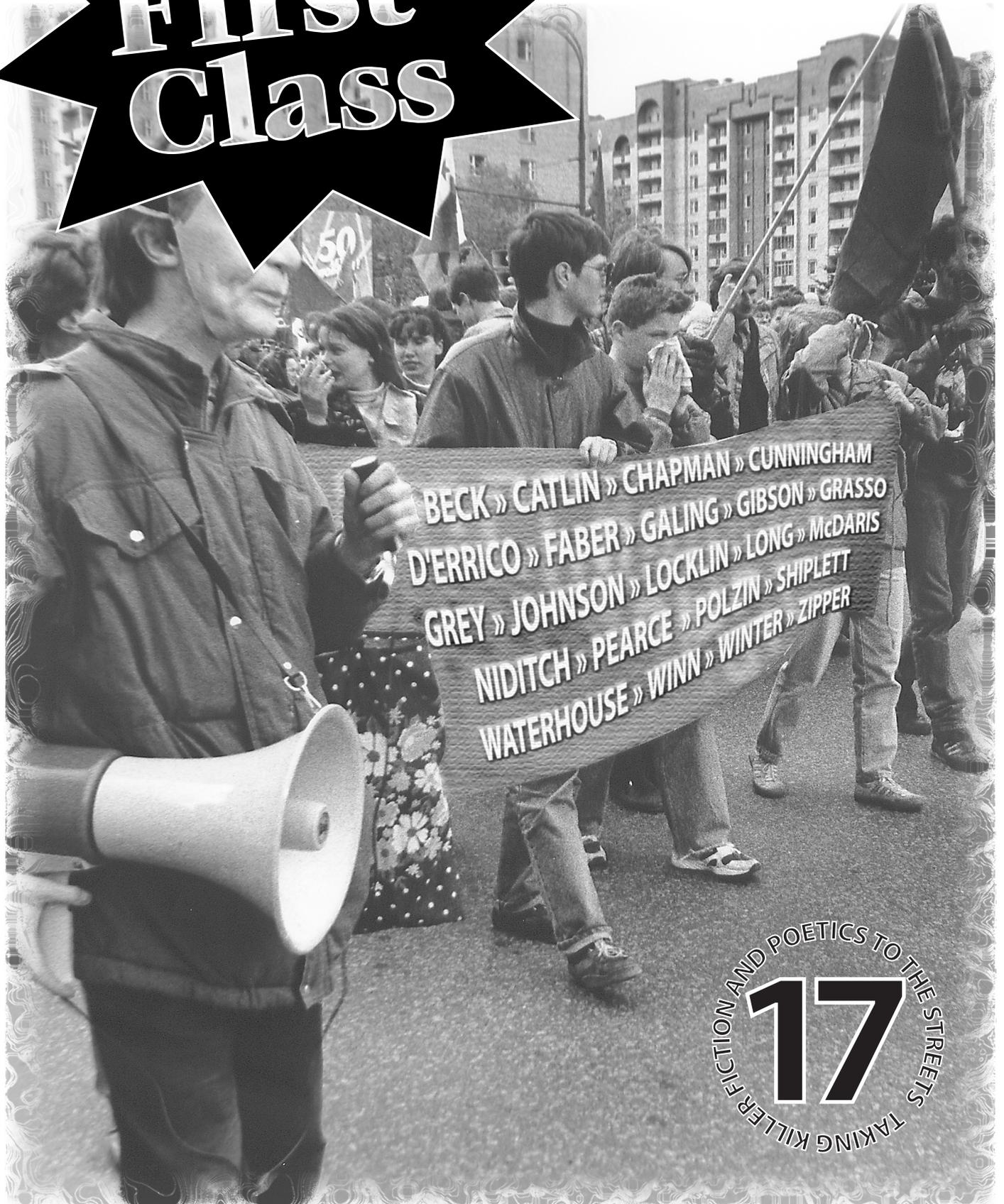


ISSUE SEVENTEEN » II of III.2001
SIX BUCKS

First Class



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TAKING KILLER FICTION AND POETICS TO THE STREETS
17



**ISSUE
SEVENTEEN**

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NOTICE!

**DUE TO TYPEFACES EVOLVING, THIS DIGITAL VERSIONS OF FIRST
CLASS HAS A DIFFERENT APPEARANCE THAN THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT
AND DESIGN, AS TYPEFACES HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH SOMEWHAT
SIMILAR FONTS. SO, IF YOU WANT AN AUTHENTIC ORIGINAL,**

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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) 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,
imaginin 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.

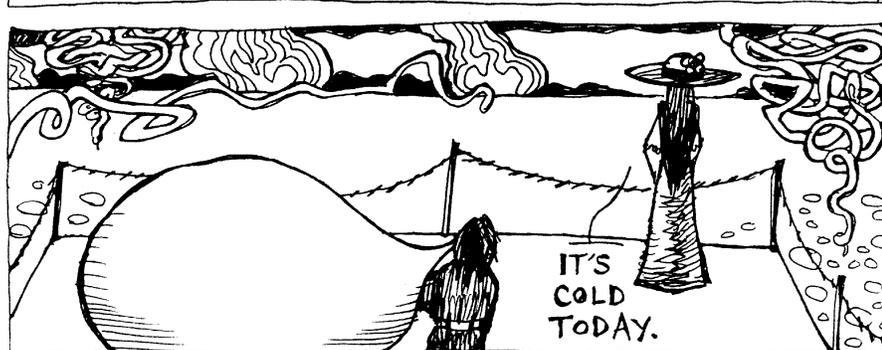
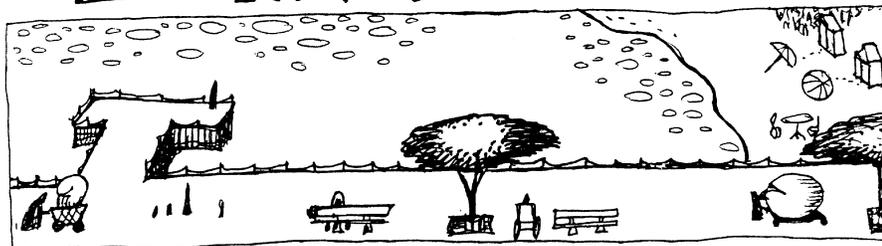
I flip through the remote awhile before halfheartedly watching the lesbian relationship between Xena and her little poet mend. But I don't have enough time to worry if I'm just another A.D.D. addled Gen-X'er that hasn't read Douglas Coupland, when the power blinks off I imagine a huge map, the Western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

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.*

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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

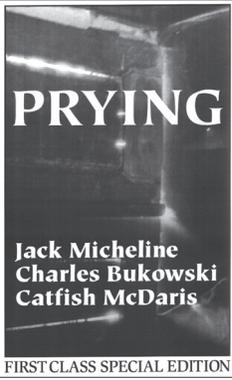
ALAN CATLIN



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

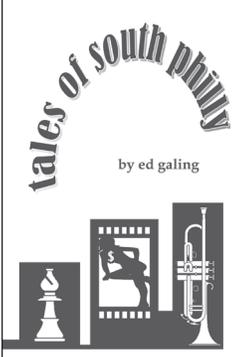
REVIEWS

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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



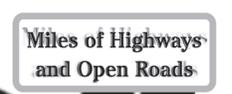
That Bit Me

by Alan Catlin

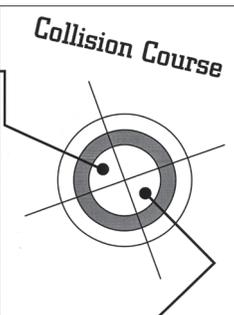
HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME is what you get the morning after indulging in Alan Catlin's earlier release, Killer Cocktails. Once again, plenty of deadly drink recipes that are indicative of the accompanying poetics. Another killer collection that belongs with the pleasure inducing prequel in everyone's 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



poems by Michael L. Newell

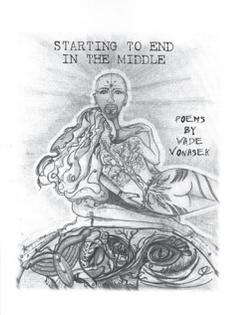


poems by Michael L. Newell

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

REVIEWS



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.

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Speaking of technology » » » stay up to date at : www.four-sep.com

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Christopher M.

see below » [NOW IN EFFECT] « see below

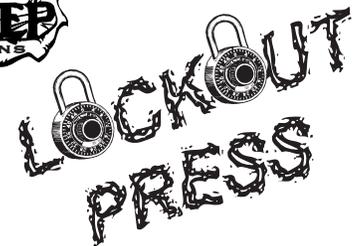
Sickened by the rape of your wallet at the copyshop?
Feeling locked out of the publishing loop?

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...

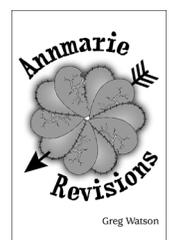
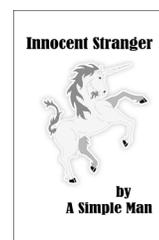


Sample rates:

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 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.

LIT-MAGS

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

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.