

First Class

the tone the issue
will be at
10

	ABC	DEF	
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GHI	JKL	MNO	
CHESNUT DOYLE FABER	HEMINWAY HUFFSTICKLER KNIGHT	LUNDE MAGLIOCCO MILLER	
PRS	TUV	WXY	
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*	WILSON WINANS M.	□	

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TEN**

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IMAGES

🎨 COVER DESIGN, PHOTO PAGE 25 by *Christopher M.*

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Perjury and Penance

JOHN BENNETT

There've been trying times and toxic times and time-bomb times, quirky quivers in the sagging flesh, failing fingers on an age-spot hand, trembling blindly down the ridges of the wart-infested face of doom; fiendish times, frenzied times – the stiletto handshake, the fey-smile back stab, joshing for position in a better world to come, not too far ahead now, just around the bend on the far side of commercial break.

Queens humping horses, a seventy-year-old Marquis de Sade fucking a fish monger's daughter, a president getting blow jobs in an oval office, a country in an uproar of what it thinks is indignation – lack-lust imaginations chained and sodomized in a short attention span.

Perjury and penance. America ready to shoot herself in the head because her president doesn't need Viagra to achieve erection. Hypocrisy slurping the hot cunt of stupid. Take a walk on the wild side, America. Sidle up to some hot Cuban pussy. Slide it in and out. Tell me it doesn't feel good, say it doesn't feel right as rain, swear it under oath.

Washington and Ben Franklin both had filthy mouths. Jefferson fucked his slaves. We all know about the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, Billie-Jean King and Elton John, Tammy Baker and a random Catholic priest or two, the Princess Di, as American as apple pie, the bulimic girl who transcended life itself.

Take a look around you America, home of the free and depraved, at your prisons, your pharmacies, your covert operations, your stock-market scams, your yellow ribbons and your yellow wars, your garter-belt judges and your secret-service heroes, your cartoon face in the mirror.

Every child is Moses in a basket made of reeds. We bulldoze them by the millions to make room for urban sprawl. Fly me to the moon, the new national anthem. There's no turning back. We're off to make a new beginning. Off to Mars on our bicycle built for two, off to where no man has gone before, off to build a better world. All men are created equal, some more so than others.

Mr. President, is this your cum stain on Miss Lewinsky's dress? Mr. President, did you suck her tits? Mr. President, did you wear her tie the day she spilled the beans? Mr. President, did you dress in drag and let her sit on your face? Mr. President, will you resign and write a book for an undisclosed sum? Show up on the Jerry Springer Show to get your face punched by some fag from Cleveland? Mr. President, Harold Stern is waiting in the Blue Room. Shame and fortune are waiting in the wings. Mr. President, you're the talk of the town.

Our town. Two kids sitting on a ledge, a boy and a girl with white holes for eyes, untouched by anything, kicking their feet in a world where the clocks have stopped ticking, dreaming the impossible dream, waiting for good things to happen.

The Troll Near the River

SUSANNE R. BOWERS

wanted to be more than a troll,
had gotten tired of living
his life under a bridge,
staying mostly out of sight,
so he studied the great books
of medicine and studied and
studied until he became a
wizard, and all of the
village came to him for
help with their pain and
illness and paid him money,
goats, fish, and even baby
lambs until he grew fat
and lazy with a large farm
and an aquarium, and,
believing he knew all the
answers to everything,
he grew arrogant as well
as fat and strutted through
the cobblestone streets
in the evenings, touching
the children on their
heads and dining in the
best cafes, drinking
wine. Once, he went to
an opera in a neighboring
village. He was proud.
Soon, a shy, young girl
went to the troll for help
with a problem in her
brain, and, being lonely,
became attached to him as
a father as well as a
wizard, and for years
she saw him almost every
day, until, with his
remedies and her new trust,
she got up the courage to
ask to see and touch one
of his goats. The wizard
raged! He came apart.
Happy being her god, he
was frightened by her
bravery and curiosity
and, feeling threatened,
refused to speak to her
anymore. She begged and
cried and tried to reason,
and even stamped her feet,

but he stood firmly on his
newly sodded ground and
stared at her in silence.
She began to hate the wizard,
his arrogance and cruelty,
but she was still attached.
Finally, half-crazy, she
STOLE the goat, late at
night when the wizard was
asleep, and took it away,
with her anger, to another
land. When he awoke, the
wizard roared so loud, he
scared the people of the
village, who, seeing
his dark side, stopped
coming to him for help.
He pretended not to care,
and pretended not to
care, until, eventually,
he hardened and turned
to stone. The girl
returned with the goat,
found the stone, and
threw it under the
bridge, out of sight,
near the river.

The Reinheitsgebot

SEAN BRENDAN-BROWN

The garden gate bangs methodically under the churning
anvils of cumulus, lightning sucker-punches the elms,
the old loon in the duck pond cries tiddle-skirk!

as the anorexic 30-something (or is it bulimia nervosa?
one disorder means nervous loss of appetite,
the other, hunger of an ox) spy lobs her half-consumed

Lucky Strike onto a lily pad then a stone to sink it.
She smooths her skirt, tilts her fedora, extracts a photo
from her paisley vest – why am I watching this movie?

My Deutsche is shaky; I remember that Reinheitsgebot
means the purity laws German master-brewers enacted
(& continue to uphold) in 1516 but why call a film

about a blond Jewish bombshell and her socialist professor/
lover (a dandy enamored of Nazi uniform but not combat)...
ah, I get it now, I get it – barley malt, hops, water – purity

in Reich as well as beer – no Jews for the fatherland, not even
beautiful blondes! I'm positioned on the sofa at an angle
where the never-read Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia

blocks the subtitles – I test my foreign language skills (terrible)
or perhaps I translated correctly and the script is terrible,
for the professor just kissed the blond and she murmured

“a sea-eagle killed Herodotus with a tortoise, no?”
The anorexic, the professor's sister, is a Gestapo captain,
a lesbian who is also in love with the Jewish bombshell:

don't I have anything better to do – of course I do –
why do I continue sprawling here, watching? I don't know,
okay, fast-forward, Berlin falls, cremated Hitler crumbles under

diesel-soaked pallets in the bomb-cratered courtyard, everyone,
it seems, dies but the leggy, buxom blond (her concentration
camp commander also loved her); I think I'll make dinner now.

The Poor (a requiem)

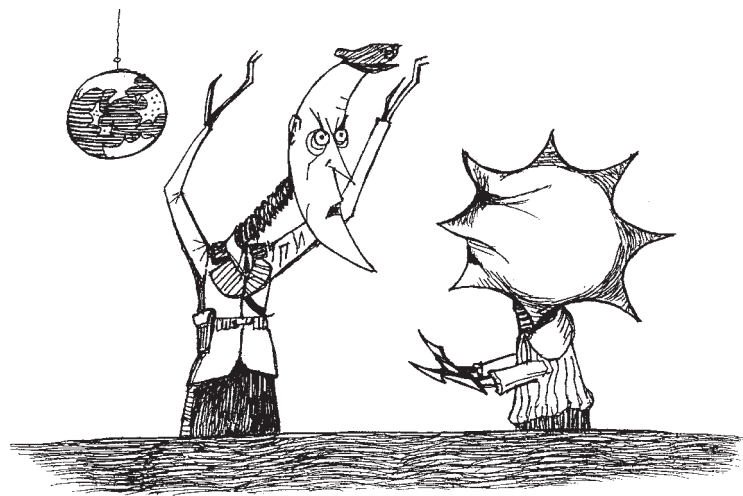
JOHN BUSH

I was heading home after work
thinking about the sharp ache on the jawbone
the cold Budweiser would make,
the great crescendoed moment of satisfaction
and relief
when my tongue becomes deluged with the bitterness of beer.
I already felt the tickle of sweat start to wander on my scalp;
there was no refuge from this heat
from this blue swelling sky on fire and
there was just enough heat in the air to make the lungs tight.
The traffic groaned through the vapor in small paces,
my direction hazed in the thick fumes of a bumper/bumper.
I glanced into the rear view only
to see my red face, capillaries bulging
ready to burst
at my skin's surface.
I looked burnt, splotchy red.
Then I saw from my peripheral view
a gray pickup coming toward my car.
It swerved left,
then jerked hard back to the right
spraying a high pitch from the Goodyears
hurtling into a washed out gully
hood first
crinkling like aluminum foil,
the glass cracking like lightning.
Then, approximate silence
that was as wide and overwhelming
as the inspissate smoke from the burnt tread.
The tires boldfaced the road.
Everything was nothing except that space.
Then, suddenly, from the cab inside
matted wet hair, red gel-like,
smeared the windshield.
The hair trailed down the glass
like those foaming whips of nylon against the glass
in an automated car wash.
A mother or wife or girlfriend or daughter
staggered out with hands wrapped around her skull
slid into the mud elbow deep,
the faded denim disappearing into the black paste.
She bowed like a mecca.
A wave of time passed in the sticky heat
as we all watched without expression
her back bending upward
her head downward
her hair red tassels
her throat retching guttural sounds.
She dropped plums from her china eyes.
The dim-space of stooped poverty

prayed to or cursed
whatever god she knew
as trails of
time
light
air
passed into each private companion.
A multitude of after work drivers still sat
metallically in their protected tin
with their massive masks.

She is the host to the end of all our days
our murderous ironies,
the red plastic rose in a cemetery
serving her bloody head on a platter—
then the ditch swallowed her
in a gulp with...

A violent horn
closes the beveled scene—
Inside a concrete truck
a broad man with thick, hairy arms,
veins standing out on his throat and head,
winds his fist fitfully,
turning me to my end of
the day,
an autopsy with the skin flayed
the chest open
a cavity seeping black blood,
sticky and slow.
Like a symphony,
the traffic leaned forward
and slid away under the metronome of flame.



ARGUMENT BY STEPAN CHAPMAN

Driving

J.J. CAMPBELL

driving out here in the country
on these old back roads
everyone drives too fast
but as usual
you have a few sunday drivers

and they are always
followed by impatient teens
running late for some
shit job they hate or thinking
about how they would love
to fuck the girl next to them
in history class without
the girlfriend finding out

they always pass the sunday drivers
on blind curves or coming
down these steep hills

and it's always me in the other lane
smoking a cigarette
listening to the radio
watching these fools drive

and it doesn't scare me
when i see them getting closer
i actually hit the gas
wanting to show these kids
what reality is all about

and as they swerve back over
to avoid the inevitable

they look to see me laughing
blowing them a kiss
hoping they have some
clean underwear in the glovebox

for fear really does stink
and it has a tendency
to cling to the body
for extended periods of time

Room

D. CASTLEMAN

Always I wondered. That gift at least hadn't been rescinded, and when controlled was a gift would cause a saint to blush. Always I wondered.

"What is the function of these stolid incurious rats scurrying in their race to the wall? One reason we as a species feel such a revulsion toward rats as a species is because we see in them ourselves as in a glass, and the misrepresentation isn't generous," I pondered for the hundredth time as I traipsed through the metropolis.

I paused. "I am allotted a hundred days maybe, or a thousand days, and I might use them to advantage or I might simply squander them," I pondered.

My gaze traveled throughout the tall buildings checkering the city, as I looked for my perch. The gods had delivered me from my labor of decades, with but small moneys, and now I wanted a lighthouse in the sky, a castle on a cliff. I needed to repair myself, and if the city proved uncongenial I would move to the country. I had a bit of time.

No hotel would do, in the customary sense, for I wished to enable my contemplations to fly free, and I had learned that garrets crab the psyche. I wanted a theatre of the soul, of the psyche. I wanted to build a psalm.

I tried the towering colossi, one by one, and used elevators and stairs to gain the tops. Petty federales chased me off, one by one, as if each summit held the final secret it must not divulge. Some few let me through, and each of those few proved unsuitable. I wanted to see the bridge, the waters and the ships of the city, and I wanted an eyrie.

In one colossus an old Celtic gentleman told me, "Sorry, mister. This ain't no hotel, and it ain't no motel neither. But today being a slowish day I'd be glad to tour you to the top. The view's a beaut, too true."

Of course I was pleased at his affability.

We elevatored toward the top, and we climbed stairs to an old black door hanging an old black padlock. The roof was flat as Kansas, and in one corner was a small glass shack lined inward and outwardly with cheap delaminating shelves. The glass was greenish. A few dry geraniums were in rusty punctured coffee cans on a few of the shelves, trying to be limp but brittle into straw down the tin sides of the cans.

In the view I could see bridges, and the bridge, and in the distance a mountain which was not so very big as mountains go. I could see the sports arena, the cathedral of our century and our capitalism. I could see the ululant colossi strumming by the wind. The red bridges wiggled.

I chatted almost idly with the man, attempting to insinuate some pleasant recognition of my mindfulness, of my kindness, of my deliberateness. From my pocket I hauled my small roll of moneys and I offered it toward him, holding it like a barely scattered fan. I smelled the years of bourbon on his unclean clothes and in his attitude, an attitude of listening denial. His eyes drooled, and his tongue snuck out like an obscenity. He said okay, and he extracted a few of the bills, silently mouthed a deal with his watchers, and he replaced a few of those few bills. "A man's got to eat, don't he? Don't you never tell nobody, cause that'd kill a couple of birds with a rock and we'd both be out on our donkeys."

I pledged my faithfulness.

We dropped down slowly to the streets and he handed me 2 keys, and also the simplest of instructions, and I left.

In the wee hours I returned to the imposing monolith and I unlocked one of those wing-like doors, two of which fronted the street like an opened book. My consciousness was impressionable and for a moment I only watched the doors, which now resembled few things as much as they resembled the graven tablets of Sinai and the tortured hands of Moses.

I had fastened my bicycle to a tree, and now I carried a bag containing my worldly goods, my few remaining books, recordings and a small player, my mandolin and a telescope. "How unencumbered must a hermit be, trudging through the howling wilderness or padding through his cell?" I wondered.

I was lifted toward the top, past the warren of homes and houses, past the hollow of the topmost floors. My second key undid the padlock, and I was on the roof. Almost black was everywhere beneath a littering of star and here above the street lamps, and the cabin had almost an aura. I wondered who else might have wandered through that little home, composing what?

The moon was a defenseless ornament like the tip of a unicorn's horn, caught in a trap it had been programmed not to avoid. I could hear no silence.

My feet crunched the gravel, and I shut the door against the night. Somehow I rejoiced subtly in my height. By going high I had become closer to myself, it appeared at the moment, and perhaps I had come closer to my psalm. From an impossible opacity the medium had been moved toward a clarity, and perhaps it could be reached through.

Idly I trailed my fingers along the panes of my cabin. I felt a switch and idly I flipped it and a bulb appeared in the ceiling.

The old druid, or celt, or whatever he was, had done me well, and I was grateful.

An old cot appeared, with blankets not too moth-eaten and a stained yellowed pillow, and a tiny fridge stood beside a table upon which was a miniature stove with a teapot. A note explained a washroom off the stairs.

I was grateful.

I mused aloud with not even a cat to hear.

Off went the light and a world appeared elsewhere. I could see a fog clutching the city. I could see the canyons and the corridors of the city, and the sea port, and the ships of the city. The colossi resembled the mega-heads of Easter Island, and they resembled Stonehenge. I thought of obelisks primevally patient. I thought of deserts.

"Since my gaze curves as certainly as does the light, if I were clever I could watch the whole show of the world. But I am too much of a mote, the feeblest.

"The mind must change its tune extremely."

I cut it off. "Enough."

Segments of the mirage wiggled at me.

I walked out and stood on the edge of the colossus, watching the city in its lights. "Here is an image finer than any which was orchestrated by Pharaoh. If only I might use it to build one

perfect psalm, fusing what we pretend to believe and what we pretend not to believe.”

So I wished upon a star. Days droned, and nights.

On the cot I lay welcomely in the evenings, which separated my days from my days. Evenings sometimes I wandered down the long elevator hall and visited some small cafe or nightclub, catching bluegrass tunes and the weightier baroque I so loved. Always the modulated voice of one woman lifted acoustically appealed to me longingly.

Mostly in the days I read through my few books, ageless things almost. Sometimes in a foolish humor I browsed a book I had written, though it seemed too much my own cenotaph. Sometimes the voice was not mine, and I wondered who had spoken it and if it had a purpose.

Such thoughts I attributed to residual exhaustion.

One morning I gazed from the rim at those scurrying millions of insignificant dots in the hollows below, hurrying to jobs, hurrying toward robberies and tribulations. “Meaningless bustle,” I murmured, having forfeited years and many years among those lost irrelevant dots. “For each of them these colossi are only so many tombstones, and they believe and they believe in those little rooms below the stones.”

Too certainly I understood that if I returned among the dots I would become a dot once more, lost in the bustle of meaninglessness. Some solution must be forced.

I listened to Johann Sebastian describing his eternal vistas, and he was unable to compete with my vistas of canyons and of corridors of steel and stone and glass in the shadows. Bach became unheroic and the fault was certainly mine.

“If I am only angling to die I must do a better job,” I thought, as I tucked the music away. Grandeur took flight, and I was alone. What is grandeur, I complained. It was no question.

Silence is the louder music, I thought. My books opened and closed but would not speak: the voice went past my shoulder or slid down my face, and closed completely.

“Poetry is only paper,” I mused, clutteringly.

“Shakespeare is not comprehensive as he is alleged. He had no clue what a child is, and his women are only eunuchs in a tantrum. When I ask him to cleave the mortal veil he cannot. What use to bother?”

“Sam Johnson thought he had answers, but he was only a male bitch whining because he was constipated and his eye hurt, and because he wore silly uncomfortable shoes.

“What use to bother?”

One evening while the sirens rolled through the city I contemplated my psalm, distantly suspecting the inutility of contemplations. Something spoke, “The unassailably ineffable is incontemplable,” and I laughed. This too was residual exhaustion, reaction.

A cat strolled by, his tail held like a peacock’s tail, his two delicately cunning ends measuring the magnets in the winds. Idly my fingers walked down to pet him. I did not wonder at his arrival since cats are omnipotent in small things and sometimes they fly when we are not looking.

And I was in reverie. Brown study.

I watched the bridge. I could feel the lights hum, and I did not bother to comment.

Hell Wasn't Built In a Day

ALAN CATLIN

Genesis

Construction begins at birth and it takes a lifetime of hard work.

And dedication.

A lifetime of righteous self abuse, screaming in the back alleys of never closing nightclubs, sweatshops, penny ante crap game parlors, ten dollar whorehouses and crack dens.

All the niceties of home.

War All the Time

Even in summer
they maintained
a perpetual flame,
a restive vigil
for the lost patrols,
crouched low on
their straining
haunches almost
feral, the wavering
glow of the windswept
flames illuminating
their dark, hardened
eyes, their long
untrimmed beards
streaked with grey,
sun bleached lips
hard as callous
immune to stray
roach end embers,
almost impervious
to physical pains
thoroughly dug in
here, by the last
redoubt, the rusted
through, blackened
oil drum; Camp Desolation
Home

The War follows you wherever you go.

An external combustion machine.

Trip flares, claymore mines, a light show of high explosives and figmentary body counts that get more up close and personal every day.

Even the outdoor cookouts in all the backyards of foreign neighborhoods you used to call home take on an ominous overtone of napalm and death; burning flesh, monster bong hits, and Miller High Life Beers in tall see-through long neck bottles, glass coffins from the rivers of oblivion.

The River Lethe, Burning in Fire, Drowning in Flame

Their coming is veiled,
aided by shadows,
half-toned lights,
shades drawn over
blood shot eyes worn
non-stop driving
black topped roads,
unnumbered highways,
amphetamine hopped,
torqued up tighter
than tight, slipping
transmissions, motion
detectors set to seize
and desist anything
that stands between
here and their assigned
objective, focused as
a soundless heat seeking
missile, homing in,
cresting the treeline,
unseen against the waning
glare of the setting sun.

Hell's pilgrim take on life blind side.

A roundhouse, sucker punch that knocks him from here to next Tuesday.

The wounds may seem superficial but inside, inside the wounds never heal.

The blackened eyes never recover their initial luster or the ability to see without a caul of blood.

Everything becomes a vision of the starkest reality, a grotesque as vivid as a street fight with broken bottles for weapons, trash can lids for shields, an audience of wharf rats, some human, some not.

The Outsiders

Their BEYOND THE PALE
t shirts suggested some
kind of an On the Road
movie of outcasts and losers
not quite over the hill
Soldiers of Fortune
on some mission of mercenaries
on which this was an
unscheduled pit stop,
an air-conditioned oasis
offering twenty one flavored
taps and a fully stocked
back shelf of every fire
water brand needed to prime
even the most arid of dry
wells. If having the most
dried skin, healed over blisters
and the palest of bleached hair

made him the leader of the back,
his demeanor ordering confirmed it,
“Just make us Five Cuervo Prairie
Fires heavy on the Tabasco
and five pint backers of whatever
is your coldest of draft beers–
we’re in training and we haven’t
got all afternoon to wait.”
I was tempted to ask, “In training
for what?” but decided there
were things I was better off
not knowing – the backs of their
t-shirts said it all anyway–
SAHARA 150-RUN FOR FUN
ROAD WORK UNTIL YOU DROP

The road work never ends.

The pavement may buckle, the concrete become a liquid like lava that blisters the souls of your feet but the race must go on.

The training is all about fundamentals: pain, suffering and a cold drink that never completely quenches an overwhelming thirst.

Drinking slows the process for awhile, all the nights on the edge either screaming out or about to scream out or lying beside the roads that lead further along the path to nowhere in ditches watching the clouds cover the clouds with an extinguishing fist like some kind of drunken, avenging angelgod.

It doesn’t matter how long or how hard you drink, the pain is the real thing, the surprise you’ve been waiting for all your life that really isn’t a surprise.

That’s why in No Exit they cut off your eyelids: you can’t afford to sleep, to nod off and miss something.

Cold Turkey

The night sweats and with it comes
dreams beyond the body’s tolerance
for pain, stronger than craving,
more real than every long night
spent locked inside, locked against
each inevitable dread whiskey bar,
the shots lined up like locked chambers
in a roulette player’s gun, waiting
to be drunk, the half filled beer
pint glass waiting to be topped,
who needs a chaser when the scene
is set like this? but the chaser
is waiting, dressed in black with
a flaming death head on his shoulders,
screaming banshee lyrics to some
dead rock group, greatest hits
performances, stage lit by fires that
burn down every corner of the fast,
encroaching night, what dream could
be more real than this? the next one,

and the one after that and the next one
after that until the phrase; horror show
seems so lame there needs to be a new
vocabulary invented to describe whatever
this is you are going through.

But there is no end to anything, not when the body is still driven by needs it can never
cast off.

Needs that make as much sense as feeding the host to keep the parasite alive and the
parasite comes in quart bottles, pint glasses, magnums, liters, nebaucfuckingnezzars of
pain no liquid measure yet invented can completely contain.

Nothing can assuage the pain. Nothing.

Describing it has nothing to do with Art, Beauty or Truth.

All the writing does is validate the experience and embody the formless creature that can
never be escaped from.

All it does is open the reservoir, the flood gate control to change the levels of what can
never be completely dammed up.

On the waters of oblivion all the supplicants are equal and all the endings are the same.

Bend down by the flaming river and cup your hands to accept the astringent waters.

The final drink that brings with it the illusion of forgetfulness.

All the Assholes in the World and Mine

They are the Future,
soon to be refugees
from a brave new fourth
world of plastic drug
transactions and heavy
mind altering soporifics,
speed basing wildmen
recently released from
user-friendly torture
machines, not completely
dry from the after exercise
shower of the permanent
sweats of the body trying
to expel all the noxious
chemicals inside, their eyes
wide, opaque, watching
the satellite transmissions
on the back tv, sound
turned way down almost
a whispered noise like
static only more distressed,
almost purposeful but not
quite, no one speaking
as they drink, automatons
on their night out, gears
stripped, their arm reflexes
are the last to go.

Homage to a G-Man (A Collage)

GLEN CHESNUT

A piece of old wallpaper with flowers
once pink but now almost brown.
At the top of the wallpaper
bold black letters spell out G-MAN.
Glued to the paper, down near the bottom,
a cutout of J. Edgar Hoover
in a double-breasted suit, hair slicked back,
sighting down the barrel of a tommy gun.
Above the cutout, written with brown ink
in a childish script, a rhymed couplet.
The couplet says:
*G-Man dandy in his prime
taking aim at America's crime.*
A brown arrow points to Hoover.

To the right another cutout of Hoover.
It runs almost the length of the paper.
Hoover is an old man, and he's dressed
in a white blouse with a brooch at the collar
and a long black dress which goes to his ankles.
The dress, once worn by Gertrude Stein, fits him perfectly.
Over to the side, written with the same brown ink
in the same childish script, another rhymed couplet.
the couplet says:
*G-Man older & wracked by stress
wearing lace panties under his dress.*
A brown arrow points to Hoover.

The Rat

GLEN CHESNUT

The rat is big and gray,
big and fast like a jackrabbit
as it scurries along the concrete wall.
But the man with the big shoes is also fast,
and he runs with the rat, kicking it against the wall.

Chancre Hill, Buenaventura, Colombia.
And the whores come out of the bars
and watch the man with big shoes kick the rat.
But the rat does not go easy.
It leaps, turns flips, bares its teeth
and fights the pounding shoe.
But the man is good.
He has the moves of a soccer player.
And when he finally lands
the winning kick, and the rat lies still,
the whores clap their hands and cheer, Bravo! Bravo!
And the man with the big shoes stands by his kill
with a big smile on his face.

The show over, the whores return to the barrooms
where all the jukeboxes, volumes turned high,
play a different tune
while a skinny mongrel of a dog
sniffs and paws the carcass of the rat.
And down at the docks my ship
is loading coffee beans.



CYCLOPS BY STEPAN CHAPMAN

Thanatopsis, 2000

JAMES DOYLE

“Your little Arthur is thinking of you in heaven today and wagging his tail.”
– remembrance card sent to the owners of deceased pets
in The Loved One by Evelyn Waugh

When I heard that little Arthur had made
it into heaven, I resigned from my church

and started checking the yellow pages under sin.
I had to hurry. I was over seventy and fading.

I didn't want to end up locked into eternity
with that bad dog. Where the alarm each morning

would be claws raking my thighs and fetid
love nips on my ears, nose, lips, and jugular.

So I was willing to become yet another statistic
in the sex and drug epidemic sweeping this nation.

But where exactly does one find it? And would I
need strength training to keep from disappointing

the deviants? Surely any one of them would be
an improvement over Arthur in companionship

and innocence. We all have fantasies. I can't wait
to be wheeled into a brothel, expire at the height

of degradation, and descend to the nether regions
the precise instant Arthur lifts his leg on the Pearly Gates.

Sitting on the Summit of Mt. Everest

JAMES DOYLE

mounds of white papier-mâché
aspiring to mysticism all around me,
a nuclear family of abominable snowmen
playing with themselves individually
and collectively over on the next world-class
peak, a junk yard of faceless
oxygen masks and one incredibly rusted
car chassis stretching from my heels down
to base camp, I can't help contemplating
the great cosmic questions and trying at last
for definitive answers to replace that abstract
philosophical speculation pawned off on us by the ages.

Yes, no, no, absolutely, why not, okay, yes, and yes.

That done, I turn to the next big department,
sex, with the great snow-capped Himalayas
as my partner. Then I snap a few pictures.

Nothing to do now but go down. And isn't
that always the case? (Here you can insert
whatever you want – poetry, Sisyphus, the shopping
network, your last relationship, buffing Grecian
urns – anything and everything all the way up
to life itself, of course, if you're that limitless.)

Well, here we all are again, at the bottom,
trying to think positive thoughts about the equality
of all experience, about savoring each moment for itself.

I go on playing with my toy boat in the bathtub.
I don't hear a voice in my head repeating over and over:
This is not the Titanic and the North Atlantic is our friend.

On the Anniversary of the Composer's

LOUIS S. FABER

On the anniversary of the composer's death
I sit at the table, a cup of tea cradled
between my knees and think of what
it must have been like, sitting in a cramped
apartment in the Village, a mattress on the floor
in the corner, a chipped Formica topped table
threatening to push the old stove out the window
and into the shaftway through which light
fought to enter, to augment the bare bulb
screwed into the ceiling, amid the flaking plaster.
He sat at the table, pencil in hand, its tip
periodically sharpened by the small pocket knife
he kept at hand, and decried the loss of his generation
on a scrap of the paper bag, writing in a cramped script
around patches of grease that seeped
from his Kung Pao chicken, the Lo Mein.
It could have been nothing like Vienna, Wien
in all its glory, the carriages, velvet and satin lined
clattering across the cobbles to the great hall
where he sat, a small man retreating into the box
as the baton was raised, hearing the notes
and testing them against what his mind's ear had heard
as he had carefully inscribed them on neatly penned staves.
He rose unsteadily at the crescendo, walking nervously
onto the stage to bathe in the accolades rising like a wave
from an audience drawn to its feet, drowning the sound
of the inapt note buried deeply in the second movement.
Both are dead now, the composer buried beneath
the ornate marble monument in the shadow of the cathedral
where as a young man he sat at the organ, legs straining
across the pedals, finger dancing as he dreamed the notes
that now pour forth from the speakers on my wall.
The poet, too, is gone, interred beneath the small stone
where pigs once wandered in the distant shadow of the City,
his liver degenerated by countless nights in dingy bars
under neon signs, silent, his words spent, mailed
with recovered stamps to magazines he had never seen.
As I sip my tea, reading the slim volume, I can feel
the bile rising in his throat, see the crumpled cigarette packs
clustering around his feet as, waiting for a word, he arches his
right hand, gripping the pencil, through the air
to the scratched strains of the adored symphony
emanating from the record player perched precariously
on the radiator, and he smiles at what to him was
an inapt note buried deeply within the second movement.

THE MEO (the charcoal-maker's apprentice)

DAVID MASON HEMINWAY

When the boy died, the man
came up the hill not
as he had come up with
heavy steps, a sofa on his back
and then the refrigerator, not
as he had later
come up one windy night
with his radio blaring
or down black-faced
from his carbon igloo,
not even as he had come
with a carved cane of
chestnut for the living
boy, nor as he came by
with the mule calling
at dawn the boy but
now he came up
with his neighbor an old
sere woman all in black
with a folded cloth
draped from her head—Zia Rosa.
He came up the hill to the house
and said: Where is he? Dov'e?
We led him to the living
room where the ashes were
in a small covered box
in the center of the sofa.
He entered
and inside the door
he thudded his knees
to the brick floor—immobile
rooted to stay
while the woman stood, a
night shadow in the door. And
he said aloud Addio
to his last Meo, bowing his head.
Next December he too died
the man Loris, who could, said
the boy, "cut wood like butter". Both
now in the cemetery, the Holy Field
some call it here— maybe going
into Holy Mountains:
the boy's small voice echoing
the words to drive the mule up
the path into the woods: Avanti!
Madonna mia, avanti? Maybe even
sharing food and the boy
bringing water to the blackened
figure resting in his wooden shoes
tired and dry after the work
the charcoal pieces still pinging
like clear crystal glass.

Frontiers

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

She was sitting on the toilet peeing.
He came in, stood watching a moment
then knelt in front of her so he could see.
Then he reached between her legs
and dabbled his fingers in the flow.
She finished and sat watching him.
He studied his fingers a moment
then raised them to his mouth.
His tongue came out and he touched one
finger to it then thrust all his fingers
into his mouth and sucked.
“Why did you do that?” she asked.
“Information,” he said.
“About me?”
“Yes.”
“So now you know how my pee tastes.
So now you know more about me.”
“Yes.”
“What?”
“I don’t know,” he said. “just – more.”

Dolce Vita
Austin, Texas
September 8, 1998



UNTITLED

BY ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

The Brain of Jesse James

ARTHUR WINFIELD KNIGHT

“There is a belief existing
that an autopsy was held
and the brain of Jesse removed
but the coroner declines
to give any information
on the subject.”

-from the *Kansas City Daily Journal*

The doctor who performed
the autopsy
stuffed Jesse's brain
into a bottle
but it escaped in the dark
disguised
as a bowling ball
tapioca pudding
taffy.
It took
a train
a stage
a boat
getting away
on the Chattanooga Choo Choo
Wells Fargo
the Stanley Steamer.
His mother said
she didn't believe a word of it
but his wife claimed
the brain stopped by
to give her a kiss
on its way out of St. Jo.
For awhile the brain hid out
in a cave in Stanton
but moved
to more fashionable quarters
in Excelsior Springs
where it had
mineral water and strawberries
for breakfast every morning
and went on the lecture circuit
playing to packed houses.
It told everyone,
“Crime doesn't pay.”

Word Around Town

DUSTY ERIK LUNDE

Tired of waiting, waiting, WAITING
in line...

Slow, grueling torture, in the check-out line.
Death, by shopping spree – while camping
at the check-out counter. You meet all sorts
it takes all kinds
in this shopping center. Sex fiends in the supermarket
hanging out, waiting around, just browsing.

Sex fiends, talking about my Agnes, in the check-out line.
It isn't her fault, but how would they know, of all people?
She has to earn her keep, for lack of a better term.
So she works for a living, if you can call it that.
She's insured, as it were – though the premiums are too high
or so I've been told. Me, I do what I'm told
if it doesn't cost too much. They say: fuck it
and I do it, if only for free. I mean, why not
shop around, compare prices, and search out bargains
whenever possible? I'm a fucking consumer, after all.
But I never kiss and tell. I'd never mention Agnes out loud
no matter how long I keep waiting in line.
I have my principles, you understand. I got 'em cheap
of course, at half-price discount. It's easy to be noble
and high-minded, if you can afford the fee.
A nominal service charge, that's all that's required
to serve your nation, or service your ideals.
You can't get anything gratis. Human decency, it's priceless
almost semi-precious, and you won't see it handed out
on a street corner or given away; that would deflate its value
as a rare commodity and limited resource. It could jeopardize
economic stability, or threaten financial collapse and ruin.
Act decent and courteous at your own peril. Keep quiet
at your own risk. Either that, or else badmouth Agnes
and call her names, wherever you go. Even though you don't know
anything
about her. Whatever she told you, it isn't true.
All those endearments and sweet nothings, she was paid
to say them. "Money for nothing" amidst Dire Straits.
Expensive nothingness, too: beautifully gift-wrapped
at slight additional cost. (If you want extra, you wait in line
like all the rest. All the others, expecting more.)

Gone Fishin

ERROL MILLER

It was Saturday in Louisiana the Bayou State where e-mail is still a riddle, Milady & I were residing at Rural Mail Stop 1, & we didn't own a dog, just threw out the scraps or gave them to Ms. Lee next door. She was pretty old compared, always workin on her plumbing, speakin in some sort of slow slurred tongues she inherited from her Mama. Anyway, Sasha (Milady) & I woke up bout 8am. We both took a leak & brushed out teeth. Then we were ready for some excitement. So we decided to run (in the car) up to D'Arbonne Lake & do some fishin.

We dug some worms out back of the mobile home where the sewage leaked, put 'em in an empty snuff can, & headed north on Highway 1, through Crossroads where we always got confused. There was a beer joint there, Shorty's Place, that added to the problem. Then we had to slip through Sterlington. They had a couple of wild-Indians there from Broken Bow, Oklahoma, the "Police." They'd give you a ticket just cause your tail light was shinin too bright. Lucky for us it was already daylight.

We got on up to D'Arbonne Lake bout 10. Had to stop & take another leak, of course, get some coffee, sanitary napkins, etc. Then we got down to some serious business. It was summer, as I recall, & the lake was swarming with (no not tourists) mosquitos seeking blood & flies searching for Sunday (Saturday) dinner. We'd brought some baloney sandwiches & pickled pigs feet, but we kept 'em in the lard pail to fool the insects. Finally we got baited up, threw in the lines. Then Milady had to pee again. I said I'd watch her pole if she'd watch mine. (a joke) She just smiled. Then a big fish got on her line. It wasn't a whale or shark, just a quarter-pounder, maybe, a pink perch, all red-faced & suck-lipped from blowin too many bubbles. I pulled that sucker in, threw it in the ol' porcelain slopjar we'd washed out with lake water. (It didn't smell too bad. But it didn't smell too good, either, worse than fish, even.) But it wasn't that bad, considering. And it had a handle on it.

I guess it was quittin time for the fish cause that was the first & last one we caught. A big bad cloud rolled in from Farmerville. It rained like hell, or cats & dogs, as they say in other "stories." We gathered up our "fish" & loaded up the ol' grey Chevette, headed home. It had been a semi-glorious outing. We'd found a half-full (or half-empty) can of beer someone had left behind. And we made it through Sterlington & Crossroads. (We did wave at Shorty in Crossroads who was taking a leak on the West side of his place).

When we got home Milady had to pee, of course. Then she lit up the ol' green gas stove streaked with residue, poured some grease in a boiler, & threw the perch in, head & all. "About that pole of yours," she said, pulling the shades. Later, I could smell that little ol' fish fryin, or burnin...

My Home Town

KENN MITCHELL

wind (NNE) hard off the river
 smelling of sulfur
 - manure plant has documentation
 they are non polluters.

kid in his *Air Jordan's*
 (open game for the less fortunate or
 more powerful) fills out half an application
 leaves empty the parts he can't read
 believing it an invasion of his privacy.

3 in the morning
 asphalt is stained with rain
 & blood. black hooker cries
 for help (or deliverance). the age of reason
 dead. onlookers
 filled with far worse diseases.

the home town team
 rallied late for a miracle finish.
 heroes. champions.
 but fuck that fag at the mission
 handing out needles
 & condoms - though the editor
 didn't put it in quite those terms.



PETER MAGLIOCCO

Out in the Quadrangle Waiting for the Van to Work

MICHAEL L. NEWELL

Grackles fume at cats, stout and strong
the old Uzbek woman chants
her call for milk, mothers
in housecoats and half-opened robes
queue up, children grumble
off to school, mini-skirts high heels
and suits scowl their way
to bus or metro, the neighborhood mafioso leans
on his car and chats with an Uzbek girl
hanging out a fourth story window
hair loose a brush in her hand,
a small black dog marks his territory,
and magpies flash past in a burst of color.

Distant rumble of Europe-bound jet.
No eyes look up. Wind flirts with trees.

Tashkent, Uzbekistan, September 1998



PETERSBURG BY CHRISTOPHER M.

Children of Noah

B.Z. NIDITCH

Linus was born out of wedlock from the Children of Noah. His parents had exchanged merely an egg yolk together in this cult as a sign of brief bliss before they left for other partners. The cult wandered and made its escapes through Ecuador, Mexico and Panama City, the latter where Linus was delivered.

Patti, his mother, became bored with the religious cult. Once an artist and playwright, a child of heroin and worldly habits, had to kick against the pricks to escape one night. She had to sleep with Brother Vaughn for another full year in order to get the keys from the leader of the cult, Joshua, who told each of the group they were from other planets, were born with animal souls, told them which tribe they had migrated from, and that only through the Children of Noah would the new messiah come. That is why each new birth in this cult was so vital.

Patti and little Linus ran away and took a steamer to New England. They had no resources except some cultic literature in their bag which she didn't have the heart to use for evangelism.

They hitched a ride toward Harvard Square, brimming with sons and daughters of the elite or who aspired to be.

Patti was so hungry she crashed the Harvard graduation of the class of 1994 and ate up six servings of poached salmon, caviar and gouda cheese.

A woman strolled up to her.

"Aren't you Fedora Vilament, the feminist poet?"

Embarrassed and desperate, Patti blurts out, "Why, yes."

"I've read all your books, backwards and forwards. My mother was a suffragette."

"How wonderful."

"I'm Ms. Cabot of Cabot, Cabot & Cabot. What do you think of the sole?"

"My soul is with all women."

"I meant the filet, dear..."

"May I try some?"

"Meet Mrs. Togo. She's an ambassador from the former Ivory Coast... It's Ms. Vilament. I recognized her from The New York Journal."

"I heard you speak at the U.N. position papers on the Year of the Woman. Tell me, Ms. Vilament, how do you manage to speak all over the world?"

"I keep my luggage handy."

"Oh, you must meet Dean Rabbit."

"Pleased to meet you."

“This is Fedora Vilament.”

“Oh, I guessed it from the portrait by Johns.”

“Have you met the head of the law school, Dr. Barney? He’s gained so much weight I hardly recognize him. He stood my daughter Melissa Cabot up. Who does he think he is, the son of the editor of Naked Together?”

“You mean to tell me Dr. Barney, the law school dean – that his father is the Mafia head of that pornographic magazine?” flutters Ms. Togo.

“Isn’t it awful, Ms. Vilament? He never even told us he came originally from Lower Sicily. And after he stood up my Melissa at the Grateful Dead concert, he tried to get into my late husband’s law firm and wound up in Mish, Mosh & Mish, who defended the late Liberace.”

“I always thought he was one of us, an alumni from blue bloods.”

“Melissa told me he forged all his papers.”

“I feel sick for the school,” Dean Rabbit looks downcast.

“Oh, Dean Rabbit and Mrs. Vilament, you don’t look well.”

“All the food, Ms. Cabot.”

“I understand, Ms. Vilament, you are on Ms. Lettuce’s diet; I read your article in Encounter. Brilliant. Isn’t it awful what Dr. Barney’s late father did for a living and he never let us know. And yet he tried to date my Melissa. What do you think, Fedora?”

“I hate pornography. It is beyond words. I was raised on the Bible.”

“Ms. Vilament, you are truly a woman of the world.”

“Are you familiar with the Children of Noah, Ms. Cabot?”

“No... Is it an art society?”

“A cult. I’m doing an expose on it.”

“I hate cults. Melissa was in twelve of them, and they are just awful. They used to promise her heaven and heaven knows what else but they tried to get her trust fund. I’d like to contribute ten thousand dollars to you, Ms. Vilament, to fund your research! I always carry a money order with me; never know when it’s needed. Here is my address. When your article is finished, please send me an autographed copy.”

“Will do.”

“Well, I’m off now to meet my Melissa. Oh, no, that Dr. Barney is coming by...that’s him! I can’t tolerate him. Bye all...”

The salmon line is full and Dr. Barney walks around to Patti.

“Hi, honey. You look bewildered...”

“Oh, Dr. Barney, I’ve heard so much about you.”

“I hope it’s all positive, except for my blood tests, if you know what I mean these days.”

He pinches Patti.

“Are you busy tonight?”

“Not really. I’m babysitting.”

“For whom?”

“My child, Linus.”

“What a dear name. Why don’t you come over to my place?”

“But what about Linus?”

“Bring him along. Just wait till I have some eclairs. I adore chocolate eclairs...”

Patti and Dr. Barney go to his Cambridge home.

“What a lovely home, Dr. Barney.”

“It’s a gift from my late father.”

“He must have been special.”

“Yes...he fought for free expression. He would have gone for you. I have a room full of women’s wear and it’s all yours.”

“Really?”

“Some of these fashions are a bit sexy but I never know what you girls will wear and not wear. It’s all up to you.”

“Thanks.”

“I can’t wait for you to get ready. After a big meal, a man needs to go to bed and get big once in a while. You like them big?”

“I do like a big man, like a big car.”

“I have an extra. Would you like to have it?”

“You must like me.”

“You’re gorgeous, darling.”

“Oh, Dr. Barney...”

“Call me Bernie. Would you like to see some of my father’s ‘zines?”

“No, I think I have to rest.”

“But I thought we could stimulate each other’s minds, have a drink, some conversation. Why don’t you sit in this massage chair while I get you a bikini? I go wild with bikinis. I’ll be right back.”

Patti loves the red decor of this room. Every room she looks at has a different color and tone.

“Hi, hon. I can’t wait to sit on top of you, or do you like to be on top?”

“I hardly know you. I’m a child of Noah...”

“Me, too. I can give you a gold cross, a crescent ring, or a star of David. There are so many jewelry boxes around here, I don’t know what to do with them.”

“When did your father give you this house?”

“When I became the head of the law school. He was so proud of me, he and Miss Arkansas both wept at the graduation. I’d like to do the same for your son, Linus, if he could be my son.”

“But I hardly know you... I meet you at a reception and you give me all this...”

“Oh, I know who you are. Word gets around Harvard as quick as a quickie. How about it? I’m needy.”

“I understand. I know what you men are.”

“I know we’re going to be good. My pop knew and he taught me. In the morning we can pick up a marriage license.”

“But it’s so soon, Bernie.”

“I’ve been so lonely. So many girls have walked out on me so I hesitated to pop the question, but when I saw you taking it on with Ms. Cabot and Ms. Togo, I knew you could take it on with anybody around here.”

“Thanks, Bernie.”

“Do you like me?”

“As a Child of Noah, I love all men.”

“My dad would have been proud to have found you, if he hadn’t been knocked off last Christmas.”

“I’m sorry.”

“At least he took care of his only son.”

“God bless you.”

“Can we pretend we are Adam and Eve?”

“Whatever.”

Dream II

IRENE L. PABST

I was living in the same house that I grew up in, but I was as old as I am now. That house on Wildwood with the green aluminum siding. I remember when we got that aluminum siding. I hadn't lived in that house in twelve years. My room was bigger than I remembered. Strange, most things seem to get smaller as you get older.

I heard this really loud, odd sound coming from outside. When I ran out to the porch, I saw a helicopter taking off from our front yard and flying over our house. I yelled at the guy in the passenger seat. He was a big guy with a black mustache and short, black hair. He looked down at me and I waved to him. He waved back and yelled something at me, but I couldn't hear him.

I ran into the front yard and watched them fly away. They never gained much altitude. They even stopped and hovered about five blocks away. I could see the guy with the mustache standing on the runner. I didn't even notice his pack until he jumped. He was holding the canopy in his hands. He threw it up in the air as he jumped. I didn't think they were high enough for parachuting. It was such a sight. The guy was just floating in the sky even though his parachute wasn't open yet. It caught the air, then it blew around a little, then it caught again and opened. This guy was truly crazy.

He was heading back towards my yard where I was standing. I got down near the bushes so I wouldn't be in his way. When he landed I ran over to tell him what I saw and give him a high-five. He slapped my hand and told me that we had to hurry up and get out of the way so the helicopter could land. We both ran to my driveway to watch the helicopter, but it already landed in my neighbor's yard. I told the guy that it was okay. Nobody lived there anymore.

I ran over to tell the pilot that it was okay to park his helicopter there, but he just walked right past me. I didn't even really notice with all the excitement going on. Nothing like this ever happened when I lived here before. I ran back to the parachute guy to tell him about how weird his parachute acted. It didn't seem like he realized how dangerous what he just did was. He was walking back towards the house next door. I ran alongside him spurring out all the details. He told me to save it so the whole group could hear.

There was group of about twenty-five people sitting Indian-style in the yard next door. Strange, I didn't notice them when I was here two minutes ago. The helicopter was gone too. The guy with the mustache told the group leader what I had already told him and asked everyone to listen to the rest of what I had to say. Apparently, I was the only one who saw the jump.

I stood in the middle of the group and started to tell my story. I didn't get one sentence out before the leader interrupted me. I sat down at the edge of the group and listened patiently. When he was finished, I started to stand up again, but this Chinese girl stood up and started talking before I could get anything out again. At least she was courteous enough to apologize for interrupting me. I told her it was no big deal, no one listens to me anyway. When she was finished, she told me to go ahead. I said I'd speak next time instead. "Why?" someone said. "No one's going to listen to you next week either!" Everyone laughed and pointed at me. I got up and walked home.

My mom was in the living room playing with my son's orifices. I went straight to my room—the room that seemed bigger than I remembered. I couldn't remember if my mom played with my orifices when I was a little kid. I listened to them play for a while as I looked around my room. It was huge. I even had my own bathroom. The only piece of furniture that I recognized was that old poster bed that I had when I was a little girl. It was my first bed.

I laid down on it and started to masturbate. My mom knocked on the door and asked if I wanted anything to eat. I said, "No thanks," and got back at it. A few minutes later, she came in my room with a chicken breast. She gave it to me and started looking around my room. "I said I didn't want anything to eat," I told her, but she wasn't listening as usual. She was too busy looking for something in my room. I yelled at her for snooping around, but she still wasn't paying any attention. It was like I wasn't even there.

I took the chicken breast and my pen in my hand. I wrote on the chicken breast:

I told you I didn't want anything to eat.
Stop snooping around my room. Leave me alone.

I handed the plate back to my mom. She took the chicken breast into my bathroom. I listened to her wash it off. She walked out of my room with the chicken breast without even a glance in my direction. I finally found a way to communicate with my mother.

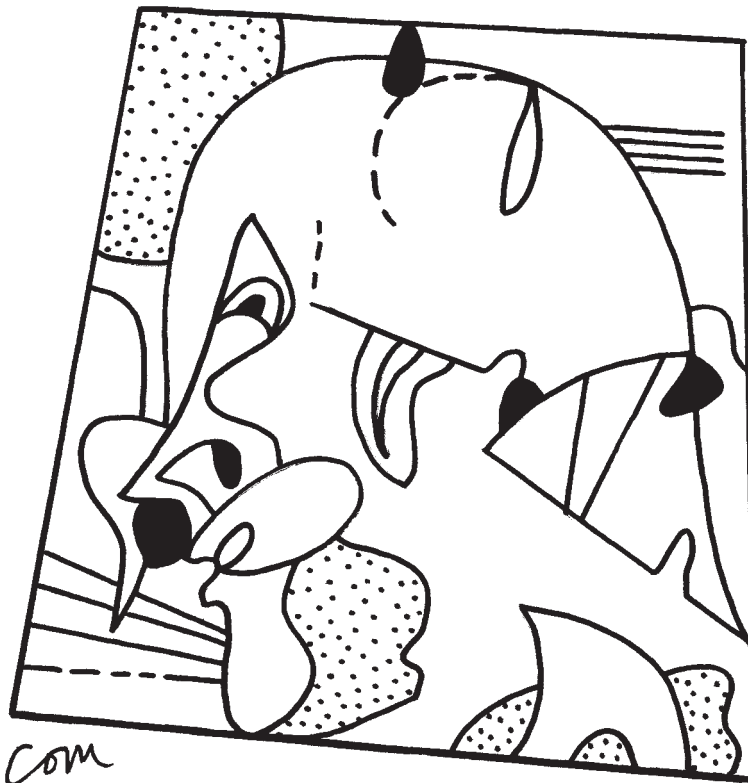


PHOTO BY JOSHUA BODWELL

Lights

WALT PHILLIPS

the guns had ceased
blazing
and everybody lay dead
in the street
except the blind
monkey trainer who
had no use for
mortality
he went on stringing
lights
though
the town had no
electricity
this is all discussed
more thoroughly
in a certain
unwritten history
of domesticated monkeys



*com
po
sition*

WALT PHILLIPS

The Errand

BOB ROLEY

There's a perplexing sense of menace abroad in the streets. You try to read its enigmatic message in the broken bottles in the park, the crushed and discarded syringes in the gutter, the litter swirling around your feet in the first chill breezes of late autumn.

If you could avoid these streets, you would. But you can't. You are on an errand of some urgency. Those you pass appear to share your unease. They glance furtively at you, then look away when you meet their eyes. The clouds seem to lower as dusk approaches. Soon it will rain.

You round a corner and are startled by the sight of an ambulance. It sits at the curb, its rear doors open hungrily. Its flashing lights reflect strobe-like off of the surrounding buildings. Two medics, masked, kneel over a prostrate form, urging it onto a waiting litter. You give them as wide a berth as possible on the narrow sidewalk. The fallen man is ill-clad and unshaven. Instinctively you know he is dead. Propped against the wall nearby is a hand-lettered sign. "Jesus is coming. Are you ready?" Without thinking, you answer under your breath – "no."

Death is ubiquitous on these streets. Some die by the blade, or the bludgeon. Others succumb to one or another of the new diseases, many without name, that seem immune to treatment. It's not unheard of now for bodies to lay for hours awaiting transport. Services are stretched thin and those still living have priority over the dead. Do the souls of the dead also wander these streets, trapped, without transport to the beyond? Is Charon, too, overworked? You are obsessed by these thoughts as you hurry on.

The shop is nondescript – not well marked. If you hadn't been looking for it, it would have barely impinged on your consciousness. For a moment, you pause at the door, strangely reluctant. Then you overcome your foreboding and enter. The room is dimly lit and stretches back into near darkness. A muted bell sounds as the door closes behind you. Merchandise – in truth you can't say what it is – clutters dusty shelves. As your eyes adjust to the gloom, a face materializes behind the counter at the rear of the shop. The face is noncommittal. Neither of you greets the other as you draw near.

Suddenly you're overcome by a sense of futility. You launch into your carefully rehearsed story without prelude or formality, already yearning to escape the closeness of the shop. You drop the name of your mutual friend. You describe your daughter's illness – how all available antibiotics have failed. You tell of the stories you've heard – cures effected by the extract of a rare South American root. Your friend's told you the extract's available here – for a price, of course. You show the shopkeeper your money, entreating him to agree to the exchange. Then you fall silent.

The shopkeeper's expression has not changed since you first met his gaze. Now he merely shakes his head. From this gesture, you know there is no appeal. You pocket your money and turn to leave. At the door, you look back one last time. As you survey his face, you see in his eyes, sadness – compassion. But again, almost imperceptibly, he shakes his head.

On the street, you stand immobilized. Rain has started to fall. Although it's only a soft mist, you sense the coming deluge. In the gutter, two crows fuss over the carcass of a pigeon – poised to inherit the earth.

Handgun Control On Cellelofrates

DAVID A. ROSS

Everyone on the peace-loving planet of Cellelofrates was a writer, an astronaut, a vegetarian, wore Birkenstocks and drank lots of coffee. The citizens were all cloned to be the same sex because they thought God was a sexist. These gentle loving people spent their days writing and drinking coffee in their Birkenstocks.

In last year's open forum with the Council of Writers & Astronauts they abolished all individual names. They felt names created hostile egocentricity because they could tip a person off as to what part of the planet they came from.

This year's forum was far more serious. For the first time in the history of Cellelofrates the people were divided on the issue of gun control. Cellelofrates had no gun laws because there were no guns on the planet and no crime to worry about.

However, one side believed earnestly and morally that the planet must create laws to outlaw all handguns. The other side felt this approach was senseless since there were no guns anyway, nor did they have any crime to contend with.

The debate opened with shouting from the Astronaut side of the council.

"We don't need gun laws because we don't have any guns or crime!" The Writer's side of the Council countered, "That's not the point! We need gun laws so we never have guns or crime!"

In the end, handguns were outlawed. In the schools, children were taught that guns were illegal and were the cause of all crime. But the children asked, "What are guns?" This question sprang forth – another debate about the education of handguns. It was decided that Cellelofrates needed to manufacture firearms to teach the school children about the dangers of guns and crime.

Guns were eventually brought into the schools for the purpose of teaching the students how bad they were. This education wasn't enough for their precocious minds. They wanted to carry guns so they would understand what it feels like to have a gun. The parents and all the adult writers and astronauts agreed with this saying how important feelings are.

The children now wanted to know what it was like to shoot their guns. They began by shooting all the teachers. It was the most fun they ever had. They left school and went to all the coffee shops where the writers were drinking coffee and shot them too. The students were on a roll.

The remaining adults held an emergency meeting about whose fault this situation was. One side said, "See what you've done? If we didn't pass these laws, none of this would have happened."

The other side roared, "Had you writers not introduced this issue, we wouldn't have this problem now!"

A gang of children barged in and said, "No need to debate. Our guns will settle the matter once and for all." The children lived happily ever after.

Death Marriage Fugue

T. KILGORE SPLAKE

“..hearts full of passion, jealousy and hate.”
As Time Goes By

young lad betrayed by sweet moist pussy,
continuous warm spring girlfriend nights, alone,
broad front carseat, slippery fun,

never realizing she will have a baby, sit
home, watch television all day, grow fatter, not
want to fuck anymore,

jealous mean “don’t touch me, don’t ask, i
don’t love you anymore,” angers exploding,

prisoner, deadend, minimum wage daily grind,
like walking millstone circle, 3rd world corners,
old blind mule and orecart of long ago,

always curious why others seem happy, act
sweet and loving to each other, both silently
certain the other “wants me weak,”

weekends awash in numbing alcohol ethers,
blurring the “lets get away from here” dreams,
erasing the “stuck here forever,” terrors,

knowing things need talking over, unable
to find courage, words to suggest needed change,
something different,

arid, tense standoff, truce, occasional talk
of “big buck” schemes, small quickly passing weekly
paychecks, brief joy shopping, spending, continual
pursuit, accumulation of more.

my life as a noir

GEORGE SPARLING

being a noir means i have many components i'll have to enumerate i'm always scared afraid that someone will break my hollow front door down and i'm filled with the guilt my parents poured into my human drinking glass it's as if i'm responsible for the war in the balkans or something i live alone and i am so lonely that i speak to the hundreds of grackles strung out along the telephone wire i'm afraid of of THE OTHER and i've had my share of breakdowns too i call 911 for the ambulance every 6 or 7 months i'm taken to a mental hospital and the doctors can't find anything wrong with me as far as despair goes i think of woody allen's book without feathers when he quotes emily dickinson saying that hope is a thing with feathers my sexual obsession is to have a black woman who is 6' tall with long legs and wearing tight short leather pants to step on my groin with her stiletto heels as far as social and moral corruption go i think of the usa as a gigantic banana republic without the bananas one of my favorite writers is raymond chandler malignant forces manipulate me like i'm a freaky puppet dancing a spastic waltz out of tune and blaring and if a book or movie has a walt disney ending with pretty balloons floating up into the blue-sky atmosphere i wanna puke out my guts in abhorrence i wanna see the universe engulfed in resolutions of doom i feel like that man in the movie detour pulling on the telephone cord from the living room while the other end of the long cord is wrapped around a drunken woman's neck she is in the locked bedroom with the taut cord being pulled the cord is under the crack at the bottom of the door i end up strangling to death this doomed woman and this act also is my own doom because the police pick me up on a lonely stretch of nighttime highway and i go to jail eventually to be killed in the california gas chamber

Staying Attentive

JOHN WILSON

In grade school at an assembly,
we would perch on our rumps on the auditorium
floor and listen, while someone made some sort
of presentation; and I would glance around
all that body of young heads, and find two or three
bobbing conspiratorially with each other, ignoring
the official stuff on stage.

I disapproved such behavior in our
small body politic, controlled by the oligarchy
of principal – always male – and teachers – females usually,
and a few earnest pupils like me.

Much later – light years later – I barely can
summon back those moments enough to work emotion,
for or against. But one thing:
I have come to hate the word “pupil”;
it seems like a synonym for prick.
They let others jerk them on cue.

Those few heads looking askance from whatever
we were supposed to be watching staged for us
should seem healthy to me now.

Instead, they remind me
that in all the cells of my settled body,
even as I speak and you are obliged to listen
(I hope), there may be
some quietly going their separate ways
in small bunches,
and that anarchy will spread.

Chinatown Poem

A.D. WINANS

the old man drools
into his soup
a booger hanging
at the side
of one nostril
a wild look
in his eyes
rags for clothes

the night has no tears
the waitress no patience
the moon is full
a fly does a dance
in his soup

one old man
one bowl of soup
a shooting star
burned out.



PHOTO BY A.D. WINANS

Old Joe

A.D. WINANS

he sleeps in doorways
on park benches
doesn't want to move
not even when prodded
by a cop's night stick
curled up in fetal sleep
memories from vietnam
whirling inside his head
like helicopter blades
the alcohol the drugs
the failed years collected
like locusts flying inside
the cranial guitar playing
all night rhapsodies inside
his head

warrior
troubadour
of pharaoh origins
pale spokesman of lost tribes
masked as homeless transients.

poet
prophet
of beauty

and all its imperfections
ravished by the streets
kissed by angels
left tired withered
like an unattended
kansas grainfield

walking the streets
like a clown out of costume
his face painted upside down.

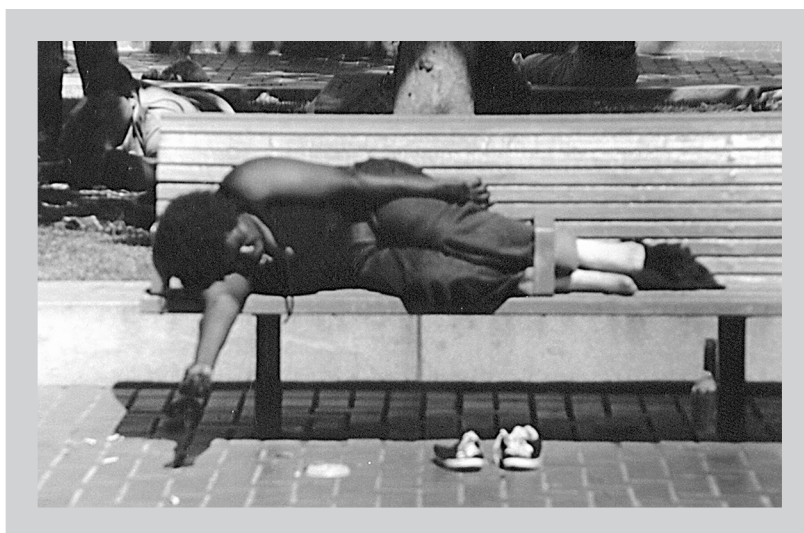
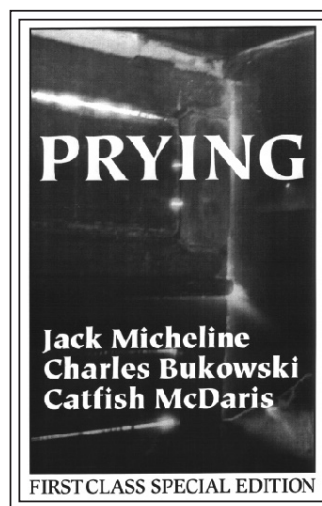
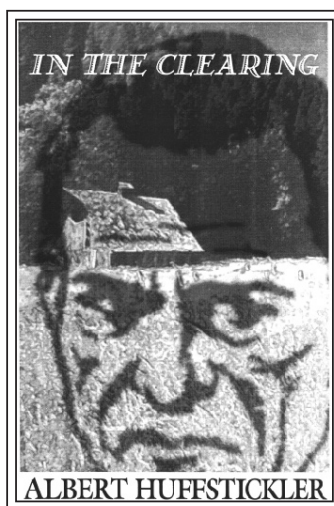
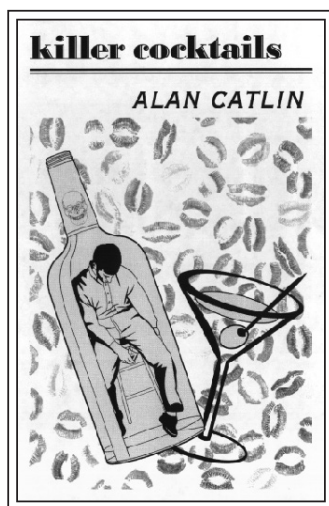


PHOTO BY A.D. WINANS



ALSO AVAILABLE FROM FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS



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 \$4ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#104

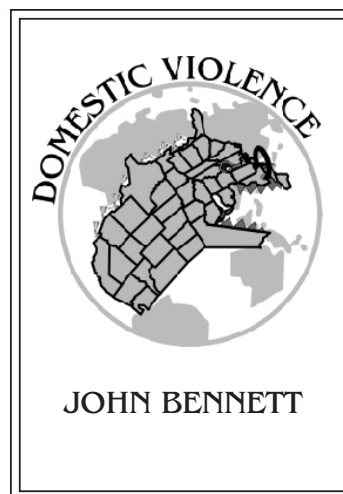
IN THE CLEARING is a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period....\$4ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#105

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.

- **FREEDOM FIVE** by *Slim Bitters*
- Short work chronicling the adventures of one man's devious, spontaneous pursuit of norm abandonment.
- A tale that skids from the high road to the public washroom. FS#101/mini-chap/26pp/\$1
- **I THINK** by *Cat Sobaka*
- Short collection of sporadic bursts of opinion. "Humorous, insightful, weird...."-M.P., Minneapolis. FS#102/mini-chap/14pp/\$1
- **FIRST CLASS #1-#3**
- Still available for \$2@ or all three for \$5
- **FIRST CLASS #4**
- Chock full of exceptional words and photos.
- Half-legal/48pp/\$3
- **FIRST CLASS #5, #6, #7, #8, #9**
- There are still a few issue of these 46-52pp/full-size/hand-bound blockbusters, featuring eighteen(#5) and sixteen(#6) humans and their best words. \$5@ ppd. or \$3@ with another publication to keep the printshop happy.

NEW! NEW! NEW! NEW!

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE is a new 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...\$8ppd./perfect bound/finest quality offset multi-color cover/72pp/FS#106



TERMS: I PREFER CASH, BUT CHECKS TO CHRISTOPHER M. ARE OK.

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.

Christopher M.

try these



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

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

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

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

LOVE IS A BROKEN DOWN TRUCK by Joshua Bodwell and Laura Savard: Hand-made and -bound short piece, with a three-color silk-screened cover. A work of art. Send them \$5 and pray there are any left. Excellent production. Bodwell, pobox 4381, Portland, ME 04101.

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

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

TWO NOVELLAS, THE FIRST TIME HE SAW PARIS by Gerald Locklin/WAITING FOR MY BABY by Donna Hilbert: 336pp/\$29.95 + \$3 s/h to: Event Horizon Press, pobox 867, Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240.

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

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

PEOPLE EVERYDAY AND OTHER POEMS by Daniel Crocker: I have yet to read this collection, but if you are familiar with Crocker's work, you know it will be good. There are 92 pages in this one, with a forward by Gerald Locklin.

'TRY THESE' CONTINUES ON PAGE 44

CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BENNETT – A prolific and enduring writer with numerous credits. Most recently, “Moth Eaters”, a collection of short stories from Angelflesh Press (see address in ‘try these’) and “Domestic Violence” available from Four-Sep (see info in this issue).

JOSHUA BODWELL – Writer and artist from Cape Porpoise, Maine. Creator of fantastic hand-crafted books through his Clamp Down Press, recently “February is the Crookedest Month” by Mark Weber.

SUSANNE R. BOWERS – Lives in Houston, Texas, and was a finalist for the Academy Arts Press 1997 National Short Fiction Competition. Many publishing credits, with her collection “The Space We Leave Between” published by Touchstone Press.

SEAN BRENDAN-BROWN – Former poetry editor for the Georgetown Review with appearances in a variety of publications.

JOHN BUSH – From Gainesville, Georgia, first appearance in FC.

J.J. CAMPBELL – Calls Dayton, Ohio home.

D. CASTLEMAN – Resides in Mill Valley, California.

ALAN CATLIN – Barmaster in Schenectady, NY. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. In the last year, seen in “Press”. Check out “Killer Cocktails” available from Four-Sep, a chosen Quarter Book by)ism(.

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

GLEN CHESNUT – Born in Amarillo, Texas, who has been everything from a cowboy to a merchant seaman (23 years at sea). Now living in San Francisco, with two chaps under his belt. His chap “Taking the Bull by the Horns” is excellent.

JAMES DOYLE – Published in over 100 journals and reviews, including “Poetry” and “Chiron Review”. Lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.

LOUIS S. FABER – Poet and corporate attorney from Pittsford, New York, whose work has appeared in “Exquisite Corpse”, “Pearl”, and more.

DAVID MASON HEMINWAY – His piece in this issue is from a collection “It Isn’t Everyday” which is forthcoming from Clamp Down Press.

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER – Widely published phenom in the small-press. His work has often appeared in these pages. Lives, eats, and breathes in Austin, Texas. Be sure to read “In the Clearing” from Four-Sep.

CONTRIBUTORS

ARTHUR WINFIELD KNIGHT – Lives in Petaluma, California.

DUSTY ERIK LUNDE – Lives in Tacoma, Washington. Third time in FC.

PETER MAGLIOCCO – Live from the sweaty streets of Sin City, this is his second appearance in the First Class lounge. A forgiving soul, with volumes of great material.

ERROL MILLER – Prolific voice in the small and medium press since 1972. Miller has several chaps and two larger collections forthcoming. “Downward Glide” is available for \$12 ppd from BGB Press, 158 King Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

KENN MITCHELL – His poetry has appeared in over 70 magazines, most recently in “Cedar Hill Review”. His first book “Poetry of the Deformed” is available from Pygmy Forest Press. From Eugene, Oregon.

MICHAEL L. NEWELL - Currently residing in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, this is his second appearance in First Class. He offers wry insight into that place on the other side of the globe that at one time we thought would be great to blow up.

B.Z. NIDITCH–The artistic director of “The Original Theatre”, with both national and international publishing credits. Several of his plays have appeared in these pages.

IRENE L. PABST – Lives in Delta Junction, Alaska, with work forthcoming in “Earspank” and from Alpha Beat Press.

WALT PHILLIPS – Illustrator and poetic typist from various parts unknown over the last year. Prolific in the small press. Finally settled in American Canyon, California.

BOB ROLEY – Portland, Oregon is the home of this first-timer in these pages.

DAVID A. ROSS – From St. Paul, Minnesota, first time in FC.

GEORGE SPARLING – Published in numerous small-press mags, including “Chiron Review” and “Atom Mind”. Calls Arcata, California home.

T. KILGORE SPLAKE – Denizen of upper Michigan, his words and images are widely published. “Available Light”, a glossy chap of his photos is recommended. “Trout Dancing Sonata” is also available: Angst Productions, pobox 508, Calumet, MI 49913.

JOHN WILSON – Lives in Madison Heights, Michigan, while being published in numerous reviews and searching for an agent for his first novel.

A.D. WINANS – Born in San Francisco, the author of more than 14 books of poetics. His resounding voice out of the Bay area can be consumed in the recent “San Francisco Streets” by Ye Olde Fonte Shoppe Press.

\$12 + \$1 postage to: Green Bean Press, pobox 237, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

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

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

ATOM MIND: If you are into the 'beat'/booze/sex poetics, perpetrated to the finest degree, and have yet to check out this excellent perfect-bound magazine, send Mother Road (see above) \$6 as soon as possible. You will be treated to over 100 pages of killer writing and gobs of Wayne Hogan images.

DRIVERS SIDE AIRBAG: It is nearly impossible to be disappointed in this digest-sized quarterly. It is packed with post-mod pieces of interest to those who appreciate a challenge from the writer, a challenge to think a bit. Thoroughly entertaining and engrossing, with illustrations and comics spicing it up. \$4/issue or \$13/year from: Undulating Bedsheets Productions, pobox 25760, Los Angeles, CA 90025.

BEAT POET: Jack Saunders' work in progress. Issue 1 is out, with a string of continuation to follow. This man defines the word *phenom*. Drop him a line: Garage Band Books, Box 1392, Tucker, GA 30085.

EVOLUTION: This is a student publication of Suffolk County Community College in New York. I received an issue and was immediately overwhelmed by the obvious care and effort that went into #55. The outstanding production, which is simple, yet well-planned, including a full-cover cover on linen stock, was nearly equaled by the contents. No submission address, though I recommend this mag for it's sheer beauty.

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.

TAKING THE FIFTH by Albert Huffstickler: This is a cool collection, a good read, bits and pieces and fragments of Huffstickler's thoughts and poetic meandering, intermingled with illustrations. Short and sweet, though it took me a good half hour to read and absorb. Available from: Press of Circumstance, 312 E. 43rd Street #103, Austin, Texas 78751.

FUNK/WORKS by Catfish McDaris and Mark Sonnenfeld: This two-seater is a collection of what these two writers do best. Catfish belts out several quickies steeped in his favorite themes, with lines like "worst case of the bullhead clap I've ever seen" and "if you think carrots or bananas have no rights I'll be glad to shove one up your ass". The poetics expose several sides of McDaris: angry, obscene, thoughtful, and even.... sensitive. Sonnenfeld has an eclectic style, experimenting with minimalist verbage and jaggedly placed text. Not my favorite style, yet a pleasing challenge to read and understand. Marymark Press, 45-08 Old Millstone Drive, East Windsor, NJ 08520.

LITURGICS FOR THE HORDES AND SCADS AND MYRIADS by Alan Cohol: Two of the many themes Cohol writes about: writing and love/emotion, are themes that I usually find tedious. However, this book is a pure pleasure to rake the eyeballs over. His poetics smooth into the brain like creamy icing, and his insights and sentiments "we'll blind them all with beauty" make you wish he was your friend and neighbor. His words are calmly raw, their insidious creeping prongs buried in bliss. The design is exquisite, allowing images to mingle passionately with the text. Temporary Vandalism, pobox 6184, Orange, CA 92863-6184.

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

FUEL: Issue 23/24 is an excellent collection of short fiction, beautifully laid out. Send Andy Lowry \$3: pobox 118028, Chicago, IL 60611-8028. If you are fortunate enough to make his pages, you will be in good company.

QUICKIES: Spunk magazine: pobox 55336, Hayward, CA 94545; **Salt Pork and Sunsets by T. Anders Carson:** \$5 Black Bile Press, 25 Avalon Place, Hamilton, Ontario L8M1G9; **The Writer's Ancestral Sense of Place by Errol Miller:** \$4 French Bread Publications, pobox 23868, San Jose, CA 95153; **Looking for an Answer by A.D. Winans:** \$4 French Bread Publications, pobox 23868, San Jose, CA 95153; **Taking the Bull by the Horns by Glen Chesnut:** \$3 3300 Press, 3300 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94110; **On Imagist Art by Norman J. Olson:** 946 N. McKnight Road, Maplewood, MN 55119-3635; **Insanity-An Anthology by Michael Buchenroth:** \$20 Buchenroth Publishing Company, pobox 13771, Columbus, OH 43213-0771; **Burroughs at Santo Domingo by John Macker:** Long Road/La Cantera Press, pobox 1825, Las Vegas, NM 87701.

'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.