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NOÖ

free quarterly journal of politics / prose / poetry / pictures

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## Editors' Notes

-- Kyle

In his autobiography Mark Twain wrote, "It is a dear and lovely disposition, and a most valuable one, that can brush away indignities and discourtesies and seek and find the pleasanter features of an experience." In this day and age, however, it often seems that we are increasingly unable to find that silver lining, especially when the clouds are part of a Class 5 hurricane. After all, it may only be fool's gold, right? Yet man has weathered storms before. For instance, the wrath of Kahn (Genghis, that is), the crucifixion of William Jennings Bryan in Tennessee, the Monkees, and the cancellation of Highway to Heaven. But somehow, through it all, man has always come out swinging, just like Sylvester Stallone in his latest flop, Rocky Balboa: The Fight Against Ageism in Hollywood. So, take heart, dear reader, because all is not lost while Harrison Ford can still make our hearts throb as Indiana Jones, hunting Nazi war criminals hiding in America!

In retrospect, I'll probably regret writing all of that, but as long as I include something somewhat serious about this issue of NOÖ Journal I'll be able to live with myself, hopefully for years to come. Saying nothing about my own work, each of the pieces included in this issue are well crafted and address an issue in our nation and/or world worthy of our attention. It is my sincere hope, dear reader, that after reading NOÖ Journal you will be inspired to send in your own writing and help fan the flames of creative thought and social dialogue. And don't forget to buy some **BAD P♥️TORY** for your sweetheart(s)!

-- Mike

Yes, it's true about Canadians. They're polite. In December, I was up in Vancouver doing a poetry/music tour called the Perpetual Motion Roadshow. Lots of rain. Right after our show at Spartacus Books, my tourmates and I walked outside. We argued about whether we were going to get tasty Ethiopian food or tasty Ethiopian food. This was, according to Laura, the worst neighborhood in all of Canada. As we strolled, a bearded drunk in a brown raincoat stumbled into me. He held on for a little, all grubby-like—maybe this should remind you of slime or warmth, depending on your view of strangers. Then he belched. A nasty belch. An epic belch, really, one you could scoop with a ladle and introduce as stew.

All very off-putting, this belch, this fellow.

But then he put both hands on my shoulders, looked at his shoes, and said "Excuse me!"

Shouted it, yes. Canadians! I felt little trumpets sprout from my heart.

Looking confused, Mr. Polite hugged me, quickly, around the collarbone area. And he continued on. Ever onward, I guess some people say.

What's important: we had our Ethiopian food. Broth and root vegetables on injera, a giant pancake and sort-of tablecloth. All tearing and scooping and sharing amongst fingers. Besides serving communal dishes, our restaurant appeared to serve as a bordello, baggage pickup station, cannabis bar, dance club, and boarding house. The owner was generous. He was trying, maybe. The truth is I have no idea. He had harried eyes and a habit of wiping his neck sweat on his apron. We ate and met up with Laura, stayed with her, woozed our way through wine-songs and leftover coconut chocolate truffles.

Sometimes I am afraid of all the things I brush. Or come across and leave. People, mostly. This is part of why I head for poems and stories. You can say okay, other people have this same haunt. Terry Sanville's young narrator wonders what it is to miss. In Nathan Parker's poem, what can you do? You look into the horn and pass it on. Your tapes explode (see: Benjamin Bucholz's poem), your brother drifts up to the attic (see: Lydia Copeland's story). Sure, you keep a little, but not really, right? Sometimes it stays as a funny, a cartoon etching. Like the polite belch-er, who makes a nice supper anecdote. Sometimes you just wonder and miss with no recourse or reason. If that sounds like something you do, try more poetry. More fiction. Start with NOÖ [six], then find other independent literary ventures. Maybe write a little and share it with your friend. He might be a janitor or a systems analyst, but he might write lines on gum wrappers and keep them in an empty salad dressing bottle.

Here is another thing, an entirely tangential conclusion: leaving Canada, entering Washington, we listened to songs about motorcycles as all the gray rain turned green. Here is the last thing, a line you should Google, a line I just happen to trust: I am safe and I am sorry in the evergreens tonight.

# Life Socks



**YOU'VE SOUGHT ANSWERS** from therapists, gurus, talk show hosts, even God. Why not ask a tube sock? Dr. Pete is a certified life coach (CEC).

Contact him at: [myspace.com/pete\\_sarbone](http://myspace.com/pete_sarbone)

Dear Dr. Pete:

Why do my mornings seem so bleak and hopeless?  
--The Rev. Gurdy, Phoenix

Dear Rev:

You have so much to be thankful for each and every morning. Many tens of thousands of people wake up in Equatorial Guinea and Gabon each day, their intestines infested with tapeworms. Repeat this fact to yourself with every new sunrise and see how good you feel. You don't have tapeworms.

Dear Dr. Pete:

Should I feel bad for refusing my spare change to the homeless?  
--Liberal-curious in Detroit

Dear Curious:

Here's the tragedy of the homeless: They only live for the day. They know nothing about long-term financial planning. If they did, they would realize that the key to a secure future is investing in annuities and IRA funds over time. That's a lesson that the homeless can't seem to understand. So the next time you're confronted, do what I would do: Instead of giving them a buck, lend them Roger Cockren's book, "Long-Term Financial Growth." And when they make their first million, you can sue them for accumulated interest and late-fees because otherwise they might just blow it all on booze.

Dear Dr. Pete:

What can I do to help beat the terrorists, when I am so small and scared?  
--Nervous in POCOIMA

Dear Nervous:

This is a time that calls for great vigilance and fear, from all of us. Though the terrorists seem to be on the run and in their final throes, this is no time to relax and enjoy your piece of the American pie. At any moment, high-impact explosives may rip through your home or place of employment. There are lots of people out there who hate you and want you die because you love freedom. In fact, a sniper's bullet may possibly be trained on you this very instant. We must all work together to report any suspicious red laser dots we may find on our clothes or the backs of our heads as we go to work, pump gas, make love, and enjoy our precious liberties. And our children are most vulnerable of all. Keep them away from heavily populated areas such as schools, supermarkets, and family gatherings. But above all, enjoy every day as if it's your last. Or better yet, your second-to-last, because your last is bound to include a lot of surprise organ ruptures and severed limbs.

# In the Shadow of Celan: A Journeyman Poet Dissents --Norman Ball

**T**HIS WAS MY POEM, "A Rash of School Shootings:"

*Another came to confiscate our schools  
of that last unshed thing—an open face—  
with demons on his brain and binding tools  
lining up our best. How can I raise  
a horror and disgust that yesterday  
only exploded? Am I myself an incubating danger,  
too-practiced on the staircase  
outrage must ascend?  
What Ishmael will summon our next anger,  
and will it be for me, the next dull-  
hooded stranger, chosen for his fresh reserve  
of emptiness?*

You suggested an amendment to the final four lines:

*What Ishmael will summon our next anger  
with his fresh reserve of legal weapons?  
Will it be me next time or the body-bagged  
shape of the child I loved?  
—(as suggested by Patricia Wallace Jones)*

If I could, Patricia, I would embrace your words and claim them for my own. A parent myself, I cheer your sentiments, and wish I could inhabit your uncomplicated rage with equal vigor. However there is more that separates us here than simply my inadequacies as a poet.

Tasked with carrying itself over the threshold, a poem must achieve success or failure on its own strength. Indeed there is something unseemly about defending a poem from the outside. So I make a fool of myself here with complete awareness. My inexactitudes often get the better of me. But in this instance I believe my rope ladder managed to span the chasm of my deficits. At least, I meant everything I said.

Far from the practiced stance of moral indignation or parochial disdain—God protect me and mine from the likes of them and theirs—I was suggesting something more ominous: authentic outrage is becoming increasingly unavailable to all of us. Forget the dispirited moralist. It was the primate of toxic habit, that great irreducible monkey, who emptied our churches. His wellspring of humanity is not inexhaustible. On a succession of bad days, the bottom of his tin cup shines through:

*God's tankards are tipping.  
They drink deep of emptiness just as of fullness  
And never brim over like you or like me (1)*

I am convinced that, no less than adrenaline or blood, outrage draws from a tankard of discrete capacity. This view is anathema to the metaphysicians who persist in their great beams of light. Frankly, I am finding more light in the shit left behind. If you can tolerate the smell, the entrails never lie.

Plato would bristle, but the great mysteries often hinge more on physiological than philosophic grounds. For example, how many times a week can a hairless ape summon up the requisite levels of outrage, shock, disgust and revulsion to meet the horrors of the present day? I don't know. You might as well ask how many times he can procreate in one twenty-four hour period. Normally, it's a question whose intimacies a bystander doesn't care to plumb—until of course the bystander must contend with a blood-let on his own doorstep. Then carnage becomes a very personal business.

The unflappable men-in-smocks, our dear scientists, do their best to reassure us: all that is feared can be strapped to a gurney and measured. But I take little solace from that. Knowing certain drugs exist to blunt his psychotic episode, we become no less fearful of a crazed man. Science solves so very little.

Today, we seem to be converging on the primate's finitudes with alacrity. All around us, people are snapping like twigs. Each fresh act of carnage, I suspect, nudges us closer to some climactic event, an Armageddon, or a great cessation. If each day in Baghdad, sixty bodies are discovered in a mass

unmarked grave, how are we to mourn this endless procession of summarily discarded humanity with the adequacy demanded of the children of Ishmael, those survivors who must endure in their humanity? Gated communities notwithstanding, no place on earth is too far from any other. Barbarity will not be localized. Belaboring a cliché, we are all connected.

Mass unmarked graves have a pernicious effect on the singular nature of souls (What is a soul if not a profoundly singularity?) All men suffer when one is denied a proper burial. Anonymous death becomes the most lethal weapon in the nihilist's arsenal. Suffice to say, vast storehouses of nameless dead posit dire implications for culture, that is, everything tasked with surviving the monkey.

**For example, how many times a week can a hairless ape summon up the requisite levels of outrage, shock, disgust and revulsion to meet the horrors of the present day?**

Just as human beings must be grieved over, survivors must grieve. This is precisely the chain that sustains the dreary continuum of humanity. It is doubtful that skulls, femurs and sternums so absently discarded can facilitate, for their prior occupants, a crossing to 'the other side.' Without coins' recognition, some final intimacy first placed on their lips, a few kind words (the benedictory salve of language), the dead can only shudder in some godforsaken limbo, pants of neither eternity nor quite of history. God cannot acknowledge what man will not see.

Bless the journalists, those English majors with a job! Putting their Sunday best forward with obligatory headlines, they scream day after day 'the nation registered fresh shock and outrage at the heinous scene that unfolded today...' Outrage is a long-abandoned barricade, a hyperbole devoid of emotive force. I will be the first to confess I grow less outraged every day. Then, the unavoidable implication: I am less human today than I was the day before. Who will join me for a beer, chest-deep, in the blood of countless strangers?

Like Pavlov's beaten dogs, we are powerless against mindnumbing repetition. Adrift in this general coarsening, some ask 'which human form will the beast commandeer on his next trail of terror?' Why though does it matter? Gacey, Manson, Bundy, Hitler, Pol Pot: the wound to humanity will be the same. Intent on averting the next monster, the compulsive collector sifts the crime scene for tell-tale signs. Such efforts, while adequate killers of time, rarely shed light. Today it's a dwarf; tomorrow, an albino. One of us always rises to the next occasion.



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Eben Drews

As it turns out, our latest madman was a Pennsylvanian milkman (et tu, ample mother?!), a monster who molested his own family members despite the latter's insistence they were never molested. Connect those bewildering dots, earnest sleuth and guardian of the prurient interest!

More important than the monkey-of-the-moment's nervous tics, eccentric tattoos and distinctive gait should be how yet another man came to be pulled from the midst of the shrinking band of survivors. The particularities of weight and hair color are the eye-witnesses' frantic reconstructions, really ghastly retrospectives whose primary aim is to spare us the horror of looking ahead: "Let the guilt of all forewarning signs come upon us" (2). When will we stop searching a stranger's eyes for what we swim in every day? We need to face, with great dispatch, whatever it is that seems intent on claiming us all: "Thou shalt seek in the stranger's eye those thy knowest are in the water" (3). Until then, but for the grace of God is the only operative talisman. One day even God's grace will run out.

**Outrage is a long-abandoned barricade, a hyperbole devoid of emotive force.**

Fifty dollars says that our grandchildren will be casual habitual killers! Yes of course, not your grandchildren. Nor mine. After all, we're sensitive poets (provided we see the fast-receding power of language and concentrate its ebbing forms to the best of abilities). Think then, dear poet, of your next-door neighbor, who you might one day explain to the assembled cameras on the day before you yourself go insane, was the last person on earth you would have suspected of doing such a thing. Of course everyone is the last person anyone would think to do the likes of these things. Charles Manson's mom insisted that beneath it all he was a good boy. But this is precisely why anyone, including you, could be the next depraved killer. How well do you trust yourself?

In 1959, the series of murders that Truman Capote captured in *In Cold Blood* managed to horrify a nation, perhaps for the last time. Horror was still an available response in the human arsenal. Though not quite fifty years ago, language still served; but only just. The nights were getting longer.

Today's writer is obliged to acknowledge how huge fields operation have slipped through some hidden hourglass like ice-shelves forever broken off from Arctic expanse. He must ask himself, where will I find the words for tomorrow? Governed by the natural born pathologies of a coarsened age, we lack a horror equal to our fathers' horror. Perhaps in time, as Paul Celan (the poet who shadows this exposition) suggests, language is self-healing. Or at least, it endures:

“It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything. [It] passed through and would come to light again, 'enriched' by all this” (4)

Strange the ironic quotations he enlists for 'enriched.' Uranium is enriched today for the purpose of self-annihilation. In all likelihood, its footprint will attend the final crime as apt coda to the Final Solution. Others are more sanguine about language's potential for rehabilitation. Can't words, like the ones who utter them, witness too much and, like Ishmael, bear the forever-curse of remembrance? Does the Holocaust diminish all who follow it? Is it survivor's guilt that has us call the things we do today, ostensibly for fun and joy, escape? In a prelapsarian age, escape implied averting some peril. Today it means averting ourselves, what we've come to know about ourselves.

As language, the great sin eater, struggles to embrace unspeakable, cascading outrage, we become less intelligible, less poetic in the telling; nor is seeking refuge in a moral

**Governed by the natural born pathologies of a coarsened age, we lack a horror equal to that of our fathers'**

sphere—that dim hall of venerable rights and wrongs—permissible. Poets are commanded to embrace far more than enlisted norms if they wish to bear Ishmael's burden. They are the canaries

in the mineshaft, charged with dying slowly in the noxious fumes. As they succumb, the queer odor, texture and substance of the fumes report back to the others who, though dying themselves, lack the faculties to articulate their demise.

In a sense, Ted Bundy is a vanguard, the ever-repeating prototype of the first man to fall. The last man standing will possess a depth of character preserving his capacity for outrage to the very end; but only to his end, as upon his death everything will—tautologically—cease to be human. This final man—perhaps walking among us today—is a bewildering eccentric, possibly Amish, a relic of a prior age when outrage still tumbled from some terrible

altitude. Humanity's last day will also see the departure of God's grace as both are antecedents of the other. Jung's Job was God's eye, allowing Him to see. In the present age, God risks losing man's gift of vision:

*“Scooped by the great Eyeless One from your eyes.” (5)*

Perhaps if we spoke less we'd birth fewer monsters. Today's better poets, I am sure, observe a disciplined silence. Celan remarked that “the poem unmistakably shows a strong bent toward falling silent” (6). I am convinced the terminus of language is traced to the detritus of stacked, nameless bodies. After the Holocaust, in an age of monsters, Theodor Adorno (joined by Steiner and Celan) asked how poetry can ever again be written.

This question is far from rhetorical. How indeed.

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*Endnotes*

1. “The Tankards ”
2. “Late and Deep ”
3. “In Egypt ”
4. Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen (1958).
5. “Scooped ”
6. The Meridian: Speech on the Occasion of the Award of the George Buchner Prize (1961).

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*'The Killing Fields of Cambodia' / © 2007 Sam Stearman (Sam Exotic Travel Photos)*



# The Truth About Hemp: Part I

--Kyle Peterson



**WHICH SINGLE PLANT** is found growing naturally in all 50 U.S. states and has over 25,000 possible uses, including paper, clothing, food, and fuel? The answer: hemp, a variety of the plant *cannabis sativa* L, often mistaken for marijuana. It's been used for centuries in almost every civilization, including the United States. So, why it is illegal today?

Regardless of its possibilities as a source of food, fuel, and industrial materials, for many Americans, cannabis carries with it the stigma of a drug culture that developed in the U.S. during the 20th century. Viewed as a "gateway" into a forbidden and dangerous world, cannabis has become a scapegoat for the ills of society. But the fact of the matter is that prior to its prohibition in the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, hemp was a legal cash crop, grown by our Founding Fathers, and for many years was even an acceptable form of payment for taxes.

Despite its current status as a Schedule One narcotic, before 1937, the U.S. government recognized the differences between the varieties of the plant used for industrial hemp and those cultivated for the flowers, or buds. What happened to change that is a story of narrow, self-interests that would lead our nation down an unsustainable path, a story all too common in the United States history.

In the early part of the 20th century, incredible discoveries and innovations in the uses of agricultural products inspired a new field of science, called "chemurgy." Defined by the Columbia Encyclopedia as a "branch of applied chemistry concerned with preparing industrial products from agricultural raw materials," chemurgy was an agrarian response to an increasingly manufactured world and as such, we shall see, was diametrically opposed to the interests of the major petroleum and chemical corporations of the day.

Perhaps some of the most famous discoveries in the field of chemurgy were those made by the scientist George Washington Carver. While working at the Tuskegee Institute, Carver discovered literally hundreds of uses for various foodstuffs such as potatoes, soy beans, pecans, and peanuts, uses including adhesives, axle grease, bleach, shaving cream, and synthetic rubber (Bellis). But Carver was not the only one making such discoveries.

Always searching for ways to improve his original design of the automobile, Henry Ford looked to nature for answers. Ford built the body of a model car entirely from

hemp and other fibers by binding them together with a resin and molding it into the desired shape. Today, this material is known as a biocomposite, and car manufacturers such as Ford, BMW, Daimler-Chrysler, and GM are experimenting with biocomposites to make door panels, head liners, and other parts. The Ford Motor Corporation alone used more than 5,000,000 pounds of hemp between 1999 and 2000 (Rothenberg 20).

But Mr. Ford wasn't alone in his innovations with hemp, nor in his desire for ethanol, which he called "the fuel of the future," to fuel the automobiles of America. He originally intended to power automobiles with ethanol, known then as ethyl alcohol, so that Americans could make use of the vast number of materials available for conversion into cellulosic and starch-based ethanols.

Another advocate for ethanol was scientist Harold Hibbert. In 1920 at Yale University, Hibbert was experimenting with the chemical decomposition, or hydrolysis, of cellulose, an organic compound found in cell walls of all green plants, including hemp. But because cellulose is a complex polysaccharide and requires enzymes or acids that to this day are expensive to manufacture, cellulosic ethanol was not yet commercially viable (Kovarik).

Almost one hundred years later, several biotech companies, including Arkenol Fuels and Iogen, have begun marketing their patented hydrolysis processes that can convert anything from paper waste to farm and forest residues into cellulosic ethanol. The Energy Information Administration estimates that by 2015 improvements in the hydrolysis process will lower production costs by as much as 60 cents per gallon, allowing cellulosic ethanol to compete with gasoline. One such improvement is the use of genetically engineered enzymes to turn feedstocks into ethanol, technology unavailable to Hibbert in the 1920s.

Undoubtedly, the scientists working on ethanol from cellulose faced challenges, but probably none as daunting as opposition from the alliance between the Standard Oil, Ethyl, DuPont, and GM corporations. In his essay "Henry Ford, Charles Kettering, and The Fuel of the Future," Professor Bill Kovarik details how the executives of these corporations feared competition from ethanol and so not only spread propaganda and lobbied ferociously against subsidies, but privately investigated politicians and advocates who supported the renewable fuel. In addition, the corporation Ethyl, which marketed leaded gasoline,

even went so far as to refuse the sale of its products if a wholesaler also sold ethanol. Although the Supreme Court upheld an anti-trust lawsuit against Ethyl in 1940, as a result of such pressure, according to Kovarik, the once broad-based support for ethanol evaporated.

The cannabis plant, which can be converted into cellulosic ethanol, suffered a similar fate as part of the chemurgy movement. A new invention, similar to Eli Whitney's revolutionary cotton gin, called the hemp decorticator, made stripping the bast, or outer fibers of the stalk more efficient. Such an improvement in technology reduced the time and cost of processing, which would in turn encourage the expansion of uses for hemp (Rothenberg 7). An ill-timed Popular Mechanics article published in February of 1938, the same month the Marihuana Tax Act came into effect, proposed hemp would be the next "billion dollar crop" (8).

However, the chemical giant DuPont held numerous patents, including one on tetraethyl lead (an oxygenate used to raise octane levels), which could be substituted with ethanol (7). Thus the future profits of the corporation were put in jeopardy, especially since serious questions had been raised about the potential hazards of lead after numerous deaths and injuries of workers who handled the toxic material. In the early development of leaded gasoline at least 40 workers died from lead poisoning and several hundred others were injured. Workers who knew what was causing their hallucinations called their factories "Houses of Butterflies." These deaths caused much public controversy and at one point, the New Jersey state legislature banned the sale and production of leaded gasoline (Kovarik and Hermes).

As one of the chief investors in the corporation, the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, had a vested interest to see DuPont prosper and beat out its competitors, including those who offered alternatives, like ethanol. As the popularity of hemp grew, so did the threat it posed as an alternative to lead.

So Mellon appointed Henry Anslinger, who at that time was the Assistant U.S. Commissioner on Prohibition, to the head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Anslinger, who would later marry Mellon's niece, spent two years drafting the Marihuana Tax Act. In 1937, the bill was submitted to the House Ways and Means Committee, who was headed by another DuPont ally. The House Ways and Means Committee was the only congressional committee that could submit a bill to Congress without input from other government agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and the bill moved on to Congress. Anslinger testified about the "evils" of "marihuana" and

with the prodding of prohibition lobbyists, the bill passed (Rothenberg 7).

The Marihuana Tax Act did not ban cannabis outright, nor would the tax of 1 dollar per ounce raise much revenue. But the Act required growers, manufacturers and distributors of hemp products to report every transaction to the IRS and provide the names and addresses of any recipient. Failure to comply would result in heavy fines or imprisonment. As a result, no one wanted to run the risk of dealing with cannabis, so the once-burgeoning industry quickly faded (Solomon). It is worth mentioning that in 1969, the U.S. Supreme Court found that the requirement to register with the IRS violated the 5th amendment by forcing the petitioner to "identify himself as a member of a 'selective group inherently suspect of criminal activities,' and thus those provisions created a 'real and appreciable' hazard of incrimination ..." (Leary v. United States). However, subsequent laws such as the Controlled Substance Act of 1970, plus court decisions such as Gonzales v. Raich in 2005, have upheld the federal government's ability to regulate the interstate commerce of controlled substances.

The United States of America stands with one of the most crucial choices of its entire history: whether to increasingly rely on foreign markets and imports, which benefit only a few, or to look inside its own borders for alternative resources that would rehabilitate its economy and environment. Such a question should be answered by the people of this great nation, not just government officials and captains of industry. Regardless of hemp's current legal status, I firmly believe that history will bear out how the many uses of the cannabis sativa plant outweigh concerns and objections held by government officials and other opponents. But it is up to concerned citizens everywhere to make heard their voices and make known their opposition to the status quo.

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YOU

TO

NOÖ: Monologues

--what's happening in your world?

## Jazz Funeral

-- Karel Sloane



**AN EPIDEMIC IS SPREADING ACROSS LOUISIANA.** This epidemic isn't average. It began with bird seed. As with many epidemics in Louisiana history, it has been accompanied by long processions, the shifting of soil, and despite deep sadness, the people of Louisiana are finding a way to celebrate.

Much of Louisiana leans toward the exotic. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana was considered a "Sportsman's Paradise," boasted about on our license plates. Often, hunters and bird watchers alike would patiently await the appearance of the beauty around them, beauty living in the unique land forms called cheniers. Cheniers are formed by the mighty Mississippi River and off shore currents, and they were frequented by several hundred species of birds on their annual migrations.

In addition to their traditional diets, many of these migrating birds were grateful consumers of seeds. Louisiana's exotic vegetation made each backyard its own miniature wildlife sanctuary. These Louisiana yards hosted droves of warblers, ibis, grosbeaks, and cardinals, many of whom like sunflower seeds. The rare and the common often came together around feeders, forming congregations of the mismatched and the colorful. But when the levees broke open, so did the feeders these birds frequented, and so did the bags of bird seed that had accumulated in every garden center, hardware chain, supermarket, pet store, cupboard, pantry, kitchen cabinet, garage and storage center.

After the hurricanes, bird too fell on hard times. New Orleans' levee failures, along with the tidal surges in other parts of the state, led to a lack of fruit, caterpillars, pollen, insects, vegetables and other foods high in nutrients. In survival mode, birds sought out what they could find. Fortunately for them, food had been scattered everywhere.

The most common ingredient in store-bought feed is sunflower seeds. The scattering of seeds and the sunflowers that followed might have been nothing more than a novelty, like the preceding St. Bernard Parish-wide watermelon epidemic, except for one crucial difference: sunflowers detoxify the soil.

Besides bird seed, levee failures scattered lead paint from old buildings, lead from car batteries and other toxins. Sunflowers are "phytoremediators," or, "hyper-accumulators." Each stalk is sort of like a giant syringe. Once the flowers sprout, they begin extracting toxins such as heavy metals, particularly lead, out of the soil. When the "syringe" has accumulated all the toxins it can hold, then the stalks become long, green containment centers. Containing the toxins in the stalk spares the next generation of seeds. When the sunflower falls over, the cycle begins again, and should a migrating grosbeak or cardinal spot the seeds, they will find the seeds safe to eat. This makes what the sunflowers do even rarer.

Today, all over Louisiana, epidemic has become antidote. Waving in the wind like umbrellas, sunflowers are the antidote for poisoned soil. In Louisiana, umbrella-waving and music are central to epidemics and funerals. A jazz funeral is an occasion for dancing, for waving your arms. Jazz funerals don't represent "end." Improvised notes, like epidemics of flowers, dancing round the disheartened represent a remembering of life. Louisiana is rooted in making due with what's around, and letting something new flourish from it. An epidemic of scattered bird seed followed by soil-cleansing sunflowers is just the latest in Louisiana improvisation.



'Sunflower bows her head' / © 2007 Tammy Mallet (picsbytammy.com)

# CATS DON'T CARE.



# HAT TRICK

-- Caleb Puckett



**M**Y SON AND I WERE WATCHING THE PRISON RODEO one evening when he asked me to explain what the announcer meant by a "hat trick." Rather than confusing him with the complicated common definition, I offered this story as a simple, but apt illustration.

Years ago, the only reputable mime in town was run over on Main Street, black beret blown against the green teeth of the sewer grate, rippling like a soot stained gypsy moth in a cave full of pickaxe blades. He would've objected to the sirens that screamed his extinction on that fateful evening, but alas his strict, lipless grip on protest had slipped away with the stillness of his ribcage and appendages, those limber instruments of transcendent language.

All the orphans were outraged at this disrespectful stab at a legacy still seemingly intact. He had been a big draw with them, a favorite on holidays, one of the few entertainers who were charitable enough to offer them distraction at a discount, and they blamed the decorum of officials for compromising his last and greatest act. The orphans held a memorial service and séance the next night, knowing that they alone could properly honor the man who made their world so bright.



**T**wo weeks later, on the very spot of the mime's demise, waves of white confetti and brass band numbers shouted the mayor's reelection into existence on a platform that bowed under the weight of his dignity.

During the celebration, the mayor spoke well of his constituents and accidentally tipped his derby back a bit much, being drunk and flushed with the cider he had secreted in his ample paunch. The hat was caught by a gust and whipped dervish-style onto a black grease spot near the green sewer grate and ended up with a stain that resembled a box containing a man who broke rocks in a prison yard all day.

The mayor, wishing to seem generous, unfazed, gave it a good whack and scooped it back onto his head with a laugh. A month later, when he was caught bilking real estate investors of millions and could only offer a glowering grunt against a paper trail as long as the Amazon, all agreed that he had been cursed by the angry spirit of the mime whose striped outfit the convicted official ended up wearing for ten years in the prison house where many of the thieving, former orphans lived in lice-ridden bliss.

That, as I told my boy, explains where we get the phrase "hat trick." Later on I explained to him why the rodeo clown wears lipstick.

*'Booboo the Mime'*  
© 2006 eggzombie  
(eggzombie.deviantart.com)

# { THE COST OF DRIFTING —

-- Terry Sanville

**I DIDN'T KNOW THAT WINE COULD BE MADE FROM ANYTHING BUT GRAPES** until Sonny pointed out the ingredients on the jug of Red Mountain that he cradled against his belly. But if he didn't care, why should I? And from the looks of him, he hadn't cared for a long time.

Sonny called himself a "wildcatter," was originally from Tulsa, or Stillwater, or Corpus Christi—his story changed with every telling—and had worked oil fields throughout Oklahoma and Texas, out through the panhandle to eastern New Mexico until he finally made his break for the coast. The Korean War had just ended, his mother was sleeping with the grease monkey next door, his younger brother hadn't returned from Inch'on, and his father had sent a postcard from San Pedro saying that West Coast jobs were good and that he was sorry.

"I can tell ya this fucken much," Sonny said one afternoon. "Never been close enough to nobody to be sorry fer what I've done."

"What da ya mean?" I asked, handing his bottle back.

"Nothin,' just that drifters don't make no friends."

"We're your friends," Jeeder said.

"No you ain't—but thanks for saying it."

Sonny holed up under the Huntington Beach pier, back against the bluff face where he stayed out of the summer heat until late afternoon. Right around four he'd emerge wearing his Army surplus field jacket and carrying a gunnysack full of pop bottles, clothes, pieces of tin foil, cardboard, and mismatched sets of beach thongs. He was a collector of discarded things, and Rudy, Jeeder and me collected him into our gang, like something you think might be useful, but can't quite figure out what for.

We'd met him on the beach while gathering soda bottles. He offered to share his wine if we washed his bottles off and turned them in for the two-cents-apiece redemption at the penny arcade. The lower the level of wine in his jug, the more he was willing to share.

But what he shared most was his stories: of boxcar rides through the dusty hills outside of Shafter, somewhere up the San Joaquin; of women on the Place Royal in the French Quarter and their slow way of offering themselves to imperfect strangers; of the cold morning fog drifting in over the docks along First Avenue as the ferry heads out across the Sound to Victoria and points north; of bar fights, run-ins with the Police, mug shots, nights in jail, and the constant quest for money to buy that next jug of Red Mountain.

He kept his voice low so I'd have to strain to pick up every word, to savor each detail, and to wish I were him for just a while, rolling free with no City, State, Country, School, or God to claim jurisdiction.

I was almost fourteen and the idea of traveling around didn't seem all that bad—but then I hadn't yet experienced being treated like the proverbial turd in the punchbowl. Hadn't been through an East Coast winter.

Every night after they'd locked up their towers, the lifeguards would kick Sonny off the beach. He'd trudge up Main Street, rummage through trashcans along the way, and head east into the blue haze that hid inland bean fields and the smoggy sprawl called Santa Ana.

"I seen him last year," Jeeder told me once. "It was like, ya know, just after Labor Day. He stole some stuff from people on the beach and the cops threw his ass in jail."

"Yeah, the cops run him out of town every few weeks," Rudy said, "but ol' Sonny just comes bouncing back."

I couldn't see why the cops would care one way or another. Sonny was just there, wasn't big or strong enough to threaten anybody, not even us kids, and made it a point to stay out of sight. It must have been the wine that he drank like Kool Aid or his nude baths in the morning surf when he'd get sick from drinking.

"I was here in the early '50s when the fields along Tin Can Beach was still producin'," Sonny told us. "Helped build some of them old wooden towers out on Signal Hill." He chuckled. "Then tore more than a few of 'em down." I was in awe of anyone that had a history, especially one that didn't involve domineering parents, who, by some stroke of magic, exiled me to Huntington Beach each summer to stay with my grandparents.

It was the week before Mom and Dad came to retrieve me. By then, the beach had become just one more boring summer feature, except that I looked forward to Sonny's stories. But he wasn't in his normal spot under the pier.

"The fuzz probably nabbed him," Jeeder said.

"Yeah, hauled him to Santa Ana and dumped him," Rudy said.

I thought about Sonny waking in some back alley, in a distant town where the roar of traffic replaced that of the Pacific.

We decided that one last trip to our half-abandoned tree house was the least boring thing to do, so we headed out of town. The tree house was lodged in the upper branches of a huge oak tree, out past my grandpop's broom factory near the railroad, surrounded by an ocean of bean fields. It still had a single platform lodged in the upper branches. I lay on my back in the shade and felt the tree lurch and roll in the afternoon wind.

"Gimme a smoke, will ya?" Jeed demanded, his fat body taking up half the space.

Rudy groaned. "When are you going to get your own?"

"When my Mom stops snoopin' around my stuff. Just shut up and give me one."

Rudy shook a Pall Mall out of its pack. Jeeder snatched it and lit up with the kitchen match he kept behind an ear.

"So, you started saving for a car yet?" I asked Jeeder.

He let out a long stream of smoke. "Yeah, my lawn mowing gives me a little. But I figured that Pop will hand over his old heap when he's done with it."

"Not me," Rudy said. "I'm getting my own wheels and drive wherever I want. Maybe even come up to Santa Barbara and see you."

"Yeah, my folks would really dig that," I cracked.

We talked about cars, neighborhood girls, and trips to the Long Beach Pike to ride the roller coaster and bum liquor from stumbling-drunk sailors. We thought we were tough. We thought we were ready.

"Hey guys, check it out." Jeeder pointed.

"What the..." Rudy pushed himself up on one elbow.

Across the bean fields near the railroad, a cop car sat with its red rubies flashing. An ambulance pulled up, dust from the farm track roiled up from under its wheels. There were no sirens. A couple of beat cops, their hats pushed back and hands on hips, waited while the guys in white climbed slowly out, leaving the doors open.

Rudy and I were out of the tree, sprinting across the field, anxious to get there before missing out. Jeeder followed at a trot. The cops probably could see us coming for miles but they didn't seem to care. I was the fastest and got there just as the attendants opened up the back of the ambulance and hauled out a gurney. As we approached, they dragged something from a culvert.

It was Sonny, his eyes staring up unblinking into the afternoon sun. He lay on a slab of cardboard, on his back, arms folded across his chest, hands curled into claws. A wash of chocolate brown covered his chest and was pooled on top of the cardboard.

I stared at the half-open eyes, the face stretched into a grin, blue tongue extended. I shuddered and my eyesight dimmed.

"Christ, he's been cookin' awhile," somebody said, and, as if by quiet agreement, we all took a step back from the body. He must have been lying in the metal culvert for days, and it was only by chance that a field worker had bent over, looked in and smelled him.

"Jesus, must have bled out a few days back," an attendant said.

"These old alkies drink until the veins in their throat explode," the other replied.

"Christ, drowning in your own blood. Makes you wanna climb on the wagon," the skinny cop said.

"We—" I said, "we know this guy."

"What do you know, son?" the cop asked, seeming to notice us for the first time.

"Yeah, he's our friend," Jeeder mumbled.

The cop shook his head but said nothing. We all stood and stared in the shimmering heat. I thought about Sonny and this end to his freewheeling days. I'd miss his stories. I'd miss the dreams that they created, of me as a different person. That would just have to wait.

The attendants threw down their cigarettes and lifted Sonny onto a gurney and covered him with a sheet. There was no emergency. Everybody moved off slowly.

"Jeez, that was weird," Rudy finally said.

"Gave me the fricken' willies," Jeeder said. "Do ya think everybody looks like that when they're dead?"

"If you're dead, you probably don't care." I shivered and picked up the pace.

"Yeah, but others gotta look at ya," Rudy answered.

I think Sonny was the first dead person any of us had seen. But it wasn't the body that scared me. It was thinking about him bleeding to death inside some baking culvert with nobody around to help.

I was sorry that he had to go that way. I wish he'd known that I was sorry.

Our gang headed back to town, clomping along the railroad, counting the cross ties, balancing on the hot rails.



*Five Teenagers Climbing on the Catwalk ca. 1932' / Courtesy of The National Archives*

# FAR FROM THE EYES OF THE SUN

*"And, like an eye being born, covered by its lids,  
a pure mind grows under the rinds of stones."*

-- Gerard de Nerval



-- Aaron Hellem

**THE DOG WAS IN THE OVEN WITH ITS FUR STILL ON.** It was stinking to all high heaven, and all the way back down to hell. They sat around the kitchen table, which, in another town, in another time, had been a church pew. Two church pews. They were three: Len, Mince, and Big Joe.

Big Joe fetched water from the creek and Mince opened a new bottle. The dog was in the oven because there weren't any more hogs to be had and the cattle were all dead. It happened that side of the mountains sometimes that a whole herd could catch something and all go at once. The herd had migrated to the river and died there. For days crows descended on them in a black wave of rippling claws and bloody beaks. They moved over and on top of the cows' corpses in the strange animation of insect movement. It had made Mince throw up to see it. Big Joe cried. It was his herd and they had disappointed him in the worst way by dying inexplicably and all at once.

Big Joe came back with the water. The water wasn't any good, but none of them had gotten the dysentery yet. Big Joe did the pouring: half whiskey, a quarter water. Mince watched the dog in the oven closely, his chair turned so he could see into it. The dog stank like Death's dirty laundry even though Mince had rubbed it with butter and sage. He was worried the other two men would hate it and make him sleep outside again.

Big Joe handed a cup to each of the two men, and then picked up his own. Drink up, boys, he told them. It's true we're eating mongrel, but this is a fresh bottle and the first drink of a fresh bottle is good as gold. The men nodded, drank from their cups.

Mince opened the oven door to have a better look at the dog.

Will you let it alone? Len told him. We'll smell it when it's done.

We're smelling it already, Big Joe said.

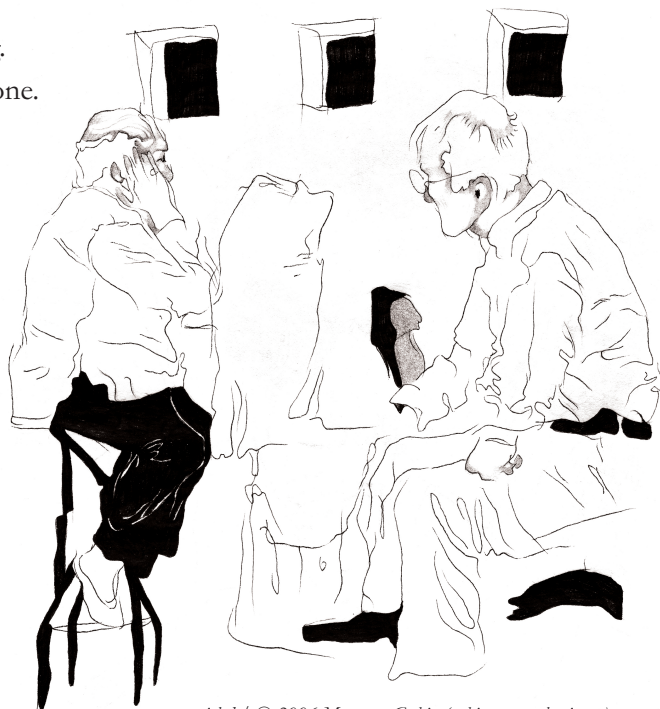
We'll smell it when it's done.

I'm just making sure, Mince said. He didn't want to sleep outside again. The nights were already getting cold as a well digger's ass and the wind felt like little baby's pointed teeth. I hate it when we have to cook dog, he said.

The other two men nodded. It was one thing they shared between them: they all thought dog was too tough, no matter how long it was marinated. Mince was left to the marinade and the worrying. It was a sorry lot in life, Mince knew, where his one goal and only hope was to be allowed slumber inside with the other two men, safe within the walls and out of the range of the wolves outside.

The wolves had eaten the cattle near the river, but lately had been patrolling closer to the cabin, had approached it and around the back. The wolves knew there were three men what lived there, and that none of them had a rifle. Mince alone felt the vulnerability. His mother had been part bluebird, and his birth nearly broke her in two. He exploded out into the world in a rush of blood and bone and awful braying. When he first cried, it shattered the X-ray display.

Len had always known he was going to die. Lately, he'd wondered if it had already happened, if the three men had somehow contracted the brucellosis that killed off the cattle and this was their purgatory, sitting around waiting for the dog to roast. He was not religious, but thought it must be a purgatory: the house, the dog, the wolves.



untitled / © 2006 Maureen Gubia ([gubia.neurasthenic.net](http://gubia.neurasthenic.net))

Big Joe was not afraid of anything and was big enough to only be stopped by a bullet. He was sad though to think about dying without ever touching a woman again. To die amongst dogs with no woman to comfort him, to beckon him into the back bedroom with a sultry finger and an unbuttoned blouse. To die alone with two other men, watching each other from across the table, when the dog and the whiskey were all done. Big Joe eyed his two companions. We're going to die out here, Big Joe said. He thought of the last woman he'd touched: Rip's sister, Maria. Her skin was the color of sunset and the inside of her fold felt like a baptism. Big Joe sipped at his whiskey. He wasn't afraid, just sad.

We've come here to do our job, Len said.

We're going to die here.

Mince didn't like to hear the other two men talk about it out loud in front of him. He preferred they spoke of it in hushed whispers when he was asleep. He knew that when the dog was gone, he'd be the first to get gutted and skinned. He wouldn't make much of a meal, but that didn't change the pecking order. He only hoped they wouldn't make him suffer. He envisioned terrible delusions of eyes squeezed shut while Big Joe descended on him from behind. They were all men of morals, Mince thought, but a place like that could change a man; once a man eats dog, his moral code metamorphoses into something base, haggard, hirsute. He'd read stories about stranded sailors, cowboys out on the lonesome plains, hunters lost in the thick of the woods. We're brothers, Mince said. Aren't we?

The other two men made no reply.

Mince moved closer to the oven. Peered into it to see about the dog.

I thought I told you to let it alone, Len said.

If we had trees with leaves on them, this is the time they'd be turning, Big Joe said. Now.

You let out the heat every time you open the goddamn door, Len told Mince. He was becoming irascible, gritting his teeth and pressing his fingernails into the palm of his hand. The whiskey wasn't helping.

All kinds of colors, Big Joe said. Reds, yellows, browns, oranges. Have either of you seen an autumn in New England?

Mince shook his head. I'm from California, he said.

Len stared into his whiskey. A small trickle of blood rose from the small slit of broken skin in the middle of his hand, and moved slow and ferrous down his wrist.

Your hand, Mince said to him.

I seen it in Maine one year, Big Joe said. When I worked on a crab boat. You know how much one of them crab pots weighs?

Let it alone, Len said. He dipped his hand in the pail of water, washed the blood off. He pulled it out and examined it. The area surrounding it was raspberry red, like a bite, from a hornet or a wolf spider. He held it up to the light, poked at it with his other fingers.

We're going to need more water, Big Joe said.

How much is left of the bottle? Len said.

We have another.

Go on and fetch it then.

Like hell, Big Joe said. It's your blood what tainted the water I fetched first.

Mince can do it then.

Mince's tending to dinner, Big Joe said.

Len glanced at the things spread out on the table: the cups, the bottle, the bowie knife. He was skillful with a knife, but he knew the only thing that could stop Big Joe was a bullet, and he didn't have a bullet or a gun to propel one.

We all know whose blood it is in the water, Big Joe said.

Len nodded.

Your blood, and your blood alone. It sounded biblical.

Len took up the pail, hurried out the door.

It's getting dark out there, Mince said.

Mind the dog doesn't burn, Big Joe told him.

Mince opened the oven door enough to look inside. The fur was singed along the sides of the carcass. Juices were boiling up through the neck hole, spilling over, sizzling on the glowing coils. I think we should turn it, he said.

Big Joe reached across the table and filled his glass from the bottle.

I want to turn it, Mince said.

Then do it, Big Joe said. It's no use telling me you want to do it.

Mince turned the dog, and announced it would be done shortly. Big Joe nodded. It was the time of year when the darkness happened without anyone watching. Big Joe looked for images of women in his whiskey. Have you ever been in love? he said.

It startled Mince. He wasn't sure how to answer and not reveal his vulnerability. Big Joe was so much bigger than he was that if it was going to happen, there wasn't anything Mince could do to stop him.

Her name was Maria, Big Joe said. She had golden skin and a salamander tongue. He paused and drank back some of the whiskey. If I'm going to die, I'd rather it happen inside her, he said. It was holy inside there. He finished what was left in his glass. Cursed Len for taking so long with the water. He stood and paced across the rotted floor boards.

The dog's almost ready, Mince said. It made him nervous to have Big Joe pacing back and forth, standing over him and breathing into his hair.

Almost ready, Big Joe said.

Becky Jackson was my first, Mince said. She was my babysitter.

Mince was a neighborhood dog, Big Joe said. Then my sister. He rested his large hands on Mince's shoulders. Patted Mince's head. You never forget your first, he said. He patted Mince's head gently on top of his hair. Like he would pet a child.

Mince stood up quickly, moved across the room, around the table. It's already dark out there, Mince said. He moved to the window. The moon cast a faint glow over the world outside. The tall weeds and dead grass. The dark outlines of the evergreens stood over them like large looming scarecrows.

I remember when it wasn't so dark, Big Joe said.

Mince saw a figure moving through the darkness, weaving through the shadows like a hobgoblin with a limp: leaning to the right. Its body twisted back and forth as though that was how it propelled itself, rearing back with the right and throwing itself forward with the left. He's coming, Mince said.

Big Joe sighed.

Len's shadow moved fast and low to the ground, his arm pulled down with the weight of the pail. His feet scurried like a possum's, and stumbled over rocks, roots, ruts. There were shadows behind his, smaller horizontal shadows pursuing. Mince counted five of them, moving towards Len in a half moon. It was too dark to see what they were, but they were something and they were after Len.

There's something out there, Mince said.

Besides Len? Big Joe said.

He's coming.

Open the door for him.

Mince didn't move from the window. He stared out at the strange shadows doubled over chasing Len, maybe twenty yards away and gaining ground. They're getting closer, Mince said.

Big Joe went to the door and flung it open. He looked for Len, but there was nothing but darkness. He heard barking close by. Canine coughs in the shadows. Len emerged from the darkness, bent and moving fast across the terrain, up the path and to the porch. He hurried inside, and told Big Joe to shut the door. Lock it tight, he told Big Joe. Big Joe did it. Len dropped the heavy pail onto the table. There's your water, he said. He saw Mince by the window. What are you doing over there? he said. The dog better not be burnt.

What are they? Mince asked. He was still watching out the window.

Wolves.

Out there? Big Joe said.

They're circling the porch, Mince said.

They surrounded me at the creek. What about the dog?

Get yourself a drink first, Big Joe suggested.

Len sat down and poured himself a tall one.

What do they want? Mince said. He watched the shadows of the wolves move around them, move around the house in the night.

The dog, maybe, Big Joe said.

Len shook his head.

The three men could hear the wolves circling around the house. Some of the wolves barked, yelped. Others howled and others answered, farther away in the darkness. Mince watched them from the window, and the other two men listened from the table. They poured drinks, but only Len drank his. Big Joe kept his ears cocked for the sounds outside. He said he thought the wolves would surround the place and wait them out. Wolves knew hunger better and longer than the three men ever had to.

One of the wolves stood a few feet from the porch and howled a haunted caterwaul, wailing like a dead thing trapped between worlds. Mince looked over at Len, and Len said, It's the others out there.

I told you we shouldn't have eaten mongrel, he said. They're here for revenge.

They'll wait us out, Big Joe said. They can last three days. Three whole days.

It's no use watching them, Len said to Mince, and drank long and pensive. Mince was looking for the flashes of faint white and gray circling in the night. It won't slow them down, Len said. Or stop them at all.

Mince came back to the table. Sat down and poured himself a tall one, too, like the other two men. All three men were quiet as they strained to listen for the wolves, trying to hear them on the porch, at the door.



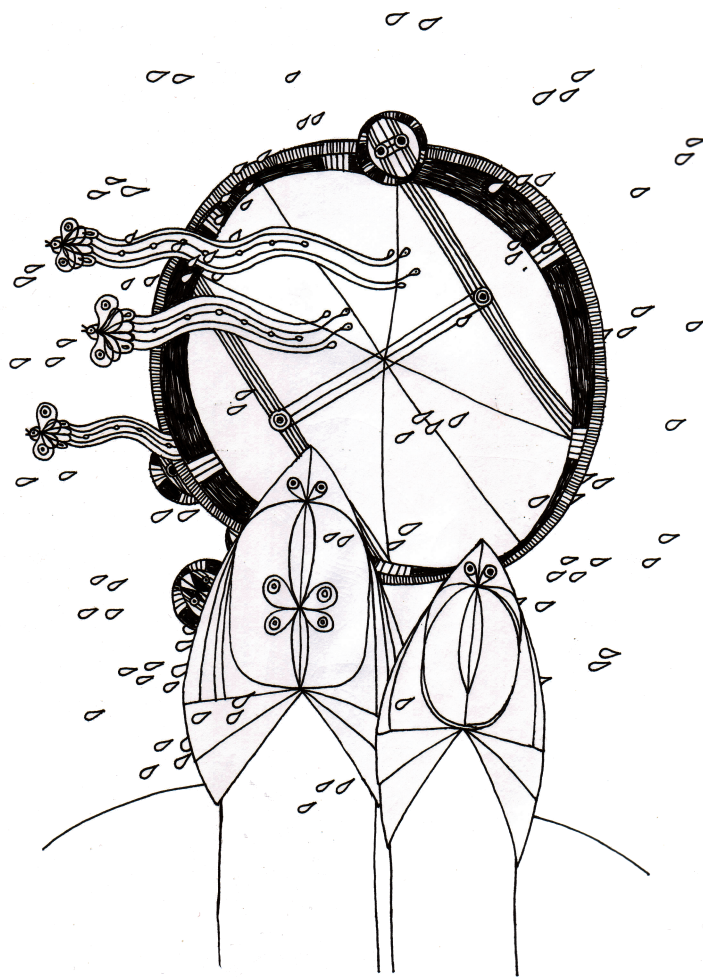
"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together."  
—Isa. lxv. 25.

# Haircut

-- Lydia Copeland



**SHE IS CUTTING HIS HAIR.** The wind is in her curls. She rises and fall like a sleeping animal. He has removed his shirt. There is a towel around his neck, the smell of spice and banana, the scent of vacations. You are reminded of the time in the beach house in Florida when you told your brother there was no Santa Clause and no Easter Bunny and no tooth fairy. These three blows in one sentence. The two of you were sharing a bed, supposed long asleep. Your brother ran crying into the living room. They asked, how could you? You said it was the truth, and, in truth, they couldn't deny it. The edge of her dress bells out in the breeze. She wears Baby's Breath all over. You see how his mustache needs trimming, how her fingers are fast with the shears. You see these things from above, on the roof outside your bedroom. The shingles are black with flecks of glitter in the light. You want to be higher than the house, want to float up, like in your flying dreams, over the tree limbs, the weather vanes, the seams of countryside. You want to slowly lift like a transparent body, like an outline of yourself, like you imagine your brother had lifted from his head and out of his bedroom and into the attic. In the attic there is old baby furniture and your mother's high school annuals and in a wooden jewelry box—your father's baby teeth. You imagine your brother must have lingered there awhile and then floated out of the house, and into the nimbus of space. That day he bled through the carpet and into the basement. Everyone had gone to the carnival to eat ice cream. He had come home to an empty house. You can hear the neighbor's fireworks, can see a trail of smoke, but there is no silver light ferning across the sky, no bloom of gun powder. It is not quite afternoon. She peels the burnt skin from his shoulders. Last week she peeled the plastic coating from the new microwave and the polish from her nails. For days you found red crescents mixed with the dirt on the kitchen floor. She dips an edge of blue soap into a glass of water, and rubs over the back of his neck. You know it is warm on his skin. You've seen her heat the water to a simmer. She will shape his hairline with her leg razor, just as she used to shape yours when you had a pixie haircut, and she told you to sit still while she palmed the top of your head and bowed you and tickled you with water, ever so gentle. She shakes the towel. He thanks her. Then he stands, lifts the shirt over his head, smooths the wrinkles from his pants. You watch as the nests of hair are swept from the porch, as they drift into the yard. There are shapes of needles in the air. Everything is light as a thread.



# A Letter to Joe Gomez

-- Louis E. Bourgeois

DEAR JOE,

In shop class, you couldn't draw a straight line. You always turned the wrench in the wrong direction, and you ruined every piece of wood you put your hands on. You were truly hated, even by the best of us. Your thick frame, plastic glasses, your sticky origami black hair, your out of date colored shirt and polyester britches, and that smell. What was it exactly? Ammonia and car grease?

Your mother was fifty when she had you. She thought you were a tumor at first, but this didn't stop you from entering the world. Not at all, it was the only attention you ever received. I had to walk the same dreary school hallways too. On Fridays, when I passed by, you were the only one who would be eating in the enormous cafeteria. The nerve! I think even the black ladies who ran the place didn't like you. They were always whispering behind your back. How sad. "To eat alone, and in our cafeteria. Shame itself!" Then there was the time, out by my grandmother's place on Bayou Sauvage when you pulled down your pants and took a dump right off the wharf. What an image you left me with on that cold October morning.

When I saw you again last year, you had finally graduated from cop school at the age of thirty. You showed no confidence, not even a little pride in knowing that you could kill us all now, legally, given the right circumstances. We still hate you, even after all this time. I've been meaning to ask you something for quite a while, Joe Gomez: if you shouldn't have been born, why do you go on living?

YOUR COMFORTER

# Home at 3 AM, After DJing the Late Shift

-- Christine Potter

All the lights are on. The kitchen's empty  
as someone who's lost her train of thought  
but is still speaking. I've been speaking for hours  
on the radio, spinning music, which  
is somewhat like work in a kitchen: hang  
the station identification on the top of each hour  
like a clean pot that fits neatly  
in the rack overhead. On the drive home,

every traffic light was green and I was so tired  
I almost forgot what that meant, how lucky it was,  
all those wordless permissions to pass. I almost forgot  
I was no longer speaking, but rolling through  
what was left of the night. If someone were awake,  
I thought, he might hear me, the smooth rush  
of my tires one long exhalation.

Much of what we hear we don't mean to.  
Like tonight, before I came in, dozens of bats  
whirled through the cedars near our door.  
A few, round-bellied, dove past lit windows,  
but I heard many wings and an impossible density  
of chirping as they followed their echoes  
to the open, black sky. And looked up at the late stars,  
unable to count all the songs.



'feeding birds'  
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([home.no.net/buxflux](http://home.no.net/buxflux))

# Longing for a Pastoral Environment

-- Maurice Oliver



In this scenario we try to slay a dragon that's really only a lizard.  
I steal the swords we use. She borrows a pair of Betty Davis eyes

but forgets to bring the Visine. Our thirst has no fear nor has it ever  
been green. She says she believes a golf course should be built

only on land overlooking the sea. I say I believe man has been  
put here to suffer especially when he's about to tee on the green.

We both agree that games should never be played in a moral  
gymnasium because the token fairway could just as easily be a

bunker. The observation podium is for onlookers to consider. The  
angels in the architecture are actually errors of Eros. And while all

of this is being sorted out, the dragon turns into a Wal-Mart store's  
restroom where all you can find is single-ply toilet paper.



# A Soldier Sways on a Swing: Episode XV

-- Liz Gallagher

Trees with bare stalks branch like capillaries for brains that have gone missing. A crippled tank is stuck in a trunk, its canon pointing limply downwards. The soothing and healing in the bible is: a cask of wine gone past its time. Vinegar tests the colour fastness of a carpet bomb and makes a naked egg blot outwards. Soldiers turn at ease from one thing to another. Moving from house to house becomes a picnic on a lawn at the Sea of Galilee. They are out of uniform and barefoot under the shade. Machine guns and sniper rifles with broad scopes lie in the grass. A father feels as if he is being buried in a sandstorm, encased in a rock like a heavy copy of his son, a fossil, the same shape as the original but emotionally changed. Destiny is heedless of how war is passed from father to son. It is in the way a father runs his hands through a son's hair or picks up a son's rifle to peer through the sights.

Is the reality on the ground, a sort of snaking forward on the world's most dangerous road to retrieve dead bodies from a tank? A Foreign Affairs Minister cannot embroider precious pearls to bullet proof jackets, just to win a wager that she could give a fortune in a single sitting. Instead she unpacks a picnic and slips away to a caravan site in France. A global battle for ideas will not douse, crack nor crumple the barriers. A soldier's foot in a black boot slips in red blood and punctuates.



*Private Paul Oglesby, 30th Infantry Regiment, inside a ruined church in Acerno, Italy*

# An American Monologue

-- Benjamin Buchholz

Name was Coleridge, how'd you get this water?, Coleridge  
was the name, I read it, you can't read, well—, castles

hunkered in the sand, flat castles, lightless at night  
to foil snipers, decreed in the pleasure dome, that's where

I got it, he came out, two of them, they came out, offering  
it like a saber of cleanliness, I was listening to them,

far away in the colleges, found these, the tapes, full of  
strange symbol and reason, college-sound, in the market

where the Turkish man in the niches of fruitseller stalls  
sells textbooks, he had a whole stack of macroeconomic—,

what?, who cares!, it isn't god and it isn't food and it  
isn't money!, who would listen to—, the boys laugh, they

run, Ishmael runs with, water in hand, runs until he, like  
all of them, stop outside the police station, breath copper

bright and ready in their lungs, laughing, Ishmael tries to  
laugh with them like usual but it comes forced and exterior

to himself, here, let us listen, they steal the headphones,  
they listen, pop the cassette player open, stomp the tape

into smithereens, the player itself shattered, dropped, and  
run, run fast, Ishmael is coming now, furious, the shrapnel

of inhuman practice, practice for growing up ordinary, hating  
anyone different, different as listening to physics

in an American monologue, comes natural gathered into arms,  
Ishmael runs with them, loses them, sees them one alley

over, thumbing noses between the chickens and raingutters,  
we hate you now, hate you, I've dreamed of castles, Ishmael

says, castles in the sand, mountains and Jenny McCarthy, he  
runs, mad, runs toward them, the focus of everything small,

red, close, soundless, soundless as screeching, the truck  
smashes into him, pops the cassette player in half.



# Old People Taking Their Shoes Off

-- Nathan Parker



They're finished, now,  
and snoring under blankets

the last snow fell from the last hat  
around two a.m.

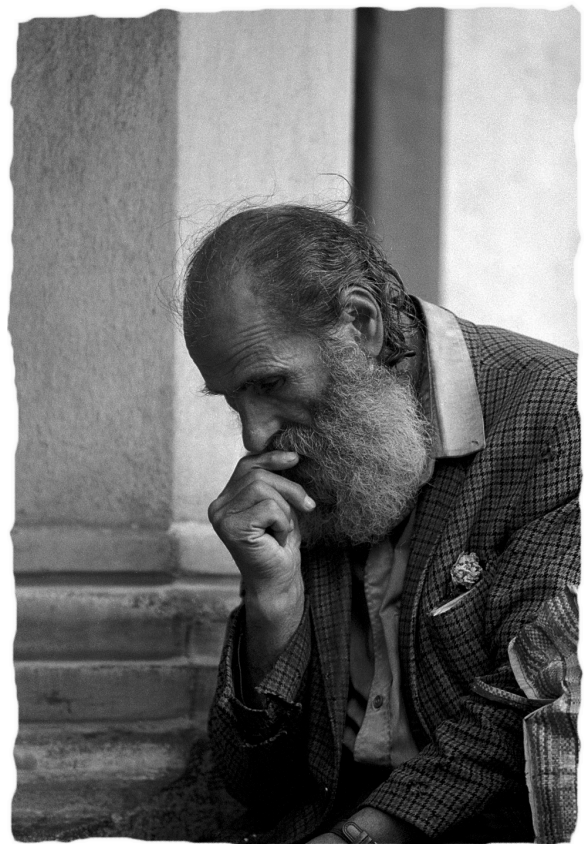
a rough-tongued pup  
drank the puddle greedily,

curled under the radiator,  
peed everywhere

I looked at myself for a long time  
in a rusty shoe horn

when after an hour I could think  
of nothing to say,

I handed the shoe horn  
to the man behind me



'Old man in Bucharest, Romania' / © 2003 Tudor Hulubei ([bulubei.net/tudor](http://bulubei.net/tudor))

from *Areas of Fog*

-- Joseph Massey



Light  
a spider scales  
one branch  
to the next  
tilts

in time  
with the wind.  
Wind

revising  
shadow  
stretched

on a flat  
patch of  
tan grass.



# Evah Fan

([www.potatohavefoes.com](http://www.potatohavefoes.com))

-- featured visual artist



"My artwork draws inspirations from weird true events, make-believes, Twilight Zone and connotations, with increased pun and narrative word-plays in mind, as I am very fond of language itself." -- *Evah* ([www.potatohavetoes.com](http://www.potatohavetoes.com))





## Contributor Notes

**Norman Ball** received a Bachelors degree from Washington & Lee University and a Masters degree from George Washington University. He opted against post-graduate work when a group of academics falsely accused him of stalking our nation's Founding Father. He lives in a tin roof shack adjacent to Mount Vernon with his English Foxhound, Martha.

**Roger Ballen** lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa. The image 'Skew mask, 2002' is from his most recent Phaidon book *Shadow Chamber* which was published in 2005 and met with much acclaim. He is currently working on a new series of works which will be published in 2008. For more information please visit [rogerballen.com](http://rogerballen.com).

**Louis E. Bourgeois** lives on a wheat farm in North Mississippi. His latest book, *OLGA*, was published by WordTech in 2005. Currently, he is completing a collection of stories entitled *The Gar Diaries*. Bourgeois is also editor of VOX.

**Benjamin Buchholz** is a US Army officer currently serving in Iraq. His short fiction and poetry have appeared widely over the last two years. For a full bibliography and other oddities please see [www.benjaminbuchholz.com](http://www.benjaminbuchholz.com).

**Lydia Copeland** lives in East Tennessee where she works in a public library. Her stories have appeared in *Elimae*, *Juked*, *The Edward Society*, and others. In 2004 she was the recipient of *Glimmer Train's* short story award for new writers. She and her husband are expecting their first baby in April.

**Eben Drews** is a man of many talents. Besides working as a freelance sketch artist and journeyman carpenter, Eben is training for his next bout as an amateur boxer in his hometown of Chico, CA, the #3 party town in America.

**Elisabet Ericson:** I draw, paint, deaign, take photos, ride my bike and animate a film about a flesh-eating squirrel. See my art at [home.no.net/huxflux](http://home.no.net/huxflux), and please visit my blog at [putapan.blogspot.com](http://putapan.blogspot.com) for the hottest news about the Squirrel of Death. I live in Stockholm, Sweden. My other blog is [gnossienne.livejournal.com](http://gnossienne.livejournal.com).

**Evah Fan** is fond of the cold climate despite the fact she grew up in sunny Southern California. She has exhibited in galleries all over the world, and her art appears in many publications. Visit her site at [potatohavetoes.com](http://potatohavetoes.com).

**Liz Gallagher** is Irish and lives in the Canary Islands, Spain. She has work published or forthcoming in *Stirring*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *Wicked Alice*, *FRIGG*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Kaleidowhirl*, *The Hiss Quarterly*, *Word Riot* and *The Mad Hatter's Review*. She placed first in the Inter Board Poetry Competition in December 2006.

**Maureen Gubia** was born in 1984 in Ecuador and lives and works in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

**Aaron Hellem's** short stories have been published most recently in *Ellipsis*, *Contrary Magazine*, *Carve Magazine*, and *Dandelion Magazine*. Works are forthcoming in the *Pisgah Review* and the *Ponhatan Review*.

**Tudor Hulubeis** works as a software developer and architect in Massachusetts. Visit his website at [www.hulubei.net/tudor](http://www.hulubei.net/tudor).

**Tammy Mallett** is a professional photographer in the San Francisco Bay Area. She photographs weddings, events, models, portraits, wildlife and scenery. You can enjoy her work by visiting her website at [www.picsbytammy.com](http://www.picsbytammy.com). She has been published in many newspapers, books, and websites.

**Joseph Massey** is the author of the following chapbooks: *Minima St.* (Range, 2003), *Eureka Slough* (Effing Press, 2005), *Bramble* (Hot Whiskey Press, 2005), *Property Line* (Fewer & Further, 2006), and *November Graph* (Longhouse, 2007). He lives in Arcata, California.

**Maurice Oliver's** poetry has appeared in *The Potomac Journal*, *Circle Magazine*, *Bullfight Review*, *Word Riot*, *Zafusy* and *Unlikely Stories*. His third chapbook, *But Mostly, Simple Precautions*, was published by LilyLit Press in November 2006. He is the proud editor of a new e-zine called *Concelebratory Shoeborn Review* ([www.concelebratory.blogspot.com](http://www.concelebratory.blogspot.com)). He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he dreams of icebergs while working as a private tutor.

**Nathan Parker** lives in Alabama with his wife and two children. Some of his recent poems have appeared in *American Letters & Commentary*, *Colorado Review*, *Conduit*, and *Octopus*.

**Christine Potter** has been head moderator at *The Alsop Review's Gazebo* for a very long time. Her first collection of poetry, *Zero Degrees at First Light* is available from Word Press. She's published work recently in *Kaliedowhirl*, *WORM*, and *Stirring*. Christine, a recovering high school English teacher, lives in a very old house on a creek, with her organist husband and two very spoiled cats.

**Caleb Puckett's** poetry is currently featured in *Otoliths*, *listenlight* and *HoboEye*, among other publications. He has a chapbook, *Desertions*, forthcoming from Plan B Press this spring.

**Terry Sanvile's** short stories have been published in *GRIT Magazine*, *BEGINNINGS*, *R-ky-ry Journal*, *The Circle Magazine*, *Falling Star Magazine*, *Pipes & Timbrels Journal*, *Tales From the Corner Anthology*, and the *About Alzheimer's* website. Terry lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife, Marguerite Costigan (his in-house editor), and two cats (his in-house critics). He is also an accomplished jazz guitarist.

**Dr. Pete Sarbone** is a fully certified life coach (CEC). He's also a sock! Guided empowerment might not seem like much help against an unexpected aneurism or a child stepping on a landmine, but Dr. Pete's empowering, life-affirming message can help lighten your slow and unending march toward old age and the realization that nothing will ever come of your life.

**Robert Sergel** lives in Cambridge, MA and tries his best to draw a comic every week. When he is not at his desk, he may be found watching movies, searching flea markets for old photographs, or playing with his band The Channels. His comics can be read at [idiotcomics.com](http://idiotcomics.com).

**Karel Sloane's** disciplines include theater, writing, film/video and visual art. Karel has been an essay semi-finalist in the Faulkner-Wisdom Writing Competition for the past two years. Her book, *With the Naked Eye*, is available on Amazon.com. She is one of Maybelline New York's Inspiring Confidence Through Education Contest for *People Magazine* winners, 2006: [www.geocities.com/adastra\\_06511/KarelSloane.html](http://www.geocities.com/adastra_06511/KarelSloane.html).

**Sam W. Stearman** resides in Hong Kong and is a travel photographer of exotic places and cultures, with emphasis on landscapes, architecture, local sights, sounds and colors, as well as of the wonderful people he meets along the way. Portfolio includes visits to six continents. Check out *Sam's Exotic Travel Photos* at [www.samsays.com](http://www.samsays.com).

**Jack Swenson** is a Left Coast writer, teacher, and curmudgeon. He is a prolific writer of short fiction. His most recent book of stories is available from the publisher at [iuniverse.com](http://iuniverse.com) and at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). The title is *Menage a Trois*. Many of his tales have appeared in online and print journals including *ken\*again*, *Pindelyboz*, *The Smoking Poet*, *Diddledog*, *Flash Flooding*, *Underground Voices* and *Taj Mahal Review*.

**Daria Tessler's** art can be found at [www.animalsleepstories.com](http://www.animalsleepstories.com).

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Excerpts

-- Here's the tragedy of the homeless: They only live for the day. They know nothing about long-term financial planning.

**Life Socks: Ask Dr. Pete,** *Dr. Pete Sarbone, page 4*

-- How many times a week can a hair-less ape summon up the requisite levels of outrage, shock, disgust and revulsion to meet the horrors of the present day?

**In the Shadow of Celan: A Journeyman Poet Dissents,** *Norman Ball, page 5*

-- The wolves knew there were three men what lived there, and that none of them had a rifle. Mince alone felt the vulnerability. His mother had been part bluebird, and his birth nearly broke her in two.

**Far From the Eyes of the Sun,** *Aaron Hellem, page 16*

-- You want to slowly lift like a transparent body, like an outline of yourself, like you imagine your brother had lifted from his head and out of his bedroom and into the attic.

**Haircut,** *Lyida Copeland, page 20*

-- We both agree that games should never be played in a moral gymnasium.

**Longing for a Pastoral Environment,** *Maurice Oliver, page 23*

-- I've dreamed of castles, Ishmael // says, castles in the sand, mountains and Jenny McCarthy

**An American Monologue,** *Benjamin Buchholz, page 25*

-- I looked at myself for a long time / in a rusty shoe horn

**Old People Taking Their Shoes Off,** *Nathan Parker, page 26*

-- My artwork draws inspirations from weird true events, make-believes, Twilight Zone and connotations.

**Evah Fan,** *page 28*