bierabjian commune that Pop had signed us up for. Every living soul was slaughtered there by the Gestapo when the Nazis stormed through Russia in 1941. But for the price of a two pound brisket I'm still alive and can tell this tale.



**Flower for Papa**  
*Christopher M.*

# paul klee: schoolgirls, outdoors,

**Gerald Locklin**

children should not smoke cigars.  
children should not *be* cigars.  
children should not *become* cigars.  
these are metaphysical givens.

some children have two heads.  
some children are tow-heads.  
some children have one head,  
but four eyes. some children  
have three eyes apportioned  
over one-and-a-half heads.  
some children have stovepipes  
for heads. some children's heads  
are violet, while other children  
gradually become indistinguishable  
from the background coloration  
(like chameleons, but irreversible).  
some children are the color of ether:  
these are known as "ethereal."  
thus, some children remain part of  
a cosmic consciousness (which is  
monochrome), while others become  
adults, individuals, separated by  
broad brushstrokes and a color of  
their own, one different from that  
of the world and those of their fellow  
adults. they are then allowed to smoke  
cigars. this is a pataphysical certainty.

it was a good year for schoolgirls  
to go back indoors,  
but they didn't.

# Hairy Ancestor

*Dusty Erik Lunde*

My hair, it seems, is a mess. It remains  
a mess. Once, it became less, less than a mess  
or so I thought, but it turns out I was mistaken.  
I was just wrong, it seems. For it was still  
a mess, in fact. An awfully messy mess  
I wasn't proud of, and I'm still not  
too proud to admit it. Oh, yes: my hair  
was imponderably messy, no doubt about it.  
Or rather, it appeared to be, though appearances  
can be deceiving. Since maybe I was hallucinating.  
Daydreaming. Tripping and spacing. Breathing  
without oxygen.

Meanwhile, my hair keeps on growing  
and I can't stop it, even if I cut it.  
Because it will always grow back again  
whether I like it or not. Whether I choose  
to believe such things, or otherwise.  
And so, I've opted to let it grow, naturally  
of its own free will, its own innate volition  
without artificial preservatives added.  
Maybe I'll dye it, or perhaps Jeri-Curl  
or dreadlock it, or braid it in corn-rows.  
Then again, I might not. After all: I'm lilly  
white working class white boy, thank Darwin.  
Anyway, it's a decision I'll consider  
in my own sweet time and hairy way. Oh, well.  
Things could always be worse, I suppose.  
I could have thinning, graying, receding hair  
line. I could be going bald. But I'm not  
and never will, most likely, considering  
my elders and watching my kinfolk.  
A thickness abounds, through thick and kith  
in all my kin. Thank Darwin.

Once when I was shaving, I thought I nicked myself  
with the razor. Oh, great, I thought: now  
everyone I see today will think it's snot  
hanging beneath my nose. But when I flicked the speck  
off my upper lip, I discovered it really was snot.  
I was so relieved it was, and not a slice of the razor  
so that everyone I met would think it snot anyway.  
The illusion of freedom: nick of the blade  
or drip of the nose? Everyone's enslaved: to society,  
to ancestry, or to their hair, among other things.

# Vienna Roles

**B.Z. Niditch**

CHARACTERS: BERTHE, owner of the boardinghouse, about 60  
JOSEPH, a retired man, early 70's  
HEINZ, a philosophy teacher, age 30  
LOTTE, a prostitute, in her early 20's  
JACOB, a retired Jewish gentleman, age 70

TIME: Vienna, 1938

## Act One

BERTHE: It's breakfast, Joseph. You're so slow today.

JOSEPH: Not for me. It's a fast day; a day of obligation.

HEINZ: Oh, the religious among us. He's the only one who says grace and must have grace.

JOSEPH: Everyone needs grace these days in Vienna.

HEINZ: You sense a foreboding time?

JOSEPH: I'm no prophet.

HEINZ: Oh, here is Lotte the whore. How is business, if I may ask?

LOTTE: Last night the streets were deserted. Something is happening. There are rumors the soldiers from Germany may pay us a visit.

HEINZ: Your business will increase. War makes everyone whores.

BERTHE: Tell me, Lotte, which ones have been the best to you?

LOTTE: Most men are crude. (There is general laughter.) A few of the Jewish men were gentlemen. At least they don't talk about their wives. They have their old ways of embarrassment. They like to talk with me as company. I have to work harder with the uncircumcised.

JACOB: Maybe God does too.

LOTTE: Most men have no imagination. But somehow it's a pleasure for me to meet a virgin country boy.

HEINZ: So you can be a teacher?

LOTTE: Let war teach them a lesson.

HEINZ: We were taught war makes a man, but only makes him more foolish.

JACOB: They'll blame the war on the Jews.

JOSEPH: Our wandering Jew is heard from. I thought, Jacob, you'd already left for Palestine and Jerusalem.

JACOB: Palestina was the name the Romans gave to us during their occupation.

JOSEPH: You don't think it's good for the Jews to be occupied.

HEINZ: No nation should be occupied.

JOSEPH: Jacob, you're always occupied with something. You Jews think too much.

HEINZ: I think they're preoccupied with their survival.

JOSEPH: What about Austria's survival?

HEINZ: In some ways, the Jews were better off under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At least they were protected. The monarchy at least did not allow for mob rule.

JOSEPH: Look at what happened to democracy in Germany.

JACOB: They'll blame democracy on the Jews.

HEINZ: Look at what kind of socialism the German marks bought.

JACOB: They blame socialism on the Jews.

LOTTE: I thought the Jews were capitalists. They always pay me.

HEINZ: Look how we're paying them back.

LOTTE: My last client said I broke his back, and wouldn't pay me. I took him to a Jewish doctor, but he said he needed a psychiatrist. What is this world about anyway?

HEINZ: A four-letter word.

LOTTE: Love.

BERTHE: Oh, people will do anything for love.

JACOB: An apple turnover please, Berthe.

JOSEPH: You Jews always try to turn the world over.

JACOB: Berthe, may I have a cup of coffee?

BERTHE: I always liked nice things. Tea cups and jewelry, love seats and perfumes; delicate things.

JACOB: Do you think we have good taste?

JOSEPH: Not really Viennese taste.

HEINZ: Precisely Viennese tastes. They are Vienna, of course. And you'll have to admit, the most distinguished part. Some of us are peasants compared to them.

JOSEPH: Speak for yourself, Heinz.

HEINZ: Why, Joseph, are you going to turn me in, or our poor Jacob here?

LOTTE: What are most of you men, but peasants who beat their wives? The Jews aren't wife-beaters, at least.

HEINZ: This is the time of our Jacob's trouble. We have to blame someone, so we will feel stronger. Once honor and truth were lovers together, but soon here in Austria dishonored madmen will lie on beds together.

LOTTE: Heinz, the philosopher, was honorable to me in bed. We could even face each other in the mirror.

HEINZ: Austria will never face itself in the mirror.

LOTTE: You are a true patriot.

HEINZ: I won't last long.

JACOB: Especially with a spy around here.

LOTTE: I had a theologian in bed one time. He talked about how he had failed God. I don't know how anyone can fail God. The man was impotent. So I listened to him talk about the Fall.

BERTHE: What other kinds of men do you have?

LOTTE: I have to play a role with different men, or dress up for them, or dress them down. One wanted me to kiss his boots. One part of me wanted to, and one part of me hated the thought of it.

JOSEPH: This wasn't always Austria. There was nobility in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

LOTTE: My mother told me I had some royal blood.

HEINZ: Jacob may have the blood of kings and prophets.

JOSEPH: Heinz, are you saying the Jews are the natural aristocrats, the elect, the chosen people? Hitler said there can only be one chosen people.

JACOB: What is this master race?  
HEINZ: A lot of good it's going to do for any of us.  
JOSEPH: You speak like you have Jewish blood in you.  
HEINZ: If we're honest, there's hardly a Viennese among us who does not.  
LOTTE: If only I could find the right man, everything would be all right and I would sleep. My doctor gave me pills before he left. But nothing seems to help me. My brother Fritz dresses like a girl for money.  
JOSEPH: This wasn't always Austria. A new day is coming — I can feel it in my bones.  
BERTHE: It's arthritis, Joseph, just the rain.  
HEINZ: Brimstone rain is coming from Germany. It's going to bring great destruction to all of us.  
JOSEPH: Heinz, speak for yourself.  
LOTTE: I went out with a dwarf once. I was surprised at his performance.  
JOSEPH: Is this Austria? No nobility. Only the dregs come here to eat and drink.  
HEINZ: How about the dregs from Berlin?  
BERTHE: Heinz, as long as I am here you'll have a home.  
HEINZ: I don't have enough for rent this month.  
LOTTE: You can stay with me.  
JACOB: I have no home left in Austria.  
JOSEPH: Why don't you leave Austria for Palestine?  
JACOB: I'm on my way.  
LOTTE: In Jerusalem they won't have our Viennese rolls. Or wiener schnitzel.  
JOSEPH: If you Jews were smart, you would all leave. No one want you. You should all leave on the next boat.  
LOTTE: He would miss us. Berthe, why don't you give him some of your recipes for schnitzel and he could start a Viennese restaurant there?  
JOSEPH: He eats up all of our food as it is.  
LOTTE: I'm so tired of our conversations. Every morning it's the same.

(There is the sound of gunfire outside)

# Mozart's Birthday

**B.Z. Niditch**

## January 27, 1943

Night remains seven leap years before mid-century. Somewhere in mid-Europa. I wish I could run out of this resealed damp room and find someone with faith, even faith in me that I will survive to give an account to heaven's blue and black accountability for proof that I am living.

I know only God can give an account, even to the fascists and mystics who chose the wrong gods to define as less than human. I am in definition a laughing stock of the nations. By whose authority. My God!

To write is to make a recreation. Already creation is to accept my persona as poet or the poet as himself. The wall is dirty, the linen more dirty, my face has no mirror to spy on from a creator's point of view. Therefore I write with deliberation awaiting liberation each day.

But who are the Allies? Not surely the truth seekers, now hemmed in by the German chamber music, and today is Mozart's birthday.

I have no family now, nothing, not even familiar. Only this partition of a Christian's mirror between me, bread and death. Sometimes bread itself tastes like death. I wish a poppy seed manna would rescue me. Dreaming about a swan last night.

## January 28

Day resonates. I have a recital in my mind of a quartet. I imagined a chicken came through the feather duster of the bed. Wind where the Messiah's children in swaddling clothes await the manger of God.

Has Christmas passed us by? Like the stubble on my face. Sister is gone. I heard her train with beautiful voices, the train of the nations heading nonstop to their final judgment of a hissing sound.

The windows are painted church white. I can see them. Really I can.

Sex is indomitable, a Vienna professor said, before he and his books were mowed down.

In the way God became man, man found his lover, woman found her love.

Beneath the nails is my skin. Skin has surplus value.

Society ladies must be helped off trains by young males who politely will go to war and be for their leader.

## January 29

Some of my friends expect nations to help us but they too will betray us. Betrayal is the history of the nations. His story book romance begins in our faith in goodness. I hated those who hated goodness. Look where I am. Like Joseph looking up from the pit to the rosy sky full of bean-filled clouds. Then Sunday. Excavations of what is digging in the time of mass murder. People in a generation will forget me. I write a note on the wall that I have a name and even my brother's helper has a name. His name is not anonymous. It is Gerhard. Mine is Amnon. Who likes to be called Am or even Ami.

I have had no friends except for Gerhard. He tells me this will be over. He tells me prayers reach skies.

If only I could just put my ears outside.

Mozart goes through me. Perhaps in the Salzburg concert halls they will admit Mozart did not love the city.

## **January 30**

To write maxims is to maximize thought but to minimize reality. My reality is death. Death defies reality and romanticism is my upbringing. Two centuries of it. My family lived in mid-Europe for more than six centuries.

I saw a Roman forum meeting. They were discussing the occupation. Some Greek scholars called out to me, "Dunk in my pool." Gerhard yells out, "Hellenism leads to Hell." A stupid daily nightmare, yet I want to swim in the pool. Though circumcised there are physicians who can make us feel as them.

Marxism is the new demonism, Gerhard says, even for my people. It's messianism and universalism is an excuse for no identity. Maybe Marx's self-hatred continues in his disciples. Gerhard says Karl joined the Satanists because he hated his ugly face or his own people. But Gerhard has a peasant's anonymity.

I do not know why he loves. There is no reason for it. We met in a Vienna library, drank French wine in a bar, he returned to bury his father and hid me. Being religious is no excuse to save me. Loving me is another story.

## **January 31**

Gerhard was the only son of a wealthy father who was determined to educate him. Gerhard's mother died early in the marriage. His father had many lands but Gerhard wanted to be socialized and urbanized. He even thought of the religious life. Certainly he talked to God.

It was the day before the Annexation. The convenient Anschluss when I met Gerhard. The day was similar to many as I was at the university studying Descartes.

I brushed my teeth, found a hole in my sock and walked into the library. Gerhard was looking for Pascal. We smiled and he took me in. He was happy we met the day after his father died. I wished to be a son or have a brother. My greatest dream as a boy was to have a theatre company in Berlin. I know it sounds ridiculous but it is my own sustaining fantasy after liberation.

Gerhard had one friend who was his roommate, Kurt. Kurt was a baby-faced nationalist but he was murdered by a disgruntled S.S. who thought he reminded him of a promiscuous S.A. Kurt's photograph was placed near Gerhard's and I was asked not to speak of it by his silence.

I must be the only victim loved. But I am told I am not a victim and don't need to be loved. At last I choose not to be victimized and loved for any other reason than for being me.

There must be a fish in an aquarium who does not wish his fins. The name of the fish is flirting with me.

Men are marching. Poland, Holland, France, Norway; I say these countries to fall asleep by.

One child lost, two of my children, sister is saying.

## **February 2**

Orange peels are just what the herr doctor ordered. German medical science, there is nothing like it. Will I ever get out of thoughts which are hampered by the fascism I demonstrated against?

I've taken to smoking. Writing poetry and translating — always the voice which cannot survive dictatorship. But what of the voices in Bonn, of Goethe's statue whose eye is marble.

Gerhard has had many women and a few men before he confessed. He has a lot of experiences but am I just a kept man, a whore who cannot even back pay his payback? I guess I am resentful to this man. I suspect there is a woman — sometimes at night I suppose so.

All the nations have chosen National Socialism — what an irony of Karl Marx, says my friend. All men are fascists, he says.

I wonder if Gerhard is top heavy with wisdom and bottom light in sex.

Modern life is becoming androgyny.

### February 3

The bunkers of war are nearby. Though they cannot find me. Gerhard said he would use bribery to save me. I'm his conscience if nothing else.

I've translated Hamsen, though I can never again read him; why deprive others of naturalism.

I see Gerhard in a blue stocking cap. Winter landscapes, the dirtiest of lyrics. If anyone is on a clean bed he must be thankful for a petty bourgeois existence.

Dreamed in an American accent as in the movies.

Gerhard says everyone is a war criminal but after the war they will again be judges, civil servants, doctors, Jungians, Rotarians, churchmen.

An old order of socialism will ultimately be a police state, he prophesies after eating boar.

### February 4

The Twenty Second Concerto is with me. Dame Hess plays.

The Bourse hit a new low perhaps. L'humanite has none.

Fascist cartoonists compare genius to baboons and say conscience is a Hebraic invention.

During the Occupation people talk about the new clothes, furniture and furs the Jews left behind.

There are new births at concentration camps and circumcision for the sons of Zion. For the daughters of Zion only stillbirths. I was reading Jeremiah, then I read a Yiddish joke in German. Gerhard said anti-Semitic fraternity jokes in the university will turn out to have the biggest joke on those humanitarians who think the world is becoming a brighter place for the Jews, with their perennial optimism, and for a few Christians with their assurance of only long-suffering.

Live a few years, drink schnapps and be happy. Read, study, and learn to be a good child.

### February 5

That melody in the Turkish Concerto. What if suddenly the German government decreed all left-handed, brown-eyed people were subhuman.

The stars have never been more incomprehensible.

The unusual becomes commonplace for those who know the inevitability of death, so we go to bed with spouse or lover to have the pleasure of an hour.

Usurers, hagglers, black marketeers, capitalists, communists, traitors, chosen people!

But at the same time there is a price on the head of Freud and Einstein. Physics is suspect and psychology cannot compete with Valhalla.

Imagine Tolstoy watching the carts of the Jews, or St. John of the Cross.

The only real friends of Weimar, of democracy, were the Jews and the decent people. Now the indecent are comfortable, even in war of brute beasts. Stalin trusts only Hitler.

I heard a British broadcast. They can be believed, at least their accents are believable; though I like to read Shakespeare in German.

I saw Gerhard had a hard-on today. He played the Jupiter for me, a bit scratchy, but worth every note.

Are there tantrums of the crazy nations?

Without centuries of theological Christ killing would such suffering be possible, and who am I to speak, being protected by kindness or need.

He is tired of women; I can always tell.

Memories are blushing.

The Resistance is combed with the disloyal — but it is for bread, drink, sadism.

False martyrdom has its own Masonic Funeral Music.

### **February 10**

If today I survive, who will want to hear me tomorrow when the clothes have to be cleaned.

When the presses run out of newsprint the government will invent other ways of dissemination of half-truths.

They say we are not basic; why were more Iron Crosses issued to us percentage-wise than to so-called pure Germans?

The Posthorn Serenade and some white wine and we have it made.

Silent films may want to speak here.

We are kept for future libraries.

German ingenuity and natural superfluity.

You are not an unperson looking forward to an asexual life and an uncontaminated death.

### **February 11**

Photosynthesis articles intrigue Gerhard. He is in a German mood and we put on German dances.

Do Hitler and his gang have lookalikes?

I played a sonata in A.

What is the relation of Assyrian and Allemagne?

Coffee, please. It goes with respect. Be respectable, especially after the war, and continue your hiring of French tailors to do your best cuts of cloth. Forget the gabardines of the Jews.

Peace, Freedom, Democracy on placards translated in Russian and German as interpreted by the gangster bureaucrats of our century.

The four humours of a new middle ages. Newsreels of the dog-lover Hitler.

### **February 12**

All the intelligentsia was wrong as usual. Mozartian arias flood the room. He died like Schubert in a pauper's pit.

Only the conductors are perpetually on time.

Out of his childhood debut, or our first love or the first movie we see or the first book we write.

Street angels and house devils see through the spermatozoa of progress.

Red meat, please. But cannibalism can never be outlawed.

A husband expects to be treated well, a wife to be treated well. Well-treated marriages are never miserable, only treatable.

Why do Russians talk slowly and Germans eat fast, Gerhard asked me.

Russians want to be poets and Germans wish to be abundant.

**February 14**

Psalms.

I know Gerhard does not want entertainment, but how does he expect to evade the draft.

They are here at the door already. Mozart records are broken and Gerhard is taken away.

We had an agreement that I would have a cyanide tablet rather than be exposed.

The soloist played so beautifully that evening that members of the German General Staff wept.



**Dachau 01**  
*Christopher M.*

# Capitalist Punishment

**Robert Roden**

*Water is our business, Electricity is our business,  
Gas is our business, Lives are our business,  
Business is our business... —Jaz Coleman*

Officer Whitlock is sitting at the table with his two cronies standing on either side. “Why didn’t you take any money?” he asks. I look at him. It isn’t that I don’t understand the question. He’s mumbling something else. I think he’s asking me another. It sounds like, “How could you just unload on them like that?”

Maybe if my Buck Rogers Starfighter had come with decals. Maybe if I’d gotten the remote controlled R2-D2 for Christmas that year. Maybe if the blue Snaggletooth had been available somewhere else besides Sears. Maybe if the forks on my four month-old bicycle hadn’t snapped.

A customer walks up. “Can I ask you a question?” she asks.

“You just did,” I quip. “You’re going to want to ask me another one, aren’t you?”

She looks baffled for a moment, then tries to play along. “Alright, can I ask you two questions?”

Because of all the cardboard cuts on my hands. Because I burned my tongue, the coffee too hot, already late for work. Because the woman of my dreams made love with everyone at the store, but me. Because I drank too much vodka, my first time, and came into work sweating it through my pores. Because everything leaks.

Another customer walks up to the glass counter where the cameras and binoculars are kept. “Can I see that camera?” he asks.

I answer him. “Is the glass dirty? I just cleaned it.. Oh! you want to hold the camera. He looks serious, so I ease up before he asks to see the manager. He tries the zoom, in, then out, then in again.

“Can I see... try this pair of binoculars?” he asks, returning the camera. He chooses a pair with the best zoom, as opposed to wide angle. “I’ll take this,” he says.

“Alright, but you have to pay for it here. Do you have anything else you want to buy?” I ask.

“Yes, I’ll be right back.” He returns a minute later with a tube of K-Y Jelly. It doesn’t take me long to figure out what he’s up to. But it’s none of my business.

“Will that be cash, check, or charge?” I ask. He takes out an American Express Corporate Card, and beneath his name are the imprinted words Nestle Corp. of America. How does an executive justify such amenities on his statement when it arrives? And you thought you had to be careful eating fast food. Or do you wonder why so many people love chocolate?

Maybe if I’d been brave enough to pay for the condoms the first time. Maybe if I didn’t have to pay for the crab lice treatment. Maybe if the fine print gaveth instead of tooketh away. Maybe if it weren’t for the vast array of stain removers, and the impossible stain.

Because a woman doesn’t know who you are before she says I love you. Because a man can’t tell a woman the truth while he’s looking into her eyes. Because a wedding ring costs so much damned money. Because diamonds are a girl’s best friend. Because marriage, by definition, is binding.

Another time, I am a cashier at the front registers. We have to wear name tags with shiny gold backers that say ASK ME, I LIKE TO HELP. Two women walk up. The one with dishwater hair and smoke lines streaked thickly across her cheeks asks, “Hey, how would you like to help us

pay for dinner tonight?” Her friend, with teeth the color of old newspaper, chuckles ominously. I play naive, like I’m only sixteen—well, at the time I really am. “I only make \$3.65 an hour, ladies.” “That’s alright, we’ll buy,” says the one with newsprint lips.

“Oh... my mom won’t let me go anywhere after work,” I tell them. At that point, a man walks up to pay for his items, and I’ve never been so thankful for a customer before.

Maybe if I didn’t need a bigger television, a faster computer, a slower watch, a more potent analgesic. Maybe if I didn’t have to spend money to save money.

At the next register, a frail young woman, named Karen, rings up the totals. I overhear an old man asking her, “Can you come over to my house and help me with my laundry?” She doesn’t say anything, just smiles through her braces. It’s hard to tell if the old man pictures her washing his sheets, his underwear, or only ironing his dress slacks.

Because 7-11 seems like a real haven. Because I have to buy a meal at a diner to read a book after midnight. Because there’s a Starbucks on every corner, across from Kinko’s. Because a photocopy costs 10 cents, but if you drive down the street you can get it for three.

If you’re standing in the right place at the wrong time, you can hear the managers say things like, “I don’t care who you get to fill the shift, just get a warm body in there.” As long as the meat is still steaming, regardless if it’s cooked or freshly flayed, they’ll make a meal out of you.

But if you show promise, they’ll let you supervise. It isn’t very difficult to learn how the computer system works. How the loop functions, what causes an off line, what techniques they use to get things up and running. There are so many exposed wires, and the really important mainframes all have signs on them saying, DO NOT TURN OFF UNLESS INSTRUCTED TO DO SO. The situation begs the question.

Maybe if I had several choices of electric providers. Maybe if the freeways were wider. Maybe if I could expand my arteries, clogged with cement. Maybe if I could find a pair of shoes that wasn’t so heavy.

The most inspiring moments I spend witnessing the credit card scams. That is when I learn the most about people, about the business. One man comes in with a card that looks like it’s been hand-painted with fingernail polish. Several others come in with a hologram that looks like it was etched out of aluminum foil, then glued to the front of the card. The sophisticated reprogram the magnetic strip. But they all do it the same way.

“Which is your best VCR?” he asks.

“Well, what is it that you want it to do?” I ask.

At this point, he’ll ask a few general questions before deciding on the most expensive model. Then he’s on to the video game systems. “I’ll take two of those Nintendo 64 units. Can you pick out the top five games for it and add them?” he asks.

“Your total is \$613.29, can I have your card?” I ask, because it’s always on credit. The startling thing, at first, is that the card always clears. If they sign the slip, you can let them go. But I call it in. I think those working the security line at the credit card company must recognize my voice by now.

“What’s the problem?” the customer asks. Always asks.

“I just have to get authorization because of the high amount.”

“How long is this going to take? I’m in a hurry... Can you give me back my card?” he insists. I have to turn my back to him to give the details over the phone without him hearing. One day I’ll hear a pop, then drop the phone. But today I turn around and he’s gone. Long gone. The credit card company offers a small reward, but at Bull’s Eye we aren’t allowed to accept it.

On a Saturday I walk into the computer room, when no one is around, and pull out the power plug to the loop panel. It does the trick—the main computer starts beeping like an irate customer. When I put the plug back in, she becomes quiet. It's like pulling the pacifier out of a baby's mouth, I think. But I don't feel cruel like that, only warm.

"Can I get a weekend off?" I ask my manager.

"Why?" he asks. "We really need you here on weekends. We do most of our business then."

"I just need some relief from the stress," I tell him. So I drive my car up North, packing a few things to sustain me: food, water, change of clothes, my uniform, wire cutters, a nametag that says VINCE.

The following Saturday, I pull up to a Bull's Eye and walk in. Disguised as a customer, it's easy to observe. They leave their computer rooms open much of the time. I walk in, and pull the cutters from my pocket (\$3.29 in the Hardware department). It takes a few seconds to cut through the thick power cord, and I feel something warm like an electric shock running through my arms—beginning with my hands—it goes straight to my heart. The tool is insulated, so I don't get electrocuted. The computer starts beeping like the patient has gone into critical, but I'm out the door before the nurse arrives.

Because I can't look out the window when I work. Because Henry David Thoreau wrote *Walden* which you can buy in a bookstore, or online. Because advertising can be so entertaining; I can't tell the difference. Because an AK-47 and a warehouse filled with banana clips are so easy to come by.

At the second store I have to wait in the snack bar for someone to leave the door open to the control room. After I walk out a manager says, "Vince, I need you to get on a register; we're off line."

"What do you mean, we're off line?" I mumble, "I'm right on the money." I walk towards a register then veer quickly to the doors when he's out of sight.

On Sunday I stop at another Bull's Eye, after Church is over, but apparently the word is out. I find the door closed and it appears, even, to be guarded. Commerce wins, maybe because of the constant supply of demand.

Sometimes I work the returns counter. Even you would be surprised at what people will try to get away with. It isn't just the woman returning a bagful of yarn, knitted into half a sweater before she discovers she doesn't like the color. Or the one returning dead plants or a dried-out Christmas tree.

"Did you try watering them?" I ask, seriously.

I'm no addict. You should see what these types try! A grizzled man with a billowing jacket, who looks about 40, comes to the counter "Hey bub, I've got some CDs in my car I need to return. I need a new battery for my car. Can I get it?" he asks.

"Do you have a receipt for the merchandise?"

"No, I got them as a gift," he says.

"You need to fill out this form first, then go to your car for the CDs, then you can go get the battery." After he fills out the form, I check his driver's license. He's only 23, or so his San Diego ID says.

"Alright, I'm going to get the batter..."

"No, you need to get the return from your car first," I tell him, but he turns and walks toward the back of the store. When I call security on the guy, they're quick to respond. The man hobbles up to the counter and heaves the battery onto the desk. He thumps it down between his heavy breaths. His jacket seems bulkier than when he came in. "I'm going out to my car for the discs

now, man.” It doesn’t surprise me when he comes back by the desk, kicking and screaming through his bracelets. “What the hell! Look what they did to me, man. I went out to my car, and this guy jumped me!” The security guard drops five CDs and a pair of scissors on the desk before taking the customer into the office. It’s not only the dirty shoes, used underwear, and insults they return. They never get their money’s worth.

Maybe if my new car hadn’t exploded on the highway, 26 miles after the warranty expired. Maybe if I knew how long a light bulb would last. Maybe if Christmas hadn’t bought out the best in people. Maybe if the world had turned out to be flat after all, I might have been satisfied with walls and television.

I don’t know what to tell you. I must have gotten tired of the routine. The register’s light blinks for help. Some customers cry out, some of them are on the floor. A telephone is ringing. The cashiers stand with their drawers or mouths open. I can’t remember. I just keep yelling, “Stop screaming, stop screaming...”



**Faith Sale**  
*Christopher M.*

*Parody of "Facts" by W. H. Davies*

One night poor Jim had not a tack,  
Mike had enough to cover Zeist,  
"Take some, I've some for Uncle Jack's,"  
Said Mike, "poster of Vanilla Ice."

So Jim tacked up his Ice pin-up;  
He tacked it on the closet door,  
He found it so, so awfully  
So fun, he tacked the whole darn floor.

Now Jim is tacking fast, and he  
Tacked the whole rent house next door;  
He tacked the waterbed, and jee,  
That wasn't such a good idea.

He swooned upon the pointy tacks,  
He was tired from all that tacking,  
and got some punctures on his back,  
A corpse! on the rent house's porch.

Ol' Jim was found with thumbtacks and blood,  
Was only twenty years and five,  
They found some thumbtacks up his nose—  
No wonder he is not alive.

# Puppies Not Named Rover

**Stephanie Scarborough**

*Parody of "Poppies in October" by Sylvia Plath*

Even if I went on Slim-Fast for ten months I'd look lousy in those skirts.  
So would the woman in the Miranda pumps  
Whose hiney blooms through her jeans so astoundingly—

A cake, a cheesecake  
Utterly delectable  
And fattening

Pale and flabby,  
Not invited to Sheila's party, my eyes  
Halt at middle-age bowlers.

But I'm not going to cry  
Because Sheila doesn't know I left her gate open  
And let the Dobermans into her bed of prize-winning flowers.

# Becoming Ishmael

**George Sparling**

I see rags on a homeless man who kicks at bottles, cans, and cartons, hoping to jar something loose: diamonds, lapis lazuli, crack, a crucifix, cashmere, a pager, that ineffable thing in which to somehow use in order to make it through another day. He wears no shoes, only dirty, holey socks, and I see his bare calves exposed to the wintry wind. His pants have worn out, so it looks as if he is wearing only shabby shorts. The cuffs of his trousers exist, dangling at his ankles. He carries a pint tucked precariously in his belt. He searches in coin returns of pay phones, looking for dimes, an eternity of filthy coins touched by, perhaps, CEOs and scrubs: finding nothing, he walks with his small, tatty pooch past the bus station, out of sight. I have watched him on his morning rambling, and I think how it would be if I were him? I would have to give my clothes to the Salvation Army, throw away my shoes, and start drinking booze again, and begin to perambulate through this city's streets, places where my reclusive life fears to roam. Could I endure blasted nights trying to sleep in wet weeds, or maybe in the park's forest, bark and boughs my only blanket? Or maybe no shelter at all, standing upright all night in a small niche of doorway? Would I have enough money to feed my dog? I really do not think I could do it. My middle-class upbringing would foul me up. I would want some kind of sanctuary to get out of the weather, any kind of weather. I would groan about not having vitamin C, B, E, and niacin, and I could not tolerate the routine police hassles, and then the beatings. I would have to accept my status as an outcast. I would be lower than the fellaheen. THE EARTH IS AN INDIAN THING — I squatted on it, writes Kerouac. At least the Indians call earth their Mother. With Highway 101 running both ways through this city, I would sense no earth. The man wanders from behind the bus station over to where I am standing waiting for a bus. He says, "You gotta help me, brother. I bleed from the ass when I shit and sometimes cough up blood." "Have you seen a doctor?" "They're all quacks, what do they know?" Maybe I am naive, but not for an instant suspect he is lying just to get money for Wild Turkey. I rarely give cash to homeless loners because I cannot afford it, but now I pull out my wallet, reaching in for a ten dollar bill, and uncharacteristically hand him the remainder of my daily cash allotment. He says, "Thanks bro, you're very kind" and drifts away, making me think he is ubiquitous, haunting the world. I get on my bus and think, no, I could not cut it, suffering is a too deep and lonely thing. Suffering is a free fall into an infinite sinkhole where neither angels nor humans know precisely when (or if) their parachutes will open, finding purchase on an outcropping, hoping to regain equilibrium, a point from which they will no longer descend.

# Cleaning Up at the Hamtramck Burger

*Don Winter*

Nights at this place  
boss lines spray bottles up  
across the counter. He says the red's  
for shelves, the blue's for toilets,  
and the whites only for  
stainless steel. His eyebrows frown, but when  
that bastard disappears into his office  
I spray what I want  
onto what I want.  
Some nights his wife lifts  
her ass onto the counter. She points  
out turnover skins I missed.  
Looks like she's been slept in  
for years. Those nights I time  
his trip to the bank to chase  
her with the white bottle.  
And I catch her and squeeze  
the little Chef faces stitched  
over her breasts. Some nights,

that is. But most nights the boss  
looks right through me. His wife mechanically  
cleans the salad bar, and yells  
at the bits of mustard and dressing.  
As if they are to blame  
for all this. Most nights I turn up  
the radio and sing my own words.  
Something about being in this business to stay  
alive. Something like that.

# Saturday Night Desperate

*Don Winter*

We talked about it at the time clock  
while we waited to punch in,  
how it must have been the moon  
looking half-starved and the radiator whiskey  
brought us to her those Saturday nights,  
and how the dog with the bowling ball  
head barked from her front porch, back legs braced  
to charge, front legs braced to turn  
and retreat, and how a willow wept  
its long springy tears over the tarpaper roof,  
and how she came hard  
out that door hung from one low  
hinge and was on you, smelling  
of possum, with slick hair and a cunt  
with whiskers stiff enough to grate cheese,  
and how she pitched her head back, buttoned  
those green eyes and shook out punk  
birdcalls under her shower cap, and how afterwards  
we took turns with her in the outhouse,  
the door swung half open, the lime-scented life  
of the toilet seeping through  
the half-moon cut in one wall, and we nodded  
each other daft, winked and said she's all that  
and a bag of chips, or something like that,  
and what we left out was the only  
thing true: how she laid back when she finished  
with us, yawned like some cat  
curled in the last pocket  
of a threadbare afternoon, the dull book  
of a dead moth loose in its paws.

# Considering the Built-Ins

*Nick R. Zemaïduk*

Today we looked at an old house  
that owns an old man, packing  
it in, can't handle the lawn, the  
barn, rents out most of the land.  
Trading his birthright for a mobile  
home in Florida on the windy side,  
he says. We don't ask, thinking wind  
has no particular side. Sons have  
owned the farm since Jefferson  
was dipping quills and slaves but  
there are no more sons, just a one  
cup house and a few hyacinths  
defying the odds, knitting a path  
to sunshine. We like to look, find  
out first-hand what people think  
is important enough to keep, admire  
character built in, not added to, listen  
to the floors creak in forgotten voices,  
see the depression in a hardwood floor  
between the table and a cold stove, breath  
deep to catch the essence of the last loaf  
battered with a tear in the old man's eye.  
We move on to somewhere else, down  
the road perhaps where someone is ready  
to let go, won't leave something we can't  
scrub away, or won't be able to weed out  
of the garden. Somewhere we can leave  
without feeling we've seen too much.

# Wishes on the Way to Tomorrow

**Nick R. Zemaiduk**

Man sits on a curb, thinking, a thousand cars  
an hour throwing whatever is left after  
what passes for rain dries, in his face,  
about what might be, how he really got here.  
Not the bus, the thumb, but THE journey  
from Jiminy Cricket and nights full of stars  
to wish on, to dumpster lunches; from Ozzie  
and Harriet to Michigan Ave., downtown  
Detroit; 2001 in Cinerama to porn flicks  
in a glitter palace circa nineteen twenty-eight.

Thinks about the yard sale with the lamp  
that burned oil and how he was two bucks shy  
of warm hands, or maybe a wish for a spit shine.  
King perhaps, President, same thing he decides.  
Considers the burden of money, complications  
of asking for too much, trading one problem  
for another, finding out he can't buy respect,  
philosophical shit like that. Now, it's just  
getting enough to get off the curb, away,  
into the space between buildings, claim  
a spot nobody else wants, defend it, sleep  
the sleep of the innocent, gather wool,  
a few papers, maybe scrounge the back lot  
at the Fox, find a suit an actor chucked  
knowing 'the call' was never going to come.  
Clean up in a low spot, create an illusion  
of respectability from a hat the world knows  
has nothing in it, like a magician with forever  
sleeves, go to a buffet where you don't pay  
up front. Conjure a wall of pictures hanging  
in a corridor somewhere between the family  
room and master bedroom, give names  
to the kids stepping up, a photo at a time  
into independence, grandkids, the gold watch,  
twilight, sunset.

Check out the suits passing by, soft black  
coats, designer umbrellas on arms too lucky  
to get wet, powdered women not recognizing  
downwind sweat.

As usual, decisions are made for him, cop  
rousts him off, 'got an image to protect,  
don't need bums'. He thinks cops are blind,  
city's rubble, subsidizes what traffic there is.  
He'll push when it's cold, take a hit for a ride,  
a meal, a warm floor on Beaubian, maybe  
catch a pimp on the way talkin' trash to his skirt,  
on a full-moon night, stars shining like the last forty years  
never happened, back to when wishes seemed possible,  
the big ones, before he'd settle for what he could get,  
crawling through Greektown on his way to tomorrow,  
wierdos the moon encourages, up and stiffing tourists,  
the smell of money, and baklava, yeah, a little baklava  
sounds good, looks up, makes a wish.

**killer cocktails**

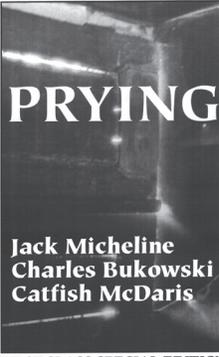
ALAN CATLIN



KILLER COCKTAILS is the latest collection of poetics by the well-known Alan Catlin. Each piece in this collection of thirty is a portrayal of a character or event inspired by a particular cocktail. Persona and event become imbibables....Fully worth the \$5ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#104

**PRYING**

PRYING is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic (Belgrade), Jouni Vaara-kangas (Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA)....\$5ppd./glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp/



Jack Micheline  
Charles Bukowski  
Catfish McDaris

FIRST CLASS SPECIAL EDITION

**IN THE CLEARING**



ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

IN THE CLEARING is a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period....\$5ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#105

**PEOPLE, YOU THINK YOU KNOW?**

PEOPLE, YOU THINK YOU KNOW? is short fiction and poetics from one of the long-standing greats in the small press, A.D. Winans. This is Winans at his best with short fiction and gritty poetics. Get into Winans' head! Also features fotos of San Fran folks, through the eyes of A.D. / \$5ppd/offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/28pp/FS#107



A.D. Winans

**The Drifter Takes Another Look**



ERROL MILLER

THE DRIFTER TAKES ANOTHER LOOK... These are pieces from the late 80s, Miller's mind ripe, the pen in his hand, once again, after an 8-year dormancy. This is the sweetest, most well preserved fruit plucked from the sealed cellar of the mind of Errol Miller, one of the more prolific writers on the scene today/\$6ppd/offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/50pp/

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**



JOHN BENNETT

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE is a sweet collection of John Bennett's finely honed style of 'shard writing': stripped away convention beating like a pulpy red heart. This is the very sharpest cutting edge of his talent, and is a most eloquent assault on post-modern sensibilities...\$9ppd./perfect bound/finest quality offset

also available from

# FOUR~SEP PUBLICATIONS

Single issues of First Class are \$5ppd.  
The best thing to do is subscribe, since every issue is at least 44pp of killer words. Subscriptions bring FC right to your door for a full year (3 issues - Feb/June/Oct) for a mere \$14. Give it a try.

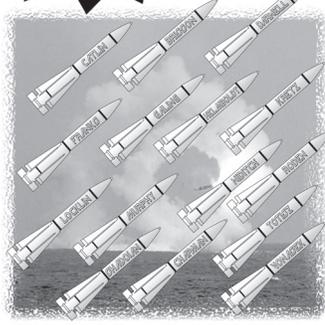
TERMS: CASH IS GREENER, BUT CHECKS TO CHRISTOPHER M. ARE OK.

**First Class**

Unprovoked, out of context  
for your senses

ISSUE THIRTEEN / 1 of 111 2000  
FIVE BUCKS

13



FIRST CLASS #13 is still available! You get 50 full-size pages of exceptional short fiction and poetics from an international selection of the best words that flow through my pobox! Just \$5ppd. Or \$3 with order of chaps!

**Hair of the Dog**

That Bit Me

by Alan Catlin

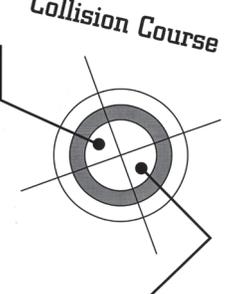
HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME is what you get the morning after indulging in Alan Catlin's earlier release, Killer Cocktails. Once again, plenty of deadly drink recipes that are indicative of the accompanying poetics. Another killer collection that belongs with the pleasure inducing prequel in everyone's bar (or bathroom). Just \$5ppd./high-end slick cover/linen pa-

**MILES OF HIGHWAYS AND OPEN ROADS**

MILES OF HIGHWAYS AND OPEN ROADS features 42 poetic slices of the exotic loaf from which the well-travelled Newell nibbles. Never presumptuous and hyper observant, whether it's a glimpse of Jordan or Oregon, these poetics are tight and full of precise, earnest imagery from the perspective of full cultural immersion. \$6ppd./high-end matte cover/24# pa-

poems by  
Michael L. Newell

**Collision Course**

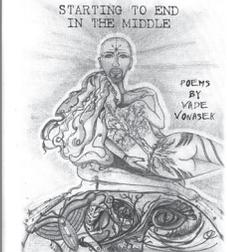


poems by  
Michael L. Newell

COLLISION COURSE draws from the years Newell spent in Uzbekistan in the late '90s. These 37 observations reveal the confusion, anticipation, dirt, and beauty of the land and people wedged in the deep seat of the Slavic/Asian crossroads of ex-USSR. Invigorating. You may reconsider your own situation and stance. Your passport just \$6ppd./high-end matte cover/linen paper/46pp/FS#111.

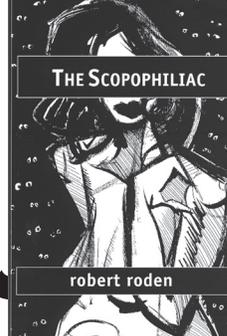
**STARTING TO END IN THE MIDDLE**

STARTING TO END IN THE MIDDLE pulls together 30 pieces of Vonasek's best poetics revealing somber introspection, consistent speculation, and often a glimmer of hope. Featuring artwork by Lori Dale. Vonasek was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Just \$5ppd./high-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp/FC#113



POEMS BY  
VADE VONASEK

**THE SCOPOPHILIAC**



robert roden

THE SCOPOPHILIAC is the latest release from one of the Long Beach area's strongest voices. This collection stirs Lee Mallory to state that 'one could mount these poems, or like a greedy voyeur, just watch and listen'. Gerald Locklin observes that he 'blends the ineffable of the Symbolists and the cacophonies of Southern California rock into a music of his own'. Just \$5ppd./ high-end slick cover/linen

# cattle call

First Class is very open to submissions. Especially sought after are pieces of short fiction, but poetics are, of course, accepted as well. I am now also very interested in illustrations and *some* stark photography for both cover art and internal pages. I seek the very best words and images you have available for me to read. I don't pay myself, so I certainly won't pay you, but you will receive at least one copy, maybe more.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work. Please, please, make every attempt to print/type your copy as dark as possible. Also, for the computer users, please do **not** justify or force-justify your text. Left-justification is preferred by my scanner and deleting all those extra spaces created by justified text sucks. Name and address on the first page of each piece only. Send along a SASE when appropriate. Lastly.....drop me a letter with your submission, it sure beats the hell out of a chunk of submission text and a SASE dropping out on the table without at least a brief greeting.

I make it a point to take advantage of the technology I have available to keep track of everything that comes in and leaves First Class. You can expect timely responses and notifications. I know from experience that it is disturbing not to know the status of your words.

Speaking of technology » » » stay up to date at : [www.execpc.com/~chriflor](http://www.execpc.com/~chriflor) (don't forget the tilde)  
[www.execpc.com/~chriflor](http://www.execpc.com/~chriflor)

Christopher M.

**see below » [NOW IN EFFECT] « see below**

**Sickened by the rape of your wallet at the copyshop?**  
 Feeling locked out of the publishing loop?

Tired of the unending *hassles* encountered while attempting to present your words with the utmost of aesthetic appeal?

The editor of the lit-mag known as "First Class" is overjoyed to announce that Four-Sep Publications will now be able to produce chaps-for-hire under the new imprint "Lockout Press". There are several options available as to paperstocks and quantities, but all include full layout and design with the option for partial distribution through Four-Sep/First Class. The foremost concern in this venture is to communicate your work with the layout and design matching the scale of your message. Professional layout software along with crisp laser output will be combined with experience, skill and text-crafting ability. After dropping too many paychecks at the copyshop, I want to share the ability I now have to reduce the costs associated with this wondrous obsession, and increase the quality of the finished product. Plus, I'll be able to read more of all of your fine words. Nothing is impossible to work out, and I assure you that you will reel in amazement. Drop me a line and I will work up a quote based on the info you give me.



**Sample rates:**

| Quantity | Pages | Paper       | Price    | Each   |
|----------|-------|-------------|----------|--------|
| 50       | 32    | Ivory Linen | \$130.11 | \$2.60 |
| 50       | 36    | 24# White   | 123.98   | 2.48   |
| 75       | 24    | Ivory Linen | 139.82   | 1.86   |
| 100      | 32    | 24# White   | 163.50   | 1.64   |
| 100      | 36    | Ivory Linen | 197.12   | 1.97   |

*The Ivory Linen refers to a paper that has a nice rugged texture, a dull yellow/ivory tone, and minimal show-through. 24# is firmer and more opaque, than standard 20# paper. All chaps include an offset printed cover on gloss stock. These are samples and subject to change. Some special projects may entail a greater commitment from both parties.*

**Recent Lockout Press Releases**

*GOOD READS FROM SMALL PRESS REGULARS...*

**Translucent View** by Michael Keshigian

24pp/Ivory Linen/\$4ppd to author: 14 Apollo Road, Londonberry, NH 03053

**Innocent Stranger** by A Simple Man

32pp/Ivory Linen/\$4ppd to author: 2710 Woodlawn Avenue, Tifton, GA 31794

**Annamarie Revisions** by Greg Watson

26pp/Ivory Linen/\$5ppd to author: 608 Lincoln Avenue #100, St. Paul, MN 55102



# contributors

**ALAN CATLIN** *Barmaster in Schenectady, NY. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chap. Published in "Press" and many others. His "Killer Cocktails", an )ism( Quarter Book, is available from Four-Sep, as well as it's fine successor "Hair of the Dog That Bit Me".*

**ROBERT COOPERMAN** *Lives in Denver, Colorado. First time in First Class.*

**GARY EVERY** *Has graced these pages numerous times with words from his home in Oracle, Arizona.*

**ED GALING** *The famed Poet Laureate of Hatboro has appeared all over the small press with a dozen chap. under his belt.*

**ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER** *Widely published phenom in the small press. His words and artwork have often appeared in these pages. Lives, breathes, and eats in Austin, Texas. Check out his Four-Sep chap.*

**JAMES M. LANG** *Teaches courses in 20th century British literature, and will be moving to Worcester, Mass. soon. Published in several journals and periodicals.*

**MIKE LIPSTOCK** *Appearances in over 150 mags and anthologies. Recently nominated for the Pushcart for the third time. Lives in Jericho, New York.*

**GERALD LOCKLIN** *Long time, far-reaching presence, with an abundance of publishing credits. Teaches at CSU-Long Beach and has lectured on Heming-*

*way in the land of cigars: Cuba. His books are even available on popular bookstore websites.*

**DUSTY ERIK LUNDE** *Several appearances on these pages and credits around the small press. Lives in Tacoma, Washington.*

**B.Z. NIDITCH** *The artistic director of "The Original Theatre", with both national and international publishing credits. Several of his plays and prose pieces have appeared in First Class.*

**ROBERT RODEN** *Hard-typin' poet out of Orange, CA seen in many small press mags. New chap "The Scopophilic" out now from Four-Sep.*

**STEPHANIE SCARBOROUGH** *Cartoons, music reviews, and poetics have appeared in small and large press. Writes from Weatherford, Texas.*

**GEORGE SPARLING** *Second time on these pages. Also appears around the small press in great mags like "Chiron Review" and "Atom Mind". Calls Arcata, California home.*

**DON WINTER** *Calls Niles, Michigan home, drawing from times spent flipping burgers, buffing floors, and investing in real estate. Accepted into several journals, this is the first time in First Class.*

**NICK R. ZEMAIDUK** *Resides in Hillsdale, Michigan.*

A booming thanks goes to all who have and continue to submit words on paper to First Class. I read every scrap that pries it's way into my pobox, and enjoy and appreciate the efforts of those who have the balls to submit their words to other's scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions. — Christopher M.

# try these

## LOADS OF NEW REVIEWS NEXT ISSUE!

**ANGELFLESH:** Jim Buchanan, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514. Please send anything—poetry, artwork, fiction, sex toys, whatever. \$4/single issue, \$10/year(3 issues plus extras).

**NERVE COWBOY:** pobox 4973, Austin, TX 78765. Send poems, short stories(up to 5pp), and b&w art w/SASE. Bias toward accessible work that depicts the absurd nature of human experience. \$4/sample.

**HEELTAP:** Richard D.Houff, 2054 Montreal Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116. Mostly poetry, excellent production. Send \$4ppd for a sample.

**AMERICA by A.D. Winans:** Quite excellent piece of poetics, dedicated to the working men and women of America, which means all of us. Black Bear Pub., 1916 Lincoln Street, Croydon, PA 19021.

**DREAMS AND GARBAGE AND THE ABYSS by Mark Senkus:** \$2 to 200 W. Portage #3, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783.

**PURPLE:** pobox 341, Park Hills, MO 63601. This is Daniel Crocker's excellent collection of essays, reviews, and criticism featuring an always awesome variety of writers. Send a few \$\$\$ for one today.

**THE TROIKA by Stepan Chapman:** 250pp/\$15 ppd. to: Ministry of Whimsy, pobox 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315.

**ISM( an organization dedicated to contemporary writers and the independent presses that publish them:** The second issue was a great improvement. Basically a showcase for people like you and me. *Be sure to check out their web site: [www.poetryism.com](http://www.poetryism.com).* Info and correspondence: 1514 16th Avenue #2, Seattle, WA 98122-4196. Submissions: 8772 State Route 80, Fabius, NY 13063.

**DOWNWARD GLIDE by Errol Miller:** This is poetics. No foolishness, pretension or classless meanderings. Miller is a poet with a talent for putting heavy weight into each word. As Vincent Bator writes of this collection: "A native son of the South, Miller mines the region's indelible history, a milieu of culture, myth and hopeless failings woven into a solid body of poetic epics." Indeed. Ninety pages, professionally presented with full color cover available for \$12 ppd. from: BGB Press, 158 King Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

**THE MOTH EATERS by John Bennett:** A collection of John Bennett's longer pieces. A brooding and exciting zone where characters develop and the full tale is told, though always with a bit of mysterious oddity teasing your brain for a time after ingesting. If you have read one of his famous "shards", imagine that as a speedy jolting assault, while in these stories, Bennett has the opportunity to tie you to a chair and spread his tales all over your face. Gorgeous words. Great production. Angelflesh Press, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514.

**RATTLE:** The nice thing about this professionally produced journal is that it looks like a stuffy, crap-hound academia-burdened "review" or "collection" on the outside, yet when I cracked the cover and began to digest the poetic offerings within the pages, I was given a taste of sweet honey from the hive. As bad as this sounds: It is an excellent bundle of words to have in the shitter with you. Clean production and stand-out selections make this one more than worth it: 13440 Ventura Blvd. #200, Sherman Oaks, California 91423.

**THE JACK KEROUAC UPPER PENINSULA DIARY by T. Kilgore Splake:** A fantastic work that is so much more than a stylistic exercise. Splake "discovers" a lost segment of the life and writings of Kerouac in a backroom bookstore in Michigan's upper peninsula while poking around on a road trip. Extraordinarily well done. Angst Productions, pobox 508, Calumet, MI 49913.

**FEBRUARY IS THE CROOKEDEST MONTH by Mark Weber:** Buy this chap! If not for the wonderful words of Weber, then for the phenomenal production by Clamp Down Press. Joshua Bodwell, the editor, culled these poetic gems from a vast supply, creating, as he states a "Weber reader". An awesome exploration of his common themes (booze, jazz, gardening, Janet) with beautiful hand-crafted and bound pages to ride on. An outstanding six-color screen printed cover starts it all out. \$8ppd to Clamp Down Press, pobox 7270, Cape Porpoise, ME 04014-7270.

**CARDBOARD PASTRIES by Richard Houff:** Houff evokes a sense of the Blues in his poetics, perhaps a lyrical answer to his musical endeavors. This work is a great way to spend half an hour, contemplating the cynical and satirical and damn serious methodology in Houff's approach and jazz-punky stance on life. Send \$6 to Scrooge's Ledger Press, pobox 1621, Pueblo, CO 81002.

**GRAPPLING by Susanne R. Bowers:** The poetics in this collection are strong reflections on the turgid underbelly of faulty family life and screamly memories. Happily spiteful, yet fair, Bowers pecks out the best words from her thoughts and experiences and soothes the needles down your throat with impeccably succinct expressions. This collection took third place in the 1998 Nerve Cowboy chap contest. Sadly, Bowers is no longer with us, but her words still are. Send \$4 to Liquid Paper Press, pobox 4973, Austin, TX 78765.

**DIRTY WALLS AND IVORY ENDINGS by Mark Senkus:** Senkus' third collection of poetics from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan is a peek at the everyday events in his life, the event and tidbit orbiting his existence. Senkus not only wonders about the inequalities and shaft-ridden rules that dominate our culture, but illustrates them so you see things his way. In "Spooked" he saves a doomed to be pellet-shot squirrel's life because "I knew what it was

'TRY THESE' HAS BECOME MY FORUM FOR PROMOTION OF THE WORKS OF WRITERS AND PUBLISHERS WHOM I, FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, HAPPEN TO APPRECIATE OR ADMIRE. I CANNOT PROMISE THAT EVERY CHAP OR BOOK OR MAGAZINE SENT MY WAY WILL BE MENTIONED HERE, BUT YOU CAN BE DAMN SURE THAT THOSE THAT ARE HAVE PLEASURED MY EYES AND BRAIN. TAKE A SHOT AND SEND YOUR BEST CREATIONS MY WAY. THEY ARE IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER.

**'TRY THESE' CONTINUES ON PAGE 50**



- BRENDA'S BIRTHDAY** by **Jack Saunders**: This is Saunders' 154th book. Saunders serializes segments of his life, his actions, his interactions, while injecting and infusing his paragraphs with thought-deep, sensible, outlandish opinions and assessments, relating all things to larger events and ideas. Wide-ranging thorough world-knowledge pumps through the heart of his works and the result is an eloquently chaotic macro-micro of the whole she-bang. A generous, sharing, prolific writer, contact him at: Garage Band Books, Box 1392, Tucker, GA 30085.
- LOOSE FRONT END** by **Mark Weber and Scott Virtue**: Pleasurable pieces and powerful moods from Weber, punctuated by inked accompaniment from Virtue. These two work well together, and it is your brain's privilege if you place this fine, fine chap before your eyeholes. Zerx Press, 725 Van Buren Pl., Albuquerque, NM 87108.
- LONG LIVE THE 2 OF SPADES** by **Daniel Crocker**: The final of three 2 of Spades books, in which Crocker, admittedly, chronicles growing up and his youth. Youthful perception, founding creativity, the quest to develop the soul and ideals, flirting with disaster, heaven, woman, and the booze. This collection completes the metamorph. Crocker could be you, or me, or anyone, yet he comes off as decidedly unique in a cluttered world. Try this perfectbound piece out for \$7 from: Green Bean Press, pobox 237, New York, NY 10013.
- ART:MAG #22**: Peter Magliocco puts together 76 pages of goodness with a free-buffet table sized helping of some of the best in the small press. This is the 15th Anniversary Issue!!! Besides the excellent poetics, there are several stand-out ink drawings by Lilia Levin. Send \$5 to Limited Editions Press, pobox 70896, Las Vegas, NV 89170.
- BLOOD ON THE FLOOR** by **normal & charlotte**: In the piece of poetic "luna in the late sun", normal notes that he has "not watched television since 1969 --- / nothing on that screen can come close / to approaching the picture I see / through my autumn window", referring to luna, the "late in life lesbo". Indeed. What normal has done is to observe the quirk and work of the humans poking around and all of the crass love and hate they exude. A killer read with a few fitting and explosive images from charlotte in one of RD's (Raindog) \$5 LRBs from Lummo Press, pobox 5301, San Pedro, CA 90733.
- INVERTEBRATES OF NORTH APHASIA** by **Stepan Chapman**: "Doctor" Chapman presents his collection of "obscure organism" drawn from his field notes, and annotated with informative notes. Crafty, hilarious, a weird sort of Dr. Seuss-like creature collection with offerings such as the Pediatriform Locust, which collects secondhand medical tools. The image shows the Locust attempting to locate the pulse of a hatchling cricket. Perhaps you get the idea. Chapman's illustrations have been prominently displayed in FC for quite some time. A mere \$3 for 36pp to: Hellp! Press, pobox 38, Farmingdale, NJ 07727.
- BLUES FOR BIRD** by **Martin Gray**: Rather than blues, this is a well-crafted celebration of the short life of Charlie Parker. I've got the first six in this 12-part series of chaps and it's easy to sink right in and devour Gray's poetics. Perhaps overshadowing the delivery is the story itself. It would be difficult to pen an uninteresting exploration of the compelling and groundswell/-breaking master of the alto sax. Hell, Parker inspired so many wicked jazz-horn blasters, he may as well have inspired the poet in Gray. Besides a few painful typos, it's worth a read and re-read. \$5 to Alpha Beat, 31 Waterloo St., New Hope, PA 18938.
- BETRAYALS LIKE THAT (Chap) / RUG BURN (CD)** by **John Bennett**: I've read a load of poetics from guys (and a few gurlies) who have been slaughtered by love, throttled, bashed, creamed and otherwise full-fucked. Generally, this shit is just that. So meaningful to the author, but the reader is left with crappy images and "who cares?" ripping through their mind, wondering if there is a bargain to be struck with a devil to gain back the wasted time. Bennett, as always, crams his fist through the mold and creates a readable and damn edgy prowl through the crap-world of betrayal and collapse. You see, Bennett is this vicious phoenix, letting rage calmly guide him into a metamorph of his many selves. With regard to his shard writing: 'A shard is a knee-jerk reaction to rug burn. A blowtorch in the face of betrayal.' If anything, Bennett has the power to turn pen to fistfuck and get you in the brain. 'Rug Burn' is a spoken-word collection of his shards, which translate best when he is liting his wry-whisper in your ear (whisper as in it seems as though he is speaking in confidence, liting as in he doesn't seem to really care whether you agree or not, you're gonna get it anyway). The chap is \$5, the CD is \$10, and don't forget that if you were or are a fan of Jack Micheline, get Vagabond's hardback tribute too. Vagabond, 605 E. 5th Avenue, Ellensburg, WA 98926.
- THE MURDEROUS CLOWN** by **T.K. Splake**: The clown, lurking beneath the make-up and painted emotion: what is there? Illusion and despair? Unknown intent? Splake relies on themes of alienation and longing and regret to paint the pages of this chap, rendered with each word bearing full impact. Standing out is "Visions for Matthew and Gerard" where the mournful promise to "get squared away" leaves a broken record of a life made empty. Athena Angel Prod., pobox 508, Calumet, MI 49913.
- BLOODY AND LIVING** by **Ed Galing**: This is a solid document capturing the attitude and persona of a long-ago South Philly, where you were nearly proud to grow up poor, and the neighborhood was a testament of it's resident's lifestyle and ambition (an idea that has fallen by the selfish and wasteful wayside of this postmodern era). This is a good long read, where the poetics stand best in union, so the reader grasps the entire message, absorbing the essence of each into a cohesive and well-knit bond, much like a neighborhood... Send \$6 to Black Spring Press, 61-36 160th Street, Flushing, NY 11365.
- THE NEBULIZER** by **Robert Roden**: Killing technology is on the forefront of our minds at some point in our interaction with the machines around us. This is a chap in the Laguna Poets Series, and much of it centers around our puzzling interaction with these mechanical devices that surround us: the telephone, the automobile, and the unhelping voice on the end of an automated phone system. In "Vehicular Manslaughter" we read: "The car wants blood/Transfusions/And upgrades/To more synthetic products." Yes, Americans, we have personified the products and devices that surround us. Perhaps they will want a bit of our blood, or more.... The Inevitable Press, pobox 249, Laguna Beach, CA 92652.