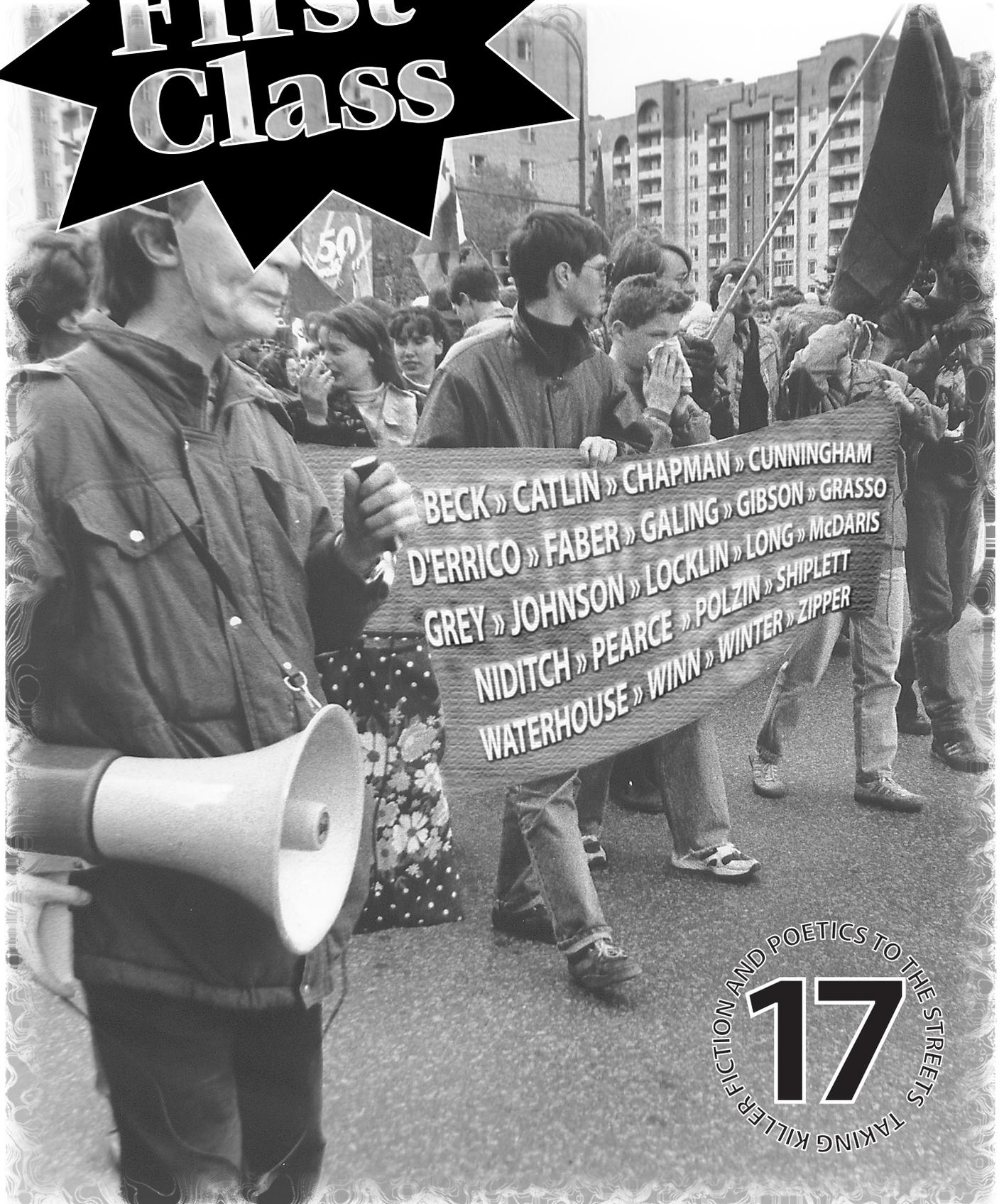


ISSUE SEVENTEEN » II of III.2001  
SIX BUCKS

# First Class



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D'ERRICO » FABER » GALING » GIBSON » GRASSO  
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TAKING KILLER FICTION AND POETICS TO THE STREETS  
**17**





**ISSUE  
SEVENTEEN**

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**WEBSITE : [www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com)**

**CONTACT : [christopherm@four-sep.com](mailto:christopherm@four-sep.com)**



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**GREETINGS:** Effective with the following issue (#18) First Class will become a bi-annual, rather than a tri-annual publication and will publish in November and May, times of seasonal transition, into and out of the cold months. Two reasons contribute to the decision: the sheer volume of submissions received and the desire to publish a greater number of top-quality chapbooks.

I need to give justice to every submission that arrives in the pobox. It is my duty to read every word.

Chapbooks are an exciting art form that I have the ability to create and produce quite reasonably. Four-Sep chaps and Lockout Press productions deserve more time.

First Class will increase in size to close to 60 full-size pages and sometimes more. Four-Sep Publications will continue to publish First Class as an artistic and creative extension rather than a cash-centered endeavor. **There have never been, nor will there ever be such gross insults as reading fees, contest entry fees, or minimum purchases in order to get published. You also don't need to join a club or be a dues-paying member.** No. Why insult art? It's enough that we all bear the burden of increased postal costs. Readers will fork over their dough if they are given something good enough to earn it, but it should never be a prerequisite to being published.

The revamped and redesigned Web site ([www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com)) is always up with the latest news and words. I hope it runs smoothly on everyone's Internet browsers. *As always, please enjoy!* - Christopher M.

-  **PHOTO ON PAGE 8, 24 and COVER ART** ..... Christopher M.
-  **COMIC ON PAGE 20** ..... Stepan Chapman

# Prisons

*Gary Beck*

Let them enter into your gates  
for comfort from the new mother,  
and father who won't abandon  
the lost boys and girls, playing cool,  
acting tough, trying to conceal  
the desperate loss of hope, the fear  
that they may be without value,  
to the world that's based on profit.

The winds from Washington D.C.  
are blowing in state capitals,  
and funneled to the big cities,  
where citizens of confusion,  
disciples of the lottery,  
are conditioned to evasion  
of thankless chores to do what's right  
that never seem to earn rewards.

Across this land of bitterness,  
divided by have nots and haves,  
a growing sense of failure cries  
to lock kids up or shoot them down.  
A democratic decision  
that was made without much wisdom  
to let kids kill each other off  
and put survivors behind bars.

The gates of welcome opened wide  
for victims of our kind neglect,  
the kids we chose to throw away  
because it costs too much to care.  
What sins we make them suffer for,  
these babies born to stand alone.  
What price they pay to learn their crimes,  
offspring from schools of violence.

The citizens of our country  
demand more prisons for our kids.  
Fund them, build them, staff them, run them,  
then everyone will make money.  
For those who dream philosophy  
we'll teach them true economics:  
there's no profit in prevention,  
nor in rehabilitation.

It matters not how bad the drugs  
that leave kids lifeless in the streets,  
as long as dealers make their loot  
and neighbors help them ply their trade.  
We close our eyes to all the needs  
that don't put cash in some pockets  
and the harm that's done to our youth  
doesn't count, because they don't vote.

# A Different Planet For Bartenders

Alan Catlin

## **Perceptions:**

Maybe I shouldn't have answered, what must have felt like an innocent question to my fellow passenger on the bus.

It was really none of her business anyway what I was listening to in the first place.

That's why you bring headphones, a walkman and your cassettes in the first place: so you zone out inside your own particular space and let the human condition do its worst all around you on its own.

But there was something in the dull glint in her eye, something between grinning idiot and worldclass bore that made me do it.

Besides it was almost time to flip over the tape anyway and the answer was sure to get a reaction.

"The recorded poems of Sylvia Plath. There's something in how her inflection changes from preppie prima donna on the verge of a great academic career that no one else will ever touch, to tormented soul, lost in a wilderness of bad dreams that speaks to me where I live, the closer she gets to sticking her head in the oven, while her husband, the laureate Ted, is away screwing some other neurotic co-ed, who would do the same oven thing to him years later, only this time with her unborn child inside, instead of them sleeping in the next room while mommy sucked on the gas."

It wasn't exactly the kind of response she had in mind.

I guess. Too bad, while she was changing seats she missed all the fun going on outside.

## **UFO Babies**

I must have been spending  
with a stacked deck  
too much time standing  
on line in supermarkets  
reading the headlines of  
certain tabloids. When  
I saw them abusing second  
hand clothes and used  
furniture I recognized  
them immediately as an  
extended family of UFO babies.  
I fervently hoped the younger  
generation would prevail;  
it would be worth paying  
to watch them try to stuff

a sofa the size of The Colossus  
of Rhodes into a taxi.  
Outside, we see them waiting  
for a bus that no one actually  
sees come. I said, "They've  
been beamed back up to their  
space ship. It's too bad they  
couldn't stay longer. At least,  
they're happy now, back with  
Elvis on the UFO. We should  
be able to read about them  
in just a few weeks. They  
were the stuff legends are made  
of and headlines in The World  
Weekly News."

## **Philosophy:**

I know bartenders aren't supposed to be educated.

They're supposed to know everything but not to be educated, it's one of those essential contradictions you get used to after awhile.

Sometimes you can even have fun with it but usually in subtle ways not many other people appreciate.

Not that it really matters.

Still, sometimes you have to involve other people in the game of life you are playing.

Like the subtle joy of a thing well done only you can appreciate, there are refinements in this life, some involving an even more subtle form of cheating, that can be rewarding in ways it is almost impossible to explain.

It helps if you are in charge of the Rules,  
and The Game.

### **Betting on Existential Dread**

I have money on  
this guy not making  
it into the bar.  
Betting is something  
I resist but this is  
a special occasion.  
We could see him  
wandering around  
on Western Avenue  
in his mind trying  
to figure out the problem  
of how to press the  
latch of our door down  
and actually open  
the door. That's when  
the wallets come out  
and the odds get set:  
if he figures out  
the door, the odds are  
10:1 he can't  
understand the concept  
of pull when he gets  
to the inner door.  
Some heavy money  
lay on the bar once  
he gets inside the  
corridor and starts  
pushing on the pull

sign for all he is  
worth. It gets to be  
an existential dread bet  
and we double it  
once he gives up pushing  
and turns to grapple  
with the latch handle  
to go outside again.  
We watch him  
struggling to figure  
out the riddle of two  
incomprehensible locked  
passageways in his mind.  
I hope he isn't  
claustrophobic, it is  
a small corridor and  
the clearly printed signs  
of how to get in and out  
obviously offer no clues.  
It is probably cruel  
watching this mortal  
struggle and not  
intervening  
but I am winning a pile  
of money letting it go on.  
Actually, it happens  
all the time.

### ***The Open Door Policy:***

Of course, if you leave the door propped open, as you should do summer evenings to let out the carcinogenic clouds of cigarette smoke the prehistoric smoke eaters do nothing to dispel. The whole idea of an open door policy is to do business with as large a general clientele as possible.

That's what it's all about.

Doing Business,

but some people's idea of doing business varies greatly from other people's.

And some of the people that pass for clientele can only be described as what the dogs of hell dragged in on their way home to the banks of the River Styx.

She came in  
& wanted me  
to call 911-  
something about  
her roommate  
spitting up blood  
around the corner  
at 187 Quail  
kitty corner from  
the block God  
forgot. That  
house has been  
haunted for twenty  
years, at least,  
I sd., can't call  
anyway, phone in  
use which was  
true but I could  
have done something  
about it.

She had no teeth,  
I sd., afterwards,  
I don't trust people  
with no teeth  
especially from  
187 Quail.  
JD told me later  
there were squad  
cars galore there  
& enough emergency  
vehicles to start  
& finish a war.  
What they wheeled  
out was probably  
dead & she would  
claim, it was all  
my fault.

### **Feelings:**

I have them the same as other people do, except mine have been altered a bit by perceptions. And a lifelong habit of observing the divina comedia from a specialized vantage point.

Have come to see the whole dim process of human interaction as a kind of living movie you have to alter the dialogue and shift scenes of in your mind as the situation develops.

Sometimes this produced a particular kind of psycho drama.

But it sure does liven things up when you are on the verge of a complete kind of stark raving mad state of boredom

or your sensibilities have becomes so jaded and over sensitized that just about any weird thrill outside of the ordinary days and nights of random weirdness can provide, and you'll do anything to press the magic buttons to make it happen.

### **A Double Vodka Martian**

I'd seen her around quite a bit before. She was a washed out mouse colored blonde you might see in a peep show on 42nd St. strung out on drugs getting a piece of whatever the winos and the perverts stuck in the pay-for-view slot outside her booth. She came up to me and gave this look which was supposed to be suggestive and sd. "I've had my eye on you for awhile, I'll give you a blow job in exchange for a double Vodka Martini." "I'd rather give you the five bucks and have you go somewhere else."

"Are you serious?"  
"Would I lie to you?"  
"You're the first bartender I know, who's ever turned me down."  
"It may come as a surprise to you but all bartenders aren't total crapheads."  
"Not the ones I've met."  
I was amazed, watching her chug the double Martian, I'd never seen anyone do that before and live.  
"Thanks, sweetie." She said,  
"I'll see you around."  
I hope that didn't mean I was going to have to identify the body.

### **Blues:**

After awhile, you feel as if you can write a whole series of in-depth monologues of the lost souls of the human condition acting their outpatient roles in the largest spontaneous school of drama yet.

That all the soliloquies you've heard and make up on the spot, are just something buried in Ophelia's waterlogged brain

dead and buried as last week's heliotropic bouquet

Rue is for the heart

White roses are for the beloved

Nettles are for the skin

or third base if you were a Yankee fan in the late 70's and early 80's.

That was the kind of observation that made you the kind of evil presence people made the sign of the cross behind your back as if they thought you couldn't see them doing it in the strategically placed backbar mirrors and weren't altering the chemistry of the alcohol they were about to drink in ways that would be less than pleasant.

Never piss off someone who is going to make something you are about to put inside your body is about the only rule to live by I would call absolute.

### **Guns and Roses**

She sd. "This dude,  
he was like crazy,  
all he did the whole  
time I knew him was  
smoke weed, drink  
Jack right out of the  
bottle and break things.  
And like maybe if I was  
nice to him he'd maybe  
lay off breaking things  
and not punch my face  
but forget it if the  
baby would commence to  
crying, all hell would

break loose. Talk about  
crazy. He couldn't  
handle noise unless it  
had something to do  
with Guns and Roses.  
He had one tattooed  
on his chest right  
above his heart, you  
know the logo of the  
band. The only reason  
we're not together now  
is he's doing time  
for murder."

Usually, I don't bother to dispel the notion that bartenders all live up to the standard deviations people expect of them:

### **Imaging:**

that we are all lying, cheating, thieving, carnal animals who live only to get drunk, play cards, bet the horses and get laid with anything female old enough to grant permission.

In fact, cultivating that image has many advantages that can be used to your advantage when all the normal rules of communication and interaction break down.

It is the breaking of the mold that makes all the days and months and years perceived as being a human scumbag with the rote intelligence of a bag of warm manure, worthwhile.

### **A Different Planet for Bartenders**

I guess it was  
assumed I was  
supposed to be an  
inexhaustible source  
of useless information.  
A noise finished on  
the infernal machine

and he asked me:  
“What was that, how  
many minutes is it &  
who was the artist?”  
“First of all,” I sd.  
“If you were referring  
to the noise, I have  
a blocking mechanism  
that blots that out.  
Secondly, I like  
Mozart and that wasn’t  
by him. Lastly,  
if we’re going to do  
trivia, let’s do  
something interesting  
like how many symphonies  
did Haydn write  
or what do the initials  
of famous writer’s  
stand for? I’ll go  
first Thomas Stems is  
the T.S. in Eliot, though  
some modern readers and  
critics may disagree but  
that won’t change his  
given name.” The look  
he gave me suggested  
I wasn’t the type of  
bartender he was used to.  
He might even think  
I was that legendary  
bartender he’d heard about,  
the bartender from  
another planet.

# holes in your DNA

*Christopher Cunningham*

I read in a magazine  
that in  
outer space,  
there are ions  
and particles,  
iron and such,  
that when expelled from stars  
move almost  
at the  
speed  
of  
light.

they move so fast  
and are so  
heavy  
that  
they will drill holes  
in human DNA.

nothing can stop them  
and  
the holes they rip  
allow for  
genetic mutation.

we  
still  
go up there  
anyway  
and  
that, while maybe not being  
courageous,

is at least

human.

# just what they are hauling

*Christopher Cunningham*

there is a certain amount of terror  
associated with  
having to shit  
in a vile truckstop bathroom  
in northern Virginia  
while three state troopers  
are having coffee  
at the counter  
right outside.

the graffiti next to the paper roll  
will make you  
yield to truckers  
on the highway  
especially  
the ones who will  
come back  
for their promised good time.



**Moscow Prison**

**Punk, 1995**

*Christopher M.*

# Waxing the Riot

Chris D'Errico

The newsman said they're looting TVs & I say of course they are & I think they should. But I'm trying to work on something here in all this commotion...

*right brained ganglions  
of earnest & stoic flames that flap  
in the wind  
before  
smoke concedes to drift air...*

Forget it. The world's inarticulate gasp wins again. Calmly watch the burn sizzle, this ether coagulating in diffuse colors of acceptance. Good. I'll comply.

I understand.  
I am content to let it go.

The newsman said there are other emotions, too. Yeah, like *the forearm of death saluting an 18 wheeler backing into a blind driveway... or the star surgeon nodding off at the scalpel while the patient flatlines & the family waits uncertain biting through nerves & tears while sharing bad coffee & staring down at their shoes...*

I'm "putting it all together."  
I'm assimilating the mess like a reluctant savant.

There's been an accident – smell the blood? They were cruising at a dangerous altitude when the whole thing blew. Some commentator says that repulsion is a totally human "phenomenon" is the word she uses & I say is that a good sign? The city's an inferno & innocent people are getting beaten to death in the streets but I don't know what they mean by innocent.

There are other crimes, too. Like this *emotionless explanation of fate that scrawls upon the heart a congress bereft of principle; sanctions against poor souls once elected to save*

*these streets  
this is madness  
this isn't right*

I open a beer & a bag of Cheetos. A doctor on TV says that while in the throws of brain death what is regurgitated from consciousness is nothing but sputtering nerves & animal tics. Images are a by-product of experience & this is exclusively human in nature, I say

*oh yes  
it's peaceful  
in the eye  
enunciating the soft emulsion of time, goodbye cruel world & I'll see you loved ones on the other side...*

A commercial comes on & shows a young Biff petting the family dog & saying IT'S ALRIGHT, I'M HERE, ALL IS NORMAL & FAMILIAR. Suddenly this giant net scoops him up just as he leaves the house & his carbolic smile melts the film as the manicured lawn morphs into rows of tenement homes engulfed in factory smog & filth.

*buildings, cars, television sets  
don't die a horrible death  
only the living do  
like these people  
these people  
these people how sickening*

There's a knock at my door. I open it to find a woman in grainy black & white screaming something at me in badly broken English. She's bleeding from her left eye. This is personal, I think to myself I DON'T UNDERSTAND! I shout back. The phone is ringing. Cautiously I walk backwards into my room to answer but when I turn & pick it up there's only static & when I turn back, she's gone. Inspecting each end of the corridor—there's no sign of her. Noticing a few spots of blood on the rug. I kneel down to have a closer look. It looks fake, I think, I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I close the door & sit back down in front of the TV, which has turned itself off.

Outside the rumble of Chicano bass blasting from the low-riders on the boulevard reminds of a movie with what's-her-name? I go to the window & looking down through smoke, I see what appears to be the b & w bleeding woman. She's riding shotgun in a cartoon convertible & a well-dressed slick back dark haired man is at the wheel, nodding, smiling & talking into the rear-view mirror. She's either laughing hard or in terror—probably the former. They begin to pull away from the sidewalk as she looks up towards my flat, blank expression.

They speed off, burning rubber, but the music gets LOUDER as they go.  
Ba-boom ba-BOOM BA-BOOM BA-BOOM!

I'm starting to get the picture in color. I'll just stay inside. More beer, more junk-food. I'm stocked up for awhile. Lock the door, put on my headphones, crank some sweet music & let it blow over like it always does. I can't help these people  
these people. Each day  
feeling the hum of an engine running on fear of abandonment & the myth of security...

oh well  
*the machine conspires  
an unbalanced load, always  
on the verge of EXPLOSION  
at the hands of its technicians*

I guess  
Just turn up the volume & roll with the road.

# Scenes From a Murder Trial

(a play without actors)

Louis S. Faber

I

He walks in calmly  
as though surveying the room.  
His head is shaved as it was  
a year ago, but he has let it  
grow out on the top.  
The food has been good to him  
thick across the chest and gut.  
The sport coat changes daily,  
yesterday blue, today  
an olive green.  
Most of the time he sits  
hands folded, stares  
impassively at the witness  
or pulls on his ear lobe.

II

There is a large map  
of the campus, blown up  
to show buildings and roads.  
Where is the blood,  
where are the screams that tore  
through the night, the flames  
of the candles, the tears.  
Bucolic, black, white,  
red, cold and dying.

III

She reads from the sheaf  
of pages from the pad,  
questions, each directed  
none overly obvious  
repetition. Drone.  
Harping on pin heads  
dancing, words as projectiles,  
in targets or shattered  
on the floor.

IV

The judges stare down  
from the oak paneled walls  
at the jury, the audience  
those who gawk those  
who were victims, or family.  
What do they know of our pain,  
our blood spilled, sitting calmly  
on the bench surrounded  
by dust crusted leather tomes  
in which are stored  
the blood of our forebears.

V

Juror number 12  
sits with her arms  
folded across her chest  
and bores into  
defense counsel  
“don’t be nasty,” her eyes  
warn, “we like him,”  
the witness, “and  
don’t like your bitchiness.  
Don’t lean over him,”  
her face says,  
it’s impolite.

VI

They whisper like pack rats  
crowded around the desk  
the hand motion of squirrels  
holding nuts against the chill  
none wishing to fall behind  
or be lost, all begging  
the nod and the smile.

VII

How do you sit so still,  
arm on the chair  
their blood, still dripping  
from your hands  
their cries in your ears  
drowned by your laughter.

VIII

The one eye stares  
unblinking  
the foam wrapped ear  
is poised  
blind and deaf.

IX

I sit and shiver  
in the cold  
that pours  
from your eyes,  
no ember burns  
in the recesses  
of your heart,  
my collar cuts  
into my neck,  
the hairs bristle

at the sight  
of the fingers  
that drew the bow  
and pulled back  
repeatedly  
on the trigger.

X  
He smiles only  
when the jury  
is out of sight  
more of a snicker  
in response  
to a comment  
from his attorney.  
A shroud falls  
in advance  
of the jury  
and he is fixed  
as statuary.

XI  
He holds the gun  
and shows them,  
benign, although  
appropriately black,  
hardly a tool  
that might spit death  
in the night,  
ripping legs, cleaving  
 chests, piercing head  
tearing lives apart.  
It was doing  
what it was designed  
to do, with mechanical  
efficiency and stoicism.

XII  
"There are 5 to 7 hundred  
firearms in my store  
at any given time,"  
some will give pleasure  
others power, but all  
may bring maiming  
or death.

XIII  
The U.S. Flag  
stands draped  
over its pole, still  
sharing, perhaps  
our mourning.

XIV  
Administrative minutiae  
clogs the bowels  
of both college  
and the Court.  
Constipated, bloated  
until the shit  
explodes, peppering  
all within  
the target area.  
Still he stares  
and holds the pen  
against his chin.

XV  
Words for blood  
Words for screams  
Words for torn flesh  
Words for shattered bone  
Words seeking reason  
Words giving motive  
Words for tears  
Words echoing  
off ears and falling  
in deafened silence.

XVI  
Day three  
same green blazer,  
beige pants, same  
stony visage.  
Screams still echo  
despite another sidebar.

XVII  
"I thought I heard  
him call someone nigger  
but he said he didn't,  
so I let it drop,"  
he was always respectful  
but somewhat quiet.  
We got along all right.  
He changed a bit  
(at which point  
truth yields to formality).  
We later had a conflict.  
Why would he threaten  
my wife and kids,  
what had they done?  
Unanswered questions  
dominate.

XVIII

Calm, another bullshit meeting  
ding one student for burning a note  
on someone else's door. Anger  
for one gets dinged, I get a fine.  
In your face, up yours, soon enough.  
Escape and hide, he's coming,  
children down, out the back  
and next . . . and next.

XIX

They are shown  
captured on film  
in two dimensions  
still, not in pools  
of blood on the cold cement  
or slumped over the wheel,  
the car in a snowbank,  
brains on the window.

XX

Direct  
Cross  
Redirect  
Recross  
confuse  
befuddle  
cry  
mourn

XXI

The court officer  
keeps a watchful eye  
on the proceedings  
and brings water  
to the witnesses,  
allowing himself  
a smile only  
during recesses.

XXII

It is odd discussing  
a friend as history  
sitting across a room.  
He speaks softly  
hands clasped in his lap.  
Wayne sits impassively  
as though watching a film.  
Wayne smiles at the mention  
of the hard core concert  
and the jury understands,  
as images of pornography  
evaporate.

XXIII

Fourteen questions  
and three photographs  
are the summation  
of a life left  
in a snowbank,  
bleeding over the wheel,  
the window shattered  
by the jacketed slug.  
No articles written,  
no lives touched  
no mourning, no pain.

XXIV

A life in four movements  
unfinished in mid allegro  
the baton cracked on the podium.

XXV

Commonwealth's Exhibit 29  
a photographic reality.  
The price of admission  
your life.

XXVI

Stare, you bastard  
as though nothing happened,  
stare with that damned  
blank look, stone faced.  
Did you stare as you pulled  
the trigger on her  
twice, then twice again  
or did you smile, knowing?  
Did you stare at the car  
as you shot out the window,  
though he never saw you, but  
did you smile, knowing?  
Did you stare at the couple  
when you said get the fuck out  
or moments later when you  
pulled the trigger, hitting him  
in the chest as he ran out,  
the good, if foolish, Samaritan  
or did you smile, by now comfortable  
with the pressure of the metal bar  
on the back of your finger?  
Did you stare into the dorm  
and see him standing there  
with his roommate,  
were you still, rigid  
as you fired, when they screamed  
or did you smile when you saw  
first one, then the other fall

only to crawl off to safety.  
Stare all you can, stare  
at the bars, the walls  
until you wither  
under their restless gaze.

XXVII  
Day 4  
brown tweed  
same stare  
hands still folded.

XXVIII  
The trail of blood  
ended at his body  
curled on the floor,  
the trail of tears  
continued.

XXIX  
The ME is a  
cherubic balding man  
a gentle smile  
whose life is spent  
explaining unexpected death.  
Why can't he explain  
why Galen and Nacunan  
are gone, why the laughter  
no longer fills the halls  
their tears, their joys evaporated.  
Don't tell how they died,  
we only want to know why.

XXX  
Say something, do anything  
twitch, anything.  
You played football with him  
you threw him the ball  
for the last touchdown  
that Saturday. How can you  
now sit there, listening  
to him describe your bullets  
that tore his legs apart  
and do nothing, say nothing  
cold, emotionless. Is that  
how they instructed you?  
And when he told of fearing  
he might die if he lost  
consciousness, hopping up the stairs  
as the jurors recoiled, wanting  
to throw arms around him  
to shield him somehow from his  
scars,  
you did nothing, never moved,  
just stared at him. Were you  
proud of your handiwork

as he looked at his jeans  
shredded by the EMT's scissors  
once blue, now a mottled brown  
dyed by his blood, or that part  
which did not pool in the hallway.  
How could you sit and see this  
and do nothing, say nothing?

XXXI  
Day five  
blue blazer  
white shirt  
same stare  
hands folded.

XXXII  
Upon examination, I  
determined that the wounds  
were consistent with  
the entry of some missile,  
into the leg. It passed through  
one thigh and then the other,  
and then exited the body.  
We were concerned because  
there was a marked loss  
of function in the left  
lower extremity, that proceeded  
quite rapidly, and we were  
concerned that the nerve  
might have been severed  
or damaged, so we explored  
and debrided the wound.  
He was quite lucky, all told,  
in that the projectile passed  
close to the major nerve  
but there was only severe  
bruising, so we believed  
he would regain use of the limb.  
It could well have been fatal  
a centimeter or more one way  
or the other and it would have severed  
the nerve or the artery, and he  
might well have exsanguinated.  
There are the scars shown  
on the photograph as a result  
of the wounds, although  
I have not followed the patient  
since his discharge from my care.  
Jagged scars, blood red  
cross his legs, his face  
twisted in pain, calling meekly  
for a painkiller, trying to move  
the foot, crying and smiling

as the toes moved, and the muscles stiffened, needing to be rubbed and looking, saying to himself why me, while smiling at others.

XXXIII

He spoke to me calmly,  
we talked about football  
the game on TV that night  
and he said he had shot  
two people at the guard shack  
two more at the library  
and two more at Dolliver House.  
He said he would have killed more  
he wanted to but the rifle  
kept jamming and he had  
to discard the clips  
as he moved through campus.  
He wanted to teach them a lesson  
but what he wanted most  
was to give himself up, he was  
very concerned that he  
would be hurt so I assured him  
that if he put the gun down  
and walked out with his hands  
interlaced over his head  
he would not be harmed.

XXXIV

Day 15,  
blue blazer,  
the hair has grown  
white shirt, pressed cuffs  
and the same blank stare.

XXXV

The map of campus  
sits in the front  
of the courtroom  
still, silent, peaceful,  
the blood has dried  
and been washed away,  
the screams are trapped  
inside the walls  
awaiting release  
into the night.

XXXVI

Criminal responsibility evaluation  
nuts or not, psychotic,  
cold, calculating, drooling  
smiling, shy, violent,  
patient interviews, life  
histories, friends, lovers,  
Galen and Nacunan still dead  
can't speak on their own behalf.

XXXVII

He went to a Catholic school

and helped raise his brother  
as his parents worked 16 hours  
a day at the restaurant.  
His father was hard, befitting  
a retired military officer.  
There was nothing remarkable  
in his history that would  
indicate anything abnormal  
in his mental status.  
He was cooperative, but had  
a need to control the interview.  
He promised honesty and told us  
we needn't question his veracity.  
When we contradicted him or told him  
we did not accept his story  
he took strong exception,  
that upset him, he wasn't in control.  
At most you could see some  
indications of a personality disorder,  
he had this tendency to be  
a cold, heartless killer.

XXXVIII

A maladaptive narcissist  
who makes bad choices,  
an off-center view, always  
the central figure,  
diminishing others  
will full metal jacketed  
.762 caliber military rounds  
from the core of the SKS rifle.

XXXIX

In the world of psychobabble  
it is quite often lost  
that there is a mind  
cold and calculating, smiling  
when the jury's back is turned.

XL

There is a fine art  
to the tying of Gordian knots,  
and littering them  
across the courtroom  
but they are not always capable  
of encasing the truth.

XLI

The voice of God spoke  
"Right the sins, act  
as I have told you."  
What sort of God  
would say "get the fuck  
out of here" or is this

yet another new revelation.

#### OBSTANTE VERDICTO

“In the matter of the People  
of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
versus Wayne Lo, on the charge  
of murder in the first degree  
for the unlawful taking of the life  
of Nacunan Saez, the jury  
in this matter finds the defendant  
guilty as charged, so say you  
madame forelady of the jury,  
so say you all of the members of the jury.”  
Twelve “yeses” were echoed  
eighteen times, most drowned in the tears  
and the rustle of tissues, of sobbing  
and of hands, daisy chained.  
The cameras grind, encoding their images  
in a transitory magnetic record.  
Across the aisle, lined by officers  
in starched white shirts, shoulder patched  
Trial Court of the Commonwealth,  
and the sports coated, buzz cut  
troopers, they huddle together  
and nod to us, slight, all telling  
and we to them, a condolence for the loss  
against which they have steeled themselves  
for the several months past.  
“It is the sentence of this Court  
that you shall be incarcerated  
for a term of your natural life  
without the possibility of parole  
in the Massachusetts Correctional Facility  
at Cedar Junction, such term to commence  
immediately upon the termination  
of these proceedings.”  
Life, no parole, then again, then 18 to 20  
for Teresa’s shattered pelvis, shredded bowels,  
the blood coursing out of Josh’s thighs  
as he hobbled up the stairs, clinging  
to consciousness as though it were life,  
for the pin in Tom’s hip and the nightmares  
and for all the others whose ghosts  
come to them in their dreams, to them

comes Nacunan singing sweet songs of the  
pampas  
his neck torn away, slumped  
over the steering wheel,  
and the mirthful laugh of Galen,  
a hole ripped in his chest, cursing  
“the bastard” knowing full well  
those words would serve as his last,  
as life and breath seeped onto the library floor.  
And to him, he who died in the chorus  
of yeses, unwavering, staring, fixedly  
as the cuffs were pressed closed about his  
wrists,  
to him, will come a thousand ghosts,  
Sacco, Vanzetti, the others whose bowels  
and bladders voided in the death chamber,  
those who shriveled slowly and died  
the death of time and were buried  
in the same blue uniform they wore in life.  
The scales of justice return  
to their precarious equilibrium,  
she smiles under the blindfold  
while we chant the Pibroch  
for all that has died.

# The Joker in the Pack

*Ed Galing*

I met jim mcdonald at  
the car dealership  
where i was workin,  
he was a short dapper  
guy,  
with a small thin wax  
moustache,  
about five foot six,  
and very quick with  
the wit,  
he was always crackin  
dirty jokes,  
just to make the rest  
of us laugh,  
this was a big dealer  
selling all kinds of  
ford autos,  
and when we wasn't busy,  
we would sit around in  
the back room,  
about six of us salesmen,  
laughin it up,  
and jim would come up  
with his jokes,  
like he would say,  
what's the noisiest thing  
in the world?  
we would give up after  
a while,  
and then jim would smile  
and say,  
two skeletons fuckin on  
a tin roof,  
then we would all laugh,  
cause we could see it was  
a funny thing,  
imagine two skeletons  
fuckin on a tin roof,  
one time he said to me,  
let's go out on a  
foursome,  
and if they won't do it,  
we'll force 'em,  
then he would begin to  
laugh, and i would join  
in,  
cause we wanted to humor  
the bastard,  
with his funny jokes,  
jim was a lonely man,  
i don't know what his  
wife gave him when he

got done with work,  
but he couldn't have got  
too much sex,  
cause he had all these  
dirty jokes in his  
head,  
and he never failed to  
come across with one,  
jim was a good salesman,  
sold more cars than  
anyone else,  
i guess the customers  
liked his dirty jokes,  
although i think most  
of them were rather  
tame,  
I THINK THAT JIM LIKED  
THE JOKES MORE THAN WE  
DID,  
I guess he thought it  
made him popular,  
cause he always had so  
many of them,  
most of jim's dirty jokes  
came out of a joke book  
called WHIZ BANG,  
which was at least  
ninety years old,  
some jokes he would  
tell over and over again,  
like he didn't remember  
he had told them before,  
like the one about the  
guy who knocked on the  
farmer's door, and  
the farmer's wife let  
him in, and he wound up  
sleeping with her,  
and during the night the  
farmer was sleepin  
and the guy kept  
pullin hairs outta the  
farmer's ass to make sure  
the farmer was asleep,  
so he could fuck the wife,  
who was sleepin in the  
same bed,  
and then he would fuck her...  
and in the morning when they

went down for breakfast, the  
three of em, the farmer got  
his shotgun, and aimed it at  
this guy, and said, i didn't  
mind it when you pulled a hair  
outta my ass the first time,  
to see if I was asleep,  
and I didn't mind it the  
second time,  
but when you pulled it out  
ten times last night,  
that's goin to far...  
that kind of joke,  
you know?  
last week jim died,  
and we gave him a big  
sendoff, all the way  
to the cemetery,  
and i can see jim right  
now,  
meetin up with saint peter,  
at the pearly gates,  
and jim says to him  
i gotta joke for you,  
why do they call a penis  
a peter?  
and saint peter scratches  
his head and says,  
i don't know, why?  
and jim grins and says,  
cause its the nearest  
thing to ... heaven ...  
get it?  
and saint peter laughs  
out loud,  
slaps jim on the back,  
puts his arm around him and  
says, chuckling, that  
is a good one jim,  
i really liked that one.  
shall we go?

# Blackout

**Ron Gibson, Jr.**

These days I can't help but notice the measured silence of drought. It's like death. I miss the singsong Northwest mantra of rain falling, ticking panes like time. Instead, the mountain reservoirs retreat from their shores, falling back over exposed stumps and Native American bones left naked by centuries of murder. Salmon dive suicidally headlong into turbines, ignoring fish ladders. And lights blink out in response; rolling brownouts becoming the West's version of Montezuma's Revenge. Everybody is paying their penance: inflated electric bills and reservation casino losses.

I can't seem to find any peace, anymore. My neighbor stops at the edge of our domains, his schnauzer shitting on the lawn (usually mine), to tell me he finds promise in a tax cut proposal, like his wife finds promise in goldenrod envelopes with Ed McMahon's likeness on the front. He then checks up and down our street, and when his conscience feels it is safe to cross, he confidentially whispers that the "niggers" are taking over our town. He warns that our property values will decrease and our crime rates will increase. And he keeps assuring my silent disdain with: "it's a proven fact." And I can't help but wonder what happened to the days when years went by without a word exchanged with my neighbors.

But now it's too quiet. Except for the television. News snippets show people flash anger over Boeing moving away, and I can't help but think it's time for me to do the same. Time to see what's past the dusty rain gutter and gray satellite dish rooftops. Time to canoe through Canadian-geese-shit-filled, man-made ponds, built inside overnight-raised apartment complexes. To see what's over that hill, where the landfill's methane gas torches blaze all day and night. Where 747's descend and sink into its fire; an illusion. But it's no magic. I know what is over that hill, past those freeway overpasses, past those sunset-stained copses hiding the vein of the Green River and traces of a dead serial killer. I know the unmarked territory where fourteen year old runaways age exponentially with each trick they turn, and which all-day-and-night-parked Winnebagos aren't filled with Okies, but meth labs. I know that Sea-Tac is waiting with a jet. A jet that will take me 20,000 feet into the atmosphere before my bladder bursts like an overfilled water balloon. All the Vicodin-popping parties in New York could not dissuade me of the facts.

So I look away from the edge of the sky, downward, and dig to discover suburban roots — petrified crabgrass, tupperware, and rusted Ford Fairlane hubcaps. The shovel dips and slices through the rich layers of wasted soil, where once this town grew out of to be a capital of agriculture and beer consumption. I hum the old Hamm's beer commercial. The one where the cartoon bear hits a homerun, and the Native American drum thumps hypnotically in the background, sent along with the affirming chant: "Hamm's, the beer refreshing. Hamm's, the beer refreshing. Hamm's." I dig past the splintered remnants of popsicle stick forts and lost pacifiers and melted army men and pet rocks and nickel-loaded fish hook containers and Black Cat firecracker duds. I dig until I stop to realize I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know what I'm looking for. I don't know what the purpose of this is, or better yet what the purpose of anything else is. All I see is emptiness around me. And when my neighbor spies on me through the crack of my fence, and declares that I need a city permit to dig in my own backyard, I accept it as a reprieve, throw down the shovel, and resign to a chair in front of the television.

I flip through the remote awhile before halfheartedly watching the lesbian relationship between Xena and her little poet mend. But I don't have enough time to worry if I'm just another A.D.D. addled Gen-X'er that hasn't read Douglas Coupland, when the power blinks off I imagine a huge map, the Western power grid, state connected to state, like firing circuits of the brain, all at once

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**In this  
dark,  
nobody's  
safe.**

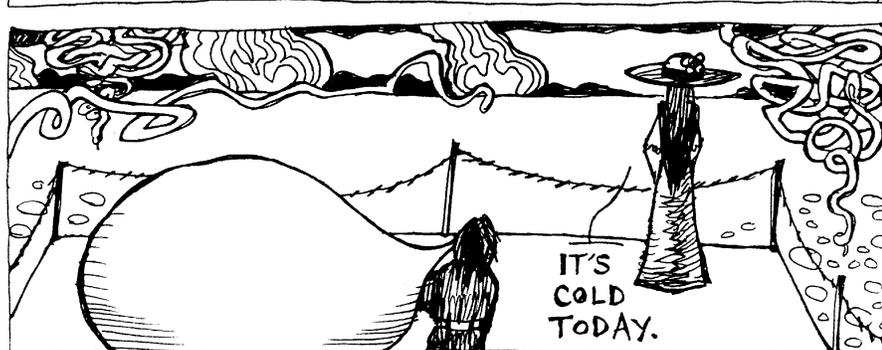
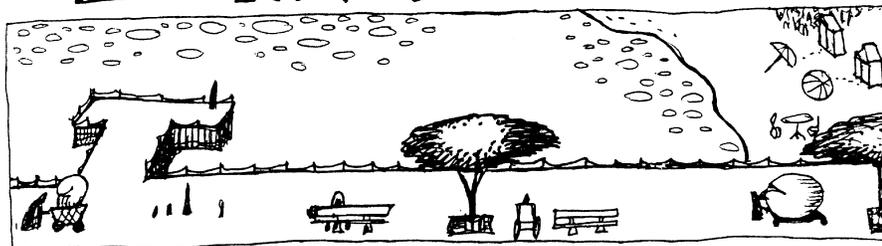
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fading into night, like the dark clouds of disease on a CAT scan image.

But the seashell silence is broken with my neighbor's yelling. I look out my window, cast in the oily sheen of stars, and see his shadow rush inside his house. I can't help but notice the peaceful moments before he returns and unloads round after round at imaginary looters, like a paranoid banderillero on peyote chasing shadows of bulls. I duck down, quick, before his crosshairs catch my silhouette. In this dark, nobody's safe.

# Sanitorium



# The Keeper of the Beast and Chestnut

*Christopher J. Grasso*

Little fingers rattle the cage of the mysterious union of boy and dog  
A dog filled with an empty stomach but full of ringworms  
My new dog, whom I urged to pet, but was scolded – he might bite  
My dog covered with filth like the chimney smoke of silt, released in the Industrial  
Age refineries  
Whose sad bark translated to: I'm a water-dog, purify me! Purify my soul!  
That water being an angel brushing off the graining tombstone of what once was  
My dog, a polished broad pup, sloppily wet but content  
Whose coat was itchy but clean from concentrated dish detergent  
Who was wondering of his new surroundings,  
and strange new noises to bark loudly at, in the night  
Whose vet trips and vitamins pumped him to an enormous size  
Whose runs in the yard became Indian midget trails  
My dog, the dumb one, who would see-saw with me  
Who would slide down the sliding board, like a rambunctious child, head first  
Who loved to bite through things except my arm, shoved into his jaws, as a test he  
always passed  
Whose claws were raptor sharp, and provided the dirt digging ability to escape into  
neighbor's plots  
My dog, who outweighed me by fifty pounds and made sure strangers knew this  
before they reached the front step  
My dog, black haired, a thick virgin forest of midnight, streaming and shedding in  
the summer time  
Whose lapping pink fleshed tongue in such a hot day, would yearn for his bucket of  
water  
Whose chest muscles were defined like the promontory coastlines of North and  
South Carolina  
Who understood that I would eventually come home after grade school, pleased to  
be in his presence too  
My dog, the chain snapper, the car chaser, the wood eater, the newly layered sod  
displacer  
My dog with flaws, disobedient like me, unwilling to take orders  
My dog, prone to be whacked with the paper on his rump, the thud of a beefy drum  
smacked on an indifferent animal  
My dog, a friend, never capable of backstabbing for a percentage  
My dog, who lived with me, then sent to live on a farm, I know had an even better  
life than I could give him

# The Shoplifters

John Grey

My lover has a son  
and the call comes through  
in the middle of hot sex  
that he's been arrested  
for shoplifting  
and passion,  
that most charming of thieves,  
must bow to responsibility,  
and she dresses quickly  
into something respectable,  
the mother I wouldn't know she was  
from the humming rev of her thighs.

And she hurries downtown,  
me trailing silently behind  
like someone who doesn't  
know his place or, at best,  
has lost it, and we stand  
around in this cramped office:  
sour-faced ex-cop store detective,  
weedy little manager,  
mother and child consoling each other  
with wide arms and shaking bodies  
in a neat display of eternal innocence  
while I, hopelessly out of place,  
can only remember the day  
I was caught red-handed  
and the blame travelled  
from one to the other  
like a hot coal  
until we finally left it with society.

And now we're grateful  
that they don't press charges,  
as long as he doesn't set foot  
in there again  
and, on the way home, I drive,  
the two of them are all  
lovey-dovey in the back seat  
like the past ten years  
of neglect never happened  
and there suddenly are no places  
where the kid can't set foot  
in her bountiful life  
though our sex, for a while anyhow,  
is that department store on 5th  
and the ex-cop who's just waiting  
for me to unzip my fly,  
that nerd of a manager  
ready, at a moment's notice,  
to shake his puny head wondering  
how I can think of undressing  
that woman at a time like this,  
and me, caught with her lush body  
in my hands, and even she,  
lining up with the accusers,  
pressing charges for all she's worth,  
while I shrink to the size  
of my lascivious thoughts  
and no mother to the rescue  
with another kind of love.

# The Bum Observes the Sneakers in the River

*John Grey*

He knows a current  
can't be about  
what's bobbing in it.  
Sneakers have a history.  
They belong on feet.  
And feet ought to be  
attached to people.  
And people are always  
so proud of what they wear,  
sticking their fancy Nikes  
in his face,  
with one wave of  
expensive shoe leather,  
opening up one more  
earthquake-sized crevasse  
between haves and have-nots.  
They can't just toss  
stuff away because it  
no longer suits them.  
If the sneakers go,  
then they have to go too.  
So it's people he sees  
tumbling and spilling  
in and out of the  
swift river like  
shells in a big surf.  
It's people running  
off at the mouth  
and toward it as well.

**Dan Johnson**

Among the other outrages, at noon in Cairo someone steals a camera from the trunk of my car. Traveling too light for teamwork, he must have slid past the latch like smoke, then retired to some slats of shadow nearby, stripping out my film on the run. Or equally true, an accomplice could have delayed my exit from the consulate so deftly that no suspicion survived the moment. I would like to put this into the past, but safe in my own country again other suspects arise, and always at night, with faces like a police composite: that waiter from somewhere, new people I met on the train or overnight flights, and others I trusted from long experience, so many of these. Soon there's a crowd of them in the marketplace of my bedroom at home. I should be sleeping, but a man who walks nervously ahead sees me and sprints away. Shoving the people aside, I go after him. That film was mine, and those pictures I never saw. Lunging past a stall I dream of justice, vengeance, an eye for an eye, the hand of the thief I'm tackling. We crash through a village gate and I wrestle down, turning over in triumph, a ten-year-old boy who may be innocent. The picture never changes: endless oceanless sand and a barefoot trek just beginning. I'm a tourist again, edging toward the last horse in line, stepping on the boy's shoulder to mount. Looking down I catch a glimpse of his bandaged ear. I lean over to ask if the sand is as hot as it looks. It is, and he leads us away.



**Corporate Inflatable, Moscow, 1995**  
*Christopher M.*

# John Singer Sargent: Street in Venice, 1882

Gerald Locklin

venice the sinister, where  
every turn is to the left.  
venice the decadent, christopher  
walken the logical successor to  
dirk bogarde. venice of the  
crumbling buildings; venice which  
was once a seaport; venice of the  
opaque waterways; venice of the  
pigeons; venice of ghost gondolas  
upon the onyx lacquer;  
lethe if there ever was one,  
portent of eternal torments.

a woman in black shawl  
to match her brows and tresses,  
gaze cast down as if in drugged  
sommambulation, frills and flares  
of narrow white skirt skimming  
pavement,

attracts the sideways notice of  
a slouching, sharp-faced gent  
involved in conversation,  
both men all in black and scarved  
against the draughts of winter.

shuttered lives.  
cracked surfaces.  
the banishment of sun.  
ostracization as a cul-de-sac.  
sin still sin not sociology.  
lust still impurity.  
stains permanent.  
remorse not yet remote.

centrality of commerce.  
incunabula of intercourse.

her unextinguished lambency  
awaits the modal passageways  
and paraphrases of miles,  
chet, monk, coltrane.

art as absolution.  
the beautiful as afterlife.

our penitential century.

# Mojo in a Box

*Jennifer Long*

My face is too small for my hair. It's the humidity, I know, but, still, I look in the mirror and see hair. Even my eyes get lost in it. No eyes, really at all, just hair. I look for my eyes in my face but can't find them. And my mouth is so small. Thin lips. I keep them closed and they shrink into my face, disappear. My lips have no color, and that probably does not help to keep my mouth from disappearing. I can't wear lipstick. I lost the only lipstick I had and it really was the wrong color anyway. Red, maybe with too much blue. Too much color on no lips. This weird colorful space in the middle of my face, just hair and red lines where my mouth should be.

My hair's got no color, either; goes along with the mouth. I know, its got color, everything does: the light hits it and because of genes and the atmosphere and God and destiny it absorbs some wavelengths and reflects others. What a beautiful machine it all is. And what it reflects is mousy brown. Sort of like the mouse my friend fed her snake this morning, the same color. I laugh at this fact as I remember this, sitting on the bed where it died, looking into the mirror above the bureau.

Mojo, she calls him. A ball python. He sits in his cage all day, all night, all curled up to be just two inches tall off the narrow bottom. Lots of wasted space, this cage that is about the size of a small bedroom with cathedral-high ceilings. Snakes can't crawl in that space between the bottom and the top, only the human eye can traverse that wide expanse of useless cage.

He was so hungry. She hadn't fed him for three weeks since she was out of town. And all he could think about, or feel, was that hunger, because what else are you going to do in a cage for three weeks. It's just white noise, nothingness in your mind, if you don't have a cerebral cortex. If all your brain can do is maintain its bodily systems, and hunger is the only one that really matters, that feels painful and lasts longer than being without air, then wouldn't it be so miserable to be hungry? Poor Mojo.

I can see being kept in a cage forever if you had food and water and heat and nothing to think about. Nothing's not that bad, I'd imagine. My fish seems happy, and he is in two gallons of chemically enhanced fish water back home. He always comes to the side to see me when I walk in. To say hi, I think. I want to kiss him hello, his little bulldog frown. His fins like crepe myrtle flowers, and how he waves them to stay afloat. I stare at him, mostly because I want him to know I love him and he is not forgotten. I try to do it at least five minutes every day. But hell, maybe he swims to the edge of the bowl to fight me, an intruder, since he's a Siamese fighting fish. Who knows, it's all anthropomorphism, anyway. He would surely have a heart attack if I scooped him up for a kiss. All these animals that smile, feel happy, miss you. I would like to think he would want to say hello, or mooch, since I am the one who feeds him. His name means "pretty" in Japanese. Kirei. All blue and green with red streaks, long fins.

So anyway, she takes out this snake, out of his cage. She puts him in another one, a plastic box with no top, saying that if he gets used to feeding in his cage, hell strike at anything that comes into it, thinking everything's going to be food. She asks me if I want to watch. I could watch. It's just nature. I sit really close to the plastic box. Mojo's this littlish tube of cool leather twisted inside it. I'm so brave. She takes the mouse out of the pet store's cardboard box which looks like a Chinese food take-out box. She holds him up by his tail, his limbs stretching towards some possible ground. It turns out that the mouse is too big for Mojo to swallow. She said "a large mouse" but they had given her a small rat, stuck him in this box from the box of rats that they keep in the back room. She drops him back into the Chinese food take-out box. Mojo starts crawling, unraveling, getting antsy. He's hungry; he can probably smell this rat. She tries to pick Mojo up again to put him back into the glass cage so we can go back to the pet store, but he won't let her touch him. He wants food. So she asks me if I'll take her car and do the exchange. I leave as Mojo reaches out of the plastic box, reaching with his whole body; Nicole watching him nervously, not even faking bravery.

I get to the pet store after grinding her clutch all over the place. Not like I don't know how to drive a clutch; I have one in my car back home. Just a new car to drive. I forgot to let up the emergency brake. I make the trade all suave and cool: teenage boys buying feeder goldfish looking at me.

“Yeah, I’d like to get some food for my python,” I say to the guy behind the counter. And quietly, “he needs something smaller than what we had just bought... here’s the receipt.” The mouse is real quiet, sitting in the take-out box on the passenger seat. I put my hand on it to steady it when we go around the curves, keeping the music down low so it won’t disturb tiny, fragile eardrums. This time the mouse is too small, Nicole says as she meets me outside. Maybe not enough for another three weeks until she comes back to Statesboro to feed Mojo.

But it will have to do. I walk through her house holding the box out in front of me and wishing my hands wouldn’t reflect the jarring steps my feet take. Trying to glide: even, steady steps while my rigid arms float. Wouldn’t that mouse be inside that box, bracing itself against every jolt, listening and smelling, trying to sense something? Trying to grip its tiny skeletal nails into the cardboard. We finally get back to her bedroom, this little procession that we are, and I sit down again on the bed next to the plastic box. Mojo crawls anxiously on her bed. He smells everything, I think. Nicole scoops him up in the middle of his weird one-muscle body and places him back in the feeding box. She picks the mouse up by the tail and drops him in. From the height of three mice lengths. I think that is a bit cruel so my mouth cringes, tightening. I hear the little rodent hit the bottom, see it brace itself against the shock of falling, automatically but pointlessly, and Mojo snaps around it, his mouth around its head, the mouse squeezed almost out of sight under snake. This tube of snake like a spring, as instantaneous as a brain moving a finger. He’s all one thing, one movement: one bone, a backbone. Nicole said before that the best way to kill a snake is to hold it by the tail and snap it like a bullwhip. Then everything inside it comes out its mouth.

Mojo tightens his hold a few times as the mouse goes through a few struggles, beginning unconsciousness as it dies. Only a tuft of brown sticks out of the snake. The rest of the mouse is invisible except for the lump in the leather that is Mojo. No bites, nothing missing. And eventually all the acids in the snake belly will break him down, smaller and smaller.

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**It’s just white noise,  
nothingness in your  
mind, if you don’t  
have a cerebral  
cortex.**

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## *Catfish McDaris*

In another week, Slick and I were to be baptized, at the Hilltop Calvary Southern Baptist Church. It was located on the only hill in a little eastern New Mexican town, that was more Texas than New Mexico.

Slick and I had been raising mice to feed our boa constrictor and tank full of piranhas. We were both a few months away from being teenagers. Our voices were squeaking from falsetto to growl. Figuring we would only be sinners for seven more days, we decided to raise a little hell.

We poked holes in the lid of a shoebox, without stabbing any of the tiny pink eyed rodents. Sliding onto the back pew floor, we set up our slingshot artillery battery.

Launching three mice at a time, we created havoc in the congregation, a regular bedlam of chaos. One lucky mouse went down between the breasts of a well built lady, she did the hoochiecoo and knocked the toupee off a short fellow with her left boob. Slick's brother snatched up the rug and trimmed it down into an Adolf Hitler mustache and was goosestepping down the aisle of the pandemonium filled church. An unlucky mouse landed on the preacher's large bible, he slammed it shut in fury, making a holy mouse sandwich.

Kids were yelling, women screaming, sleeping men were lurching up out of monotony. Ladies leaped upon the pews dancing and pulling at their hair. Beating at the flying mice with their purses, missing and hitting crying children.

I saw my mother and Slick's looking around suspiciously. My sister was grinning. My dad stomped a couple of mice with his Tony Lama's, put on his Stetson and went back to sleep. The preacher seemed to be growing horns and a tail, smoke billowed from his nostrils and ears, as he watched his flock scatter. Hell, he hadn't even passed the collection basket and most of the people were out the door.

Six more days of sinning. Then we'd be dunked in the holy tank of God. Tomorrow might be piranhas in the teacher's toilets.

We're ideal men and I have my first pubic hair and Slick doesn't.

# The Watchman

**B.Z. Niditch**

I had not seen Reid since the eighties when he was a student of Kant, became a lawyer in the firm of Wotila & Kafka, and had married the daughter of the Connecticut State Senator, Vinnie Minicam.

We ran into each other on a rainy Saturday in July in a Boston mall. I had not recognized him because he had changed. Gone was the beard, the commitment to any moral imperative, truth, justice – only the way of his American success story.

Instead, Reid appeared androgynous, autonomous, and asked me in no uncertain terms to be anonymous after this meeting.

I was ready to oblige him, when he started to nervously laugh. We walked into the Four Leaf Clover Saloon and ordered beers, and I knew he expected me to commiserate. I put my hand on his shoulder, which he promptly removed.

“We both were searching, Reid.”

“I found out I was miserably suited for the bar, except this kind. I had a miserable marriage to Nancy whose father promised me a vague future appointment to the Supreme Court, so happy was he to see her married. She couldn’t have children because of her ‘wildness,’ as he put it. As if that mattered to me.”

“What mattered?”

“I thought it was the working class virtues, you know, something absent from the suburbs. I had once joined a progressive lawyers’ guild.”

“Was it Nancy that turned you away?”

“For a bright TV anchorwoman to join that gnostic cult and believe she spoke to Enoch and aliens to give away half her fortune...”

Reid orders another beer. His face seemed so much thinner, no longer ruddy and full. He looked down with large grey eyes. He was wearing typical yuppie gear.

“It’s always money, isn’t it, Reid?”

“No, it was worse than that... Enoch told her in his church that she too was an alien...a descendant of a lost type of Amazon warrior who were the golden gladiator men of their time.”

“Oh, come on.”

“I’m serious. And she started to work out in the gym and developed her muscles, took steroids, to the point...now hold on... she tried to convince me she was a man in another life, before the Flood...”

“This is antediluvian, Reid.”

“And she is now wanting to go public as a drag king.”

“Not Nancy the Sunday School girl...” I said, banging the pub table.

“Her dad pays me a salary just to watch her...and she never sleeps... And she blames me for the marriage break-up because I’m not an esoteric, erotic gnostic like her. I’m just passé.”

“Isn’t she in therapy?”

“It won’t help her. Bipolar.”

I put down my beer.

“So its useless to talk to her? I know she liked me. She dated me before you.”

“Everything seems dated, even meeting you today. But all the hairy situations, right about now, at seven tonight, she is going to be interviewed on ‘Thirty-Six Hours’ by Dr. Larry Flowers.”

“You’re kidding me...the mother of talk shows...interviewing Nancy...”

“She’s in New York now. Look up and live.”

I pick my head up, glance at channel four, and see Nancy in a space helmet telling Dr. Flowers of her landing in a space ship near the Yale campus. Reid puts his head down.

“You never know.”

He signals for me to leave the bar alone. I walk out in the rain; the heavens never seemed emptier. It’s even hard to concentrate driving home.

# Excerpt From a Letter Never Sent

*Richard William Pearce*

“...A few days ago I entered a discussion about the existence or nonexistence of God with another student at my college. (No. ‘Entered’ isn’t completely accurate. He pulled me into it.) He was a little older than I am, about twenty-four, twenty-five. He claimed to be a devoted Christian, a believer in souls and heaven. I, as you know, am an atheist. His argument, spilling forth at such a sloppy, rapid rate that I knew he’d been waiting forever to present it to anyone who’d listen, was worse than weak, it was pathetic. I tore him apart and almost felt sorry for him while I did it. My knowledge of the Bible was superior. My knowledge of the history of Christianity was superior. And I used this knowledge (along with my more recently and much more expensively acquired erudition in psychology, sociology, and the physical sciences) to blow him ‘absolutely’ out of the water. At the beginning of the discussion he had been smug and self-assured. He went away looking confused...”

“That night I was feeling restless and went for a walk. I ended up at the corner of Darby Road and Ardmore Avenue, staring up at St. George’s Episcopal Church, an edifice very familiar to me: It is the church in whose choir my friend Parker and I had sung together. It is the church in whose reception hall he and I (in our extreme youth) had angered the adults many times by putting pinholes in the bottoms of the punch cups. It is the church in whose stairwells we had raced up and down; the church on whose lawn we had wrestled and played; the church through whose magnificent stained-glass windows the sky had poured its light upon our faces and hymnbooks every Sunday for ten – no, more than that – a dozen years. It is the church where his funeral was held... I sat down upon the cool stone step of the church’s front entrance; rested my head against the massive wooden doors; watched the cars pass by; saw the headlights shrink in the distance. Tiny specks of fading illumination. Moribund fireflies that, one after another, were swallowed up by a darkness like some black bloated ubiquitous toad. I sat there and thought of Parker, thought of my grandparents, thought of your mother, and of my father. And

all I wanted

was to believe

that I had come away from that argument

the one who was

wrong.”

# The Coat

*Jane E. Polzin*

Mostly she wandered. Then she sat at the counters and smoked. And smoked. She drank her coffee with plenty of sugar to get the full effect.

"I'm the nervervous type," Sasha would say, talking loudly whenever she spoke, as if the tendency to tap her fingers and feet needed the explanation.

It was almost autumn and flies kept her company at the counter. And sometimes James would, too, with his huge, unhealthy belly pressing up against the counter and his big black crack showing from behind. He drank cup after cup, talking to no one in particular and swearing softly to himself.

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**Now it was  
marred,  
black burn holes  
over her  
heart.**

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After she left Aunt Jessie's Grill, the oldest restaurant in town and a firetrap at that, it began to rain. A soft sort of rain. The kind that's like a mist almost. Sasha wore a long, heavy camel wool coat. She had bought it during better times. It had cigarette burns on it right over her heart. Sasha put her butts out right over her heart. Then she'd put them in her black leather purse that had a gold chain shoulder strap. Another sign of better times.

"I only have 97 cents," she pleaded with Buddy when she arrived at his Breakfast Hut.

"Sorry, can't help you," he replied.

Knowing very well she needed three cents more, she left for the bus depot just a few blocks away. She knew somebody would give her some change. If she couldn't come up with the cash, she could get a smoke for free and sell it for a dime or a nickel at least.

"No! And don't ever ask me again!" said the first woman she approached. But another woman, who you could tell felt like she made some large charitable contribution to society itself, gave her a quarter.

"Let me see your change," Buddy's wife said back at the Breakfast Hut. Sasha held out a trembling hand as her coffee was being poured. "Fill it full," she encouraged.

She liked Buddy's sugar best – in those large glass containers with the little flippy silver lids. You could get more sugar that way than with those annoying white packets.

Some people in a corner booth laughed loudly.

"It's not polite to laugh at someone," Sasha announced.

"It's not polite," she continued. The waitress interrupted – "They're not laughing at you, Sasha," she said, trying to change the topic before things got hot.

Sasha thought about the people in the corner booth. If she had been at Jessie's, the people would have been laughing at James. The waitress would tell him, "Time to move on, James," when he downed his TCL - Three Cup Limit. Sasha rarely got the boot like James and Sam and occasional others. Her attention span was usually short. She would drink her limit and leave.

Sasha lived in a boarding house that had once been the home of a wealthy family. She lived on the third floor with three other women who shared a kitchen and bath.

"That's our one-assed kitchen," one of the other ladies told her when she moved in. Sasha was discouraged from using it, though, since she had almost started a fire once when she was

cooking; she had left the kitchen to have a smoke in the hallway. Also, she didn't like that Girl Scout thing where you're supposed to leave whatever it is you're leaving in better condition than you found it.

Sasha's room had a bed, a dresser, a desk and a wardrobe. Above the desk was a calendar from the year before with a picture of a woman wearing a fancy felt hat with roses on it.

The landlady, who occupied the first floor, cleaned the rooms once a week and gave her boarders clean sheets and light blue blankets with burn holes in them.

The bath was down the hall. It had one of those old-fashioned tubs, the kind with the little feet. The floor had tiny marble tiles – some were missing – and there was a round brass plate covering a hole in the middle of the floor. Above the sink was a mirror with little flowers etched along its edges.

Sasha walked the long walk home in the rain. She climbed the stairs and went to her room, left unlocked. She carefully took off her coat and hung it on a hanger on the back of her bedroom door. She walked over to the window and lit a cigarette. Looking out the window, she heard the noise from the busy street below and watched the reflection of an empty sky in the mirrored windows of the office building across the avenue.

Sasha thought about the two men in her life. She was a graduate of a prestigious Midwestern university where she met Hal, who had left her. Another classmate, her friend Andre, had taken his life. Sasha returned to the dunes where they had last spent time together. She had written "Andre" in the sand with her finger and watched as the waves gently washed the word away.

She turned from the window and looked at the camel coat on the back of the door. She had worn the coat that day at the dunes. Now it was marred, black burn holes over her heart.

She searched her purse and pockets for change for tomorrow.

# The University

*Jane E. Polzin*

There was a knock at the door. It was the cops. Somebody tipped them off. They put the handcuffs on her wrists and took her to the squad car. She had never been in one before. There were no door handles in the back seat. There was no way out.

Building "A" Ward Four. The keys clicked in the lock and the door slammed shut behind them. The police led her to a tiny pocket of a room where a social worker was seated behind a battered metal desk. He asked her if she knew where she was and why she was there. She could find no answers in her head or in her heart. She just looked down, holding out her scarred arms so the cop could remove the pinching cuffs from her reddened wrists.

"The doctor ordered some medication for you," he said. Within minutes a nurse arrived to give her a shot. The police remained "to hold you down, if necessary," a voice warned. She started to shiver and cry at the same time. The cops were not needed. She'd been given a shot in the ass many times before. Then the police tied her to a bed in the hallway "for observation."

Things were blurry for awhile. She did not know how long. Finally she awoke from the fuzzy effects of the shot, and a nurse released the restraints.

When she got up she walked to the wired window. There were people lurking around outside all hunched and smoking against the backdrop of many tired red brick buildings. It was winter, but there was no snow.

The first patient she met bounded toward her.

"Hi, my name's Jack," he said in a friendly voice. "Got any money or cigarettes?"

She was clenched with fear. The hospital had a heavy reputation. It was dangerous. Criminal, even. The last stop for hard core mental patients. They called it the university because of its education. Education in survival. Survival of the unfit.

At first she spent hours crouched in a corner on the grainy grey tile floor of the small day room.

Occasionally she'd venture to the large day room to "kiss the wall" - light a cigarette at the wall lighter. Matches or regular lighters were not allowed. Somebody could torch the place.

She could earn a meagre living lighting cigarettes. People would give small change for lighting a day's worth of smokes for them. They were afraid to get up because there could be a fight over their chair.

Then there were the pacers and there were the sitters. She found it was safer to pace. If you were walking, there could be no fights over who was sitting where. There were the usual battles over cigarette butts and eyeglasses, along with other barter items including slippers, toothpaste and watches. Plus you never knew when somebody was going to "go off." On one visiting day in the dismal cafeteria, a diminutive patient "lost it" and six guards came to carry him away for the customary shot. The visitors drew in their breath in horror. It was a matter of course for the patients.

Most patients were hauntingly thin. Three wards ate together and that's where she met the pirate guy. He wore an eye patch, a gold hoop earring and a blue bandanna. He taught her how to trade food. You would hold up an orange, for example, and say, "an orange for milk," or "dessert for a sandwich." This went on all over the cafeteria, like at the frenzied stock exchange.

One day the doctor stopped her in the hallway.

"Do you know why you're here?" he asked, not waiting for an answer. "You put a gun to your head."

Things began to come together. She was brought to the hospital sometime after New Year's. She remembered drinking champagne from an old peanut butter jar. And she thought about her roach-filled, one room apartment, with song lyrics written on the walls.

She tried to explain it to the doctor about the voices. How they came from outside her head. People put thoughts inside her head, too. She wanted to die. She thought everybody did.

"You're not getting better," he concluded, turning away.

The weather started getting better, Finally she was given a grounds pass. She had heard other patients talking about how you could buy a joint or how you could leave the grounds. One patient told her that if you left and got caught, you would be treated better upon your return.

After she left the ward, she walked right past the smokers to the parking lot. There were signs that said, "Take Your Keys and Lock Your Car," and "Don't Pick Up Hitchhikers." She slipped through an open place in the fence near some bushes. The train station was nearby and she used the money she earned lighting cigarettes to buy her ticket. After the trip there was a 13 block walk to her apartment. She felt a secret sense of excitement. She had escaped.

She opened her fridge to find the milk curdled, but some champagne remained. She took a measuring cup out of the sink and filled it up. She took a drink to taste her new found freedom.

There was a knock at the door.

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**They called it  
university because  
of its education.  
Education in  
survival. Survival of  
the unfit.**

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# The Little Rascals and the Gates of Hercules

*Paul D. Shiplett*

"We have to learn to read!" - Porky

My ten year old brother  
woke from a bad dream  
where he was sleeping on the floor  
in our living room  
and while only half awake  
with his eyes glazed over  
he began to urinate openly  
unto the carpet in front of us  
and he looked directly at me  
as he stood in that soil  
and he said  
"I'm dead."

My Aunt Flash said convincingly  
though my mother said otherwise  
that my great grandmother  
was a half-Cherokee medicine woman  
back in the hills of Kentucky,  
(Aunt Flash and mother  
had different fathers  
and were often prone  
to disagreement),  
I have a picture that I found  
of her and a bushel of children  
with her husband perched on a throne  
in the middle of them all  
though the royal seat is only a chair  
beaten by wear and constant use  
lacking naturally  
any sort of jewels  
but rather  
the scars and nicks of terrible poverty,  
they were from Appalachia  
before it became the place  
of international controversy.

And the ties that bind were thin  
since members of the same family  
fought and died on both sides  
in the war between the Blue and the Gray,  
and our name was represented  
in the register of soldiers who marched  
under George Armstrong Custer  
when on at least one occasion  
he murdered old Native American  
men  
unarmed women  
and innocent children  
hoping it has been said  
by various historians  
for a vacancy

in the White House,  
and if Attila the Hun  
was the scourge of God  
then Nero was  
a used contraceptive,  
and my father screamed  
all the way back  
in 1967  
that he was the worst man  
in the world  
but I was going to be good  
if it killed me,  
he's old now  
and he mostly sits and sleeps  
in a chair designed  
to dignify the elderly.

John Gotti  
on the other hand  
of the Black Hand  
said that maybe Jesus  
deserved to be whacked  
and so in retribution  
the Government chained him  
in a maximum security cell  
for the remainder  
of his natural life,  
and when I fell in love  
with Laura  
I was finally able to dream again  
but the cosmos was lined up  
for stormy weather  
and the gal and I just couldn't  
put it together.

The day Rosie Mason was killed  
by a blast to the face  
from a neighbor's shotgun  
I was loading garbage on the truck  
on a penal work detail  
where men were killing each other  
with out of wedlock encounters  
that made some want to die  
of shame,  
and for 12 years  
George Bush senior  
was the head of the C.I.A.  
making him in my opinion  
the highest paid hit man

in the civilized world,  
and men did evil  
in the sight of God  
or some such creature  
like my 8th grade gym teacher  
who beat me up one day  
though he really wasn't beating me  
when he slammed my head  
into the weight machine  
he just hated the fact  
that I was young  
and he wanted to know  
if my blood was a different color  
than his,  
and that year  
Lyndon Baines Johnson  
under orders and direction  
from the Pentagon  
with a little help from their friends  
in Rome  
successfully accomplished  
the least bloody coup  
in world history  
by taking over a whole nation  
from a bush in the park.

Legend has it  
that George Washington  
died of syphilis,  
and having offspring  
with a maid of color  
we might call  
Jeffersongate  
and my mother told me  
when I was a child  
and her only friend  
that she felt because of marriage  
and children born to a Catholic  
she had wasted her life,  
I always largely felt  
that I was to blame  
since I was the first lock  
opened in the family,  
the eldest boy child  
and a punching bag  
for anyone subjected  
to critical strife,  
and a Vietcong whore  
on an intelligence mission  
gathering information  
asked me if I was a cherry-boy  
or did I want to party  
since it looked like I had  
a fist full of dollars  
and a few dollars more  
was all I would need

to be a man,  
I knew almost immediately  
I would leave her bedside  
broke and malnourished  
crazy for milk and sugar  
for all of my days  
however it came  
and so I went looking  
for someone to kill.

On my birthday one year  
when I was in grammar school  
a friend brought a present  
nicely wrapped in colored paper  
to my school classroom  
to give to me  
as a project sort of  
from them all,  
I opened it hurriedly  
with delicious expectation  
only to find  
a cheap pine board  
about the size  
of a box of Wheaties  
and as the sculptors curved  
the bust being formed  
I learned that you need not seek  
humility  
for it will always find you  
in a house that cruelty built,  
and Susan E. Barrett said  
the next time it was her turn  
to do the spanking  
because I hit her too hard  
when we met to play  
in a rooming house  
on the Kennebec River  
by a mental hospital  
in Vacationland  
later in life.

A long-haired flower child  
at a coffee shop in Portland  
told his friends not to talk to me  
or give me any drugs  
because he said that  
I was one of those creeps  
that killed the babies  
in Vietnam,  
rejection is the primary pill  
in a universal pharmacy  
that once it is ingested  
it forces the mind to need

an escape from reality  
if in fact reality is real  
or purchased widely  
at the general store,  
and an F.B.I. Agent  
said to my first wife  
that he was sorry to inform her  
that her husband had confessed  
to bank robbery  
and that was just the first page,  
it became apparent  
that if you swim downstream  
you might find an ancient mariner  
searching for a big fish,  
like the tenured employee  
at the Veterans Administration  
that took me off the grounds  
of the psychiatric hospital  
straight to her lake house  
and a mirrored waterbed  
where she drained me completely  
of every last ounce  
or protein and vitamin C  
and then she asked me,  
“look – I’m really in debt  
would you be my pimp  
for some of the money men  
here in town  
and provide protection.”

Somewhere I heard  
the sound of distant thunder  
and I remembered  
I was the hunter  
who never came home  
from the enigmatic hill  
“but I saw the Devil  
on the shores of Tripoli  
and he wore a Globe and Anchor  
just the same as you and me  
with a guidebook in his pocket  
and a hash mark on his sleeve  
and bottle of beer  
in each hand.”

*For My Aunt Flash, who when I was almost 50 years  
of age suggested that I should straighten out my life.*

# Sally Bowden-Schaible

*Paul D. Shiplett*

Laws are an ineptitude  
for the street fighter  
since they mostly don't apply  
when everyone else  
it seems to him or her  
makes up the rules  
so he took a dive  
that night at the Garden  
on a one way ride  
to Palookaville  
not terribly concerned  
who laid down  
in the middle of the tracks  
for the love of flesh  
until age came to visit  
and the loneliness  
ate the heart of a bull  
for strength and vitality  
at the ghost dance.

Young girls look at me  
from behind the registers  
and pass over items  
paid for with cash  
and they smile with pander  
knowing by an early age  
they hold the ticket  
to the things men seek  
but they won't come  
to the altar of things  
without proof of a prize  
and a huge purse  
because they've been trained  
almost from infancy  
to lay down for gold  
if in fact it is  
and present enough  
to bite down hard  
proving it authentic.

It's winter time  
on a snow covered road  
stretched along the beach  
in New England  
where even the pigeons  
are contenders  
punching their way through  
a harsh cold  
that rips the tan  
from summer legs,  
and darkness comes  
hours earlier

than it did during weather  
when I forgot  
sooner or later  
the universe would close up  
all the doors to light  
and a hiding place for scars  
would have to be found  
in a soft lotion  
until spring.

A library in the woods  
far removed from the malls  
was built with stones  
by men that couldn't read  
masterfully placed  
one on top of another  
until the edifice  
was a marvelous tower  
of learning and lust,  
and I see the librarian  
dressed in tweed  
carrying pearls  
to give to me in trade  
for taking her home  
at some melancholy juncture  
but she's a witch  
and needs to hurt me  
with a curse  
chanting old axioms  
that vaguely sound familiar  
while I peel off my clothes  
and throw them off the bed  
and into the fire  
where the black pot boils  
our collective mood  
that we will drink  
to forget  
all the trains I missed  
when instead I flew  
and then pulled out a pistol  
to steal the contents  
of as many dime bags  
full of junk  
that a tough guy and a lush  
could inject and still  
list the names of those  
I have not forgiven  
in these poems in time.

I have to go now

because I realized  
sitting at the computer desk  
I was only day-dreaming  
but given enough reason  
I could stay and listen  
to the articles of faith  
in the latest wave  
or just feel the warmth  
when some educated fossil  
wanted a champion  
no matter how many times  
I could have won and didn't  
when I was pushed  
by all of my dead friends  
into the ring  
for a shot at the title  
that had been fixed.

*For my Aunt Eileen who said when I was about 7 years old, "You'll never be the man your father was." And for the Catholic Priest who heard my confessions when I was a boy. He would later serve time in prison for the molestation of male children.*



# Free Fall

*Philip A. Waterhouse*

The old rummy  
we visited from week  
to bi-month in Christian  
charity, of course,  
where he lived summers  
under the bridge downstream  
from a polluting New  
England town tannery,  
once spun a tale kind of  
rung up the curtain  
for some of us that knowing  
about pros trolling  
city streets and squares,  
rouge butt boys and  
candy mouth girls,  
impatient mommies and  
daddies up against  
alley walls, horny  
conventioners  
forming happy lines  
outside square one cribs  
in the rain, highrise  
madames keeping book  
on charter club cash cows  
and new johns janes,  
the immortal gender  
impartial x y z's  
money honey time  
one size fits all  
was all, he said,  
we ever needed to know,  
any you kids want  
a snort?

Angels stand on the rivers edge,  
watching men drown.  
Gathering in clouds over fields,  
they darken the sun as though in eclipse,  
so that rye rots and turns mad.  
Sailors stare up at them in rigging  
and masts as lightning  
marks painted skies and seas  
while various vessels sink.  
One looks down upon the corpse  
of a monstrous infant cradled  
in arms and lap of grieving mother.  
Batlike, another hangs upside down  
from cathedral rafters,  
hands folded, face rigid as plaster.  
Never having been seen,  
they congregate into existence,  
arms joining shoulders, heads to necks,  
legs to trunks, minus genitals,  
until filled with semblance of flesh  
by visions flooding land and air  
with great goose wings flapping  
or folded, angels who are  
nowhere seem everywhere.

# Gas Station Attendant

*Don Winter*

His station is cluttered with grief:  
a picture of his dead wife on the wall.  
For supper he drinks whiskey.  
He sits all night  
like an overturned flower pot.  
His breath is sour as an orchard  
after the first frost.  
Bruises under his skin are like shapes  
frozen in the St. Joseph River,  
leaves caught in flight,  
or maybe the hand of a man reaching  
from the dark water for help.

# The Immigrants

*Gerald Zipper*

Little men shivering on cold corners  
despised creatures  
hover like darting birds  
waiting for handful of creased dollars  
for hoisting and hauling  
gouging niches in the fat sneering country  
men with round faces horned hands coal-button eyes  
sweet smiles  
baffling smiles  
hinting at obscure mountain legends  
cheeks aflame from high air of Andes  
my father's father  
dapper man hauling bewildered wife and five runny children  
rode the splintery seats of wind-hemorrhaged railway car  
he was blind  
adrift in a vast sightless desolation  
bundles tied with blankets hanging pots and pans  
Bucharest to Hamburg  
seasick passenger vomit on the bellowing sea  
my father the boy pushed and shoved a huge beer barrel  
buying first night's sleep behind a boisterous bar  
crammed in rooms of bawling lower East Side  
mothers sons daughters stitchers boarders  
eating bathing at the pinched kitchen sinks  
children swarming under balloon bundles  
shish kebob kielbasa mamaliga  
flavoring the stifling air  
neighbors on brash Brooklyn streets  
speaking their snatches of Hungary Poland Russia Roumania  
children's children squeezing themselves in the narrow spaces  
filling slots for businessmen doctors lawyers councilmen  
moving to the fine houses fancy lawns big cars dot coms  
despising the coarse slight immigrants  
who make their houses so fine and their lawns so fancy.

# wordmakers

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.*

**GARY BECK** *Theater director in New York. His translations and works have been extensively produced off-Broadway.*

**ALAN CATLIN** *Barmaster in Schenectady, NY. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. "Killer Cocktails" is available from Four-Sep, as well as it's fine successor "Hair of the Dog That Bit Me."*

**STEPAN CHAPMAN** *Lives in Cottonwood, Arizona and his illustrations have appeared all over the small press. He also writes short fiction, appearing in The Baffler, Analog Science Fiction, and The Comics Journal.*

**CHRISTOPHER CUNNINGHAM** *Poet out of College Park, Georgia. Check out his new chap "screaming in some beauty" from Lockout Press. E-mail him for info at thelastpoet@hotmail.com.*

**CHRIS D'ERRICO** *Living in Las Vegas writing for the release and the attitude.*

**LOUIS S. FABER** *Poet from Fairport, New York with appearances in numerous journals including Exquisite Corpse and Rattle.*

**ED GALING** *The famed Poet Laureate of Hatboro has appeared all over the small press with a dozen chaps under his belt, including "Tales of South Philly" from Four-Sep Publications.*

**RON GIBSON, JR.** *Lives and writes in Kent, Washington.*

**CHRISTOPHER GRASSO** *New poet from Oaklyn, New Jersey with a day-job as a children's photographer.*

**JOHN GREY** *An Australian living in New England, earning a living in computers while writing stuff in his spare time.*

**DAN JOHNSON** *Associate editor of The Futurist magazine in Bethesda, Maryland, and involved in publishing and literature since the '70s.*

**GERALD LOCKLIN** *Long time, far-reaching presence, with an abundance of publishing credits. Teaches at CSU-Long Beach and has lectured on Hemingway in the land of cigars: Cuba. His books are available on popular bookstore websites.*

**JENNIFER LONG** *Writer from Denver, Colorado.*

**CATFISH McDARIS** *Influenced by Hendrix, van Gogh, and Jose Cuervo. Also seen in the pages of "Prying" from Four-Sep Publications.*

**B.Z. NIDITCH** *The artistic director of "The Original Theatre" with international publishing credits. Several of his plays and prose have appeared here.*

**RICHARD PEARCE** *Lives in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, published often and active in his local scene.*

**JANE POLZIN** *Photographer and writer from Kenosha, Wisconsin with a Smith Corona typer that belongs in the Smithsonian.*

**PHILIP D. SHIPLETT** *Poet from Standish, Maine.*

**PHILIP A. WATERHOUSE** *Spent the last few years cruising, just looking, for respectable manual labor while living in Sonoma, California.*

**HOWARD WINN** *Widely published and accredited, and living in Poughkeepsie, New York.*

**DON WINTER** *Calls Niles, Michigan home, drawing from times spent flipping burgers, buffing floors, and investing in real estate.*

**GERALD ZIPPER** *Widely published poet and playwright who lives in Manhattan.*

## killer cocktails

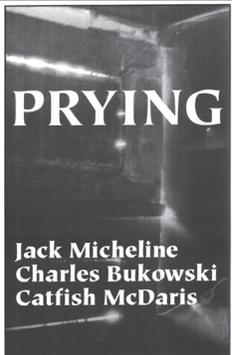
ALAN CATLIN



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

REVIEWS

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/FS#103.



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

REVIEWS

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



REVIEWS

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/FS#108

REVIEWS



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 multi-color cover/72pp/FS#106

REVIEWS

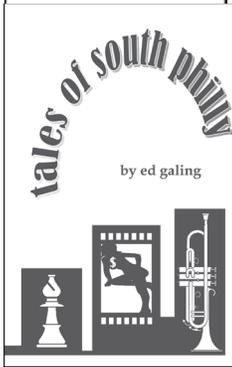
# also available from FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS

Single issues of First Class are \$6ppd.

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 (2 issues - November and May) for a mere \$11. Give it a try.

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

TALES OF SOUTH PHILLY chronicles the sights, sounds, smells and action on the streets and in the homes of a long-since-gone South Philly. Hard living turning out the best people, leaving behind a few and struggling in the crossroads of a city and growing up / \$5ppd/offset slick cover/24# paper/28pp/FS#114



That Bit Me

by Alan Catlin

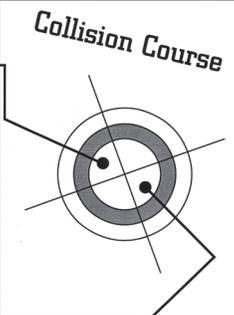
HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME is what you get the morning after indulging in Alan Catlin's earlier release, Killer Cocktails. Once again, plenty of deadly drink recipes that are indicative of the accompanying poetics. Another killer collection that belongs with the pleasure inducing prequel in everyone's bar (or bathroom). Just \$5ppd./high-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp/FS#109

REVIEWS

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# paper/50pp/FS#110

Miles of Highways and Open Roads

poems by Michael L. Newell

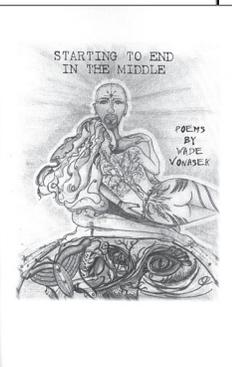


poems by Michael L. Newell

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.

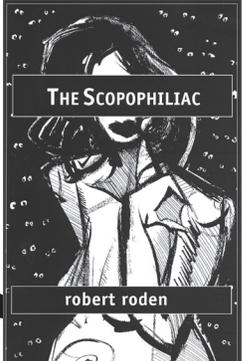
REVIEWS

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



STARTING TO END IN THE MIDDLE

POEMS BY WADE 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 paper/24pp/FC#112

REVIEWS

# 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.

[www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com)

Speaking of technology » » » stay up to date at : [www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com)

[www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com)

Christopher M.

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

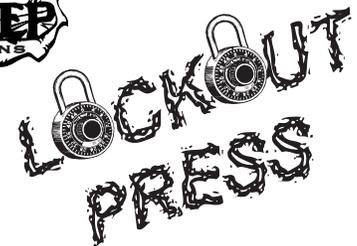
Sickened by the rape of your wallet at the copyshop?  
Feeling locked out of the publishing loop?

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 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.



presents...

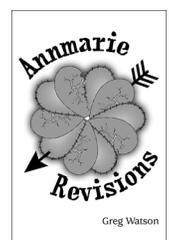
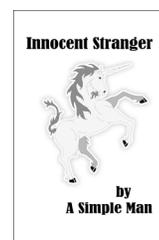


**Sample rates:**

Quantity	Pages	Paper	Price	Each
50	32	Royal Linen	\$156.13	\$3.12
50	36	24# White	143.98	2.88
75	24	Royal Linen	166.28	2.22
100	32	24# White	183.50	1.84
100	36	Royal Linen	227.53	2.28

*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.*

Check out [www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com) for the latest information and details! Just click on "Lockout Press."



# try these

A complete collection of all reviews can be found on the Web site at [www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com).

## LIT-MAGS

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**DRIVERS SIDE AIRBAG:** Comics, short fiction, poetics, killer illustrations and sometimes a dirty picture. Usually around 50pp, letter-half, loaded with edgy, biting, and intelligent, sometimes sardonic pieces. Issue 40 is \$3 and submissions should be sent to pobox 25760, Los Angeles, CA 90025.

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

**THE ICONOCLAST:** A mag loaded with intelligent, strongly crafted poetics, short fiction, art and reviews. A good long, thought-provoking read. Issue #66 out now for just \$3. Send submissions to: 1675 Amazon Road, Mohegan Lake, NY 10547.

**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.

**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 SILT READER:** A crisp, clean quarter-page-sized collection of lean poetics that provide a quick, energetic and entertaining read. Elegantly and precisely produced by Robert Roden and Barton Saunders. Just \$2 to Temporary Vandalism (checks to Robert Roden), pobox 6184, Orange, California 82863.



## CHAPS AND BOOKS

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**SPARE CHANGE by Ed Galing:** A collection of Galing poetics from the pages of a journal, Spare Change, that benefits the homeless in Massachusetts. All of these pieces are killer examples of his work, sometimes sharp and drilling, other times soft, yet brain-thuddingly blunt. Hopeful hopelessness and settling into fate are central themes. This is a cool assemblage that makes you feel like you read the words of an unsung hero. Try sending \$3 to 3435 Mill Road, Hatboro, Pennsylvania 19040.

**M&M's AND OTHER INSIGNIFICANT POEMS by David M. Taylor:** "So what's Life about?/Hell, I don't know." Taylor is wrong in those two lines. He does know, but perhaps will only come to realize it by continuing to create more of the vivid and mood-inducing poetics that are crammed between the cover of this, his first, chapbook. Metaphor and allegory, merged with tight symbolic and descriptive words induce hazy feelings of loneliness, yet a happiness in despair. There is anger on these pages but it is tempered with darkness and evasiveness that lead to conclusions about what life may really be about - living, understanding, growth and, and and .... Send \$5 to HB Press, 409 Sheridan 5-J, Cape Girardeau, Missouri 63703.

**SPIN CYCLE by Les Wade:** Intelligent without highbrow pretention, Wade's distaste for the untrue, the unjust and the greedy reveal themselves in subtle, though pinpoint accurate descriptions and narrative in this lengthy collection. Rather than blabbing on about bad businessmen and powergrabbing politicians, he crisply writes in *A Brief Lesson in Political Economy*: there's no mystery here/just extraction of value/and men who wear suits for a living/intent on their mission/in their pale fingers to crush the living labor/into palatable abstractions and digestible categories/unequal exchange/their life's blood our death. Send a mere \$4 to Upside Down Press, 2902 N. Calvert Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218.

**SCAR LIT by Mark Edward Marston:** Sparing unnecessary words, Marston gets to the point quickly, poignantly and powerfully on numerous topics in his poetics that stand so strongly alone, yet taken together, in one heady, vicious read, make for a series of climactic jabs and foot-stomps that leave the reader excited that so much provoking thought has raged into the mind in such a violently pleasant way. In *Release*, we must contemplate a prisoner: He will ride out on the white school bus/The kind the kids ride in to school/These seats have belts and restraints/Our prisoners are safer than our children. There is no reason I can think of to not send \$6 to Pariah Press, 604 Hawthorne Ave. East, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.

**ART & LIFE by Gerald Locklin / FOUR JAZZ WOMEN by Locklin with SHOOTING THE BREEZE by Mark Weber:** *Art & Life* is a brief collection of Locklin's astute observations of art: paintings and life-style. Unpretentious as

'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. A complete collection of all reviews can be found on the Web site at [www.four-sep.com](http://www.four-sep.com).