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children
churches
& daddies

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table of contents

poetry

Andrew Weigel.....1

editorial

Drugging Ourselves Into A Stupor2

poetry

Michelle Greenblatt.....5

the 2 manhattans

Advice Column6

poetry

Arthur Gottlieb8

Robert Arthur Reeves.....9

Bobbi Dykema Katsanis9

Chelsea Pitcher.....10

Tracy M. Rogers *art*10

poetry

Mark Cunningham.....12

Danny McKeever13

Cheryl Townsend *art*15

Billie McCorkle *art*16

poetry

Lisa Flaherty17

CL Bledsoe18

Karissa Askvig.....19

Jason A Wilkinson20

Josh Nolan221

Jacqueline M. Weat22

William Dauenhauer23

Marisa Foltz.....23

C. Brendan Clark24

Michelle Greenblatt.....25

prose

Ken Kash.....24

Steve Fischer.....30

philosophy monthly

Shari O'Brien36

Melissa Reid *art*.....43

Edward Michael O'Durr

Supranowicz *art*44

Scars *art*4, 8, covers

poetry

Our justice

Andrew Weigel

Here, guilt is nothing.
Remorse is everything,
their impunity.

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the boss lady's editorial

Drugging Ourselves into a Stupor

You know, I'm looking at the headline of this and thinking this is supposed to be some sort of "marijuana is bad" editorial, and it's not. I swear.

Let me break into this with personal stuff... Because of depression, which my doctor believed was the foundation for my trouble sleeping, I started taking Paxil a few months ago to calm my mood swings. It worked — even when I was taking 12.5 mg daily in the first week of testing with it (before going to 20 or 25mg, which is still a light prescription), I noticed that I didn't get angry at things going wrong any longer (not the way I did before). And yes, things still aggravate me, but now it seems that I just start to think (when I encountered a problem) that the difficulty is more of a stupid inconvenience than something I should be angry at and respond by internally blowing up.

Not bad, I guess. Take the generic to save money, and stop outwardly being such a bitch. Granted, I have to take a pill every day, but it's otherwise a good deal. Not one thing I've noticed since I've started taking Paxil is that I have absolutely no interest in working on my next novel (which I've already completed the first part of). I mean, *no* interest. Zero.

Now, I don't know about creativity being stifled with anti-depressant drugs. All I could think was that my nephew was put on Ritalin for a short while when he was in school. He was the type of boy who climbed everything, and often tried to pull stunts like hanging upside-down from a ledge on a fort he had, hoping the beams would hold him in place. Often they wouldn't and he'd fall, or he might try to pull a stunt and not realize there's a loose nail sticking out of the wood he's climbing with. It seemed like he was getting hurt a lot from rambunctious play, and he didn't pay attention in school classes. I don't think my nephew was depressed, but they decided to give him Ritalin to help him in classes, and his mother was amazed how he suddenly became more focused.

Now, I didn't really tie these two stories together (anti-depressants and creativity), until I read the article in the *Wall Street Journal* that asked about the world giving a good number of children Ritalin because they wouldn't focus in a classroom and their behavior wasn't appropriate.



There are attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder support groups that believe that often people who may have (according to the *Wall Street Journal*) “classic ADHD traits such as impulsiveness, a penchant for day-dreaming and disorganized lives,” are people who accomplished so much in their lives — and their abilities and accomplishments may have been in part *due* to their behavior.

People believed to have had ADHD: Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Salvador Dali, and Winston Churchill.

I know, I know, you can think Salvador Dali was only capable of surreal pieces like “The Persistence of Memory, 1931” (you know, the melting clock print that everyone in college years ago seemed to have on their dorm room walls), but he was actually extremely talented painter and created a wide variety of extraordinary pieces. And I don’t think anyone can say anything bad about the ability of Churchill or the wonder of Albert Einstein. I mean, think about it: what if Edison was drugged and



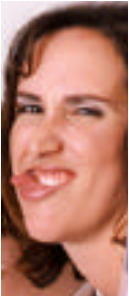
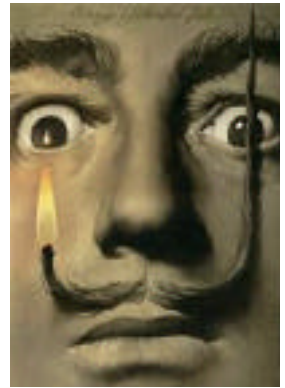
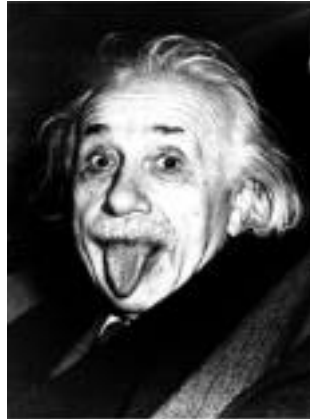
told to sit and pay attention to the teachings of others, instead of inventing on his own?

I think it was after I read the article in the *Wall Street Journal* that I made the possible connection between my writing and the Paxil. So I started searching the Internet for information. No one could say anything definitely, and I know I have a low prescription, but I read this line from a man named Barry, who posted this in <http://www.rxlist.com/rxboard/>:

“The most brilliant and successful people have suffered from depression since the beginning of humanity. Albert Einstein and Abe Lincoln come to mind. Makes sense, actually. Think positive, as it can be responsible for great creativity.”

Is he suggesting that depression may be a symptom of those who are truly creative? I don't know the answer, and I don't think anyone can prove what he says.

But today, I think I'll start taking half of my prescription dosage, and see if my creative juices start flowing again.



Janet Kuypers
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

P.S. (later editor's note):

When my sleep didn't get better after taking Paxil, the doctor instantly switched me to Effexor. I didn't know a thing about this *new* drug, and after a month my sleep *still* didn't change. So I told the doctor I was just going to stop taking the drugs. Since then my sleep hasn't really changed, I don't think I'm that moody, and I've been writing like mad. It's good to get my creativity back, and not take drugs...

poetry
the passionate stuff

Being Bipolar is Fun

Michelle Greenblatt

Being Bipolar is kinda
Fun, right?

The depression gets you way into T.V.
I'm an NBC
Addict. I've softened
My side of my hard
Spring Mattress and flattened my fluffy
Pillows.

Mania? I don't have it the best; it's
Dysphoric in its nature, but I get
A lot done

Anyway.

Plus I have OCD
In an original sorta way
See, I can
Think the same thought
Think the same thought
Think the same thought
Obsessively

Until I compulsively
Pick up the phone
And call him 50 times,
Maybe more.

Plus the Panic Disorder
(Which I think is giving me
Me an ulcer)
Makes the hair on my arms
Stand up and salute
This power—

And powerful it is
The panic
The fear
The surges
The urges
The crackling of the air
In my yellow
Lightning shot
Eyes
The shallow breaths
The only breaths
My lungs can draw
In

But I get along okay
Because my Borderline Personality
Lets me charm and discard
At will.

11.8.2004



“A questioning breeze stirred my curtains; its name was unknown to me as it told its tale of yearning.” Anonymous

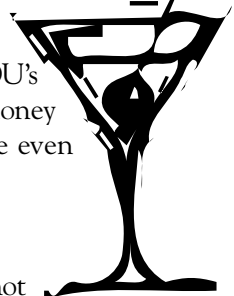


Welcome friends! I take it this missive finds you well. When last we talked, winter still held sway over the northern latitudes. Gladly, spring has since arrived in all its full pageantry. We are given cause for celebration--huzzah!

And now, formalities out of the way, let us on to the letters go. Our first writer hails from the flinty Northeast:

“Dear Sir, How does one broach the topic of IOU’s unpaid among friends? I loaned a friend a large sum of money a couple of months ago and he still hasn’t refunded me even though I know he has the ability to do so.”

G. Sandstrom, Fort Sumter MA.

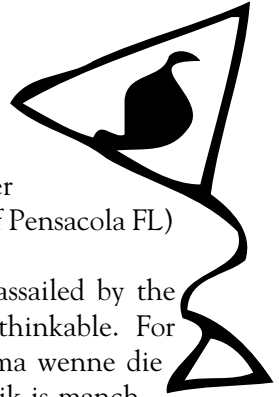


Yours is a tight bind indeed gentle reader and one not unfamiliar to these eyes. Fortunately, I have the answer you seek. The path of open diplomacy is the road to take. A true friendship is of greater value than any amount of funds. You have trusted this person enough to call them friend. Follow through on your declaration and rely on the implicitly stated trust therein. A gentle clear-eyed reminder is all that is required for your funds to be returned. After that, there is always small claims court.

At this point I suggest we refresh our spirits and freshen our spirits, which brings us to this issue’s (nearly) perfect Manhattan:



2 oz bourbon
1/2 oz sweet vermouth
1 dash of bitters
Rim the glass with freshly ground black pepper
(as suggested by long time reader, S. Bullock of Pensacola FL)



Frequently in these turbulent times we are assailed by the unknowable, the unfathomable, the seemingly unthinkable. For after all wasn't it Nietzsche who said "Der hamma wenne die unm^glichsten spr,nge machen kannst, kla, realitik is manchmal auch recht lustig"? Ah yes, *recht lustig* indeed.

Nevertheless we must ever onward trek. In that frame of mind, let us take a moment to have the readers consider this question from the friendship state.

"Why always Manhattans? Don't you ever mix it up a little and try a new drink?"

J. Wallat, Lancaster PA

Your clarion call has been heard my friend and I am here to address it. In honor of warmer weather I am happy to present a cocktail which will put the starch back into your shorts after a long day's sweat.

The Fiddlehead
3oz bourbon over four ice cubes
2 tablespoons lemon sorbet
1 oz club soda
Stir until sorbet has liquefied.

With that, I must say farewell for tonight. The sun is setting while the cool evening gathers. We're going out tonight to talk and eat with friends.



Yours, Two Manhattans.

First Day

Robert Arthur Reeves

It means being willing to learn
that everything you call your personality,
your life, is a Mardi Gras mask
with feathers blocking the eyeslits,

that all your values are mudbanks
of trenches prone to wet weather,

that blood rolls into the face
without warning, and makes it a strange face
peppered on slipping skies.

Your name cringes
to hear itself spoken.

Lust's raps on you have echoes
and you learn you're only as mighty
as an opening gate.

Wild Turkey,

neat

Bobbi Dykema

Katsanis

she's a poet
from a family where words
were doled out by the teaspoonsful—
their medicinal qualities undiluted.

she still likes her words
straight up
no water

is greatly irked by those
who talk too much
with nothing to say

she cannot taste the whiskey
in the downpour

Imaginary Precipitation

Chelsea Pitcher

The problem is that
Most of the time I am
Not only
Separated from it all,
Above it;
I am in another realm watching, as if through the
Portal of a dream,
A part of, and yet
Separate from,
Watching a
Scene unfold.



Clouds13, art by Tracy M. Rogers

Tracy M. Rogers, Editor and Creative Architect for *The Aurora Review: An Eclectic Literary and Cultural Magazine*, is a photographer, writer, and web designer. She grew up in Fayetteville, a college town in northwestern Arkansas. She holds a history degree from the University of Arkansas and dropped out of graduate school due to “creative differences” with her faculty advisors. Her poetry can be found in *Poetry Kit Magazine* and the current issue of *Prism Quarterly*. When she is not masterminding *The Aurora Review*, Tracy is either busy writing her first novel or working on her ongoing “Clouds” photo project.

Maybe I am on a cloud, but the cloud sits in a
Magical world,
Evaporating into rain on a rainforest
That no longer even exists in the real world,
Burned down years ago to be turned into
Grazing land for creatures renamed
Cattle,
To slaughter and pound into patties
To send off to fast food franchises
Across the burning, fuming globe,
To turn to rolls of fat,
Fuel and excess to cover
The binge generation,
Until lawsuits are brought forth
To excuse each one's lack of control,
So that they may be given the currency
To have the proof of over-indulgence sucked out
With a medically sanctioned vacuum cleaner,
Made new again, under
Sagging flesh and
Able to,
Guiltlessly, this time,
Consume
All the world's resources
In their greedy mouths and
Chubby hands.

You can wonder all you want about
Where I go,
But at least
Now
You don't have to ask
Why.

American Bittern

Mark Cunningham

Courtney enjoyed a Happy Meal when she was eight or ten, but she'd also stare out the passenger window at cement pours around some scabbled up corner and say, "What about the animals that live there?" or "They could have put a playground there." I thought: now's the time. I'll teach her to get the most from our limited money. She won't be a typical American; she won't get fooled into buying the first cheap thing she finds. We started with backpacks at Wal-Mart. We counted the number of pockets and examined the probably Chinese stitching to guess how long it would last. We went to Target. We compared blue backpacks with no ornaments to green backpacks with Bugs Bunny on them. Courtney said some of the packs at Wal-Mart had other pockets for pencils in the smallest front zippered pocket. I made a note. We drove to K-Mart. We scouted the outdoor section to see if the packs there were better than those in the back-to-school section. We went to a bookstore for coffee and hot chocolate while we decided. I stood in line. Courtney remembered she needed a raincoat. We used more gasoline.

Sanderlings

Mark Cunningham

At first, I thought the white wash of clouds was the birds. Then I saw them, fifteen or eighteen, twenty-two was the most I counted, many with three or four legs, in Morris Grave's gouache of them, slivers and tubes picking at surf-scatter, one in front I swear had five. They've stayed with me longer than Audubon's eagle or Picasso's dove; they were unexpected. Who knows where I read that a particle of Julius Caesar's final exhale is in 99% of the inhales I take now. I remember a *Cosmo* survey that reported that 18% of women masturbate once a week, and 11% once a day--but how current is this? I wanted to ask a coffeehouse crush, white t-shirt, black bra, out for, well, coffee, I figured it was a good time (re: *Cosmo*), her head would have rested right in the curve of my collar bone, I asked her about the book she had with her, set up the next conversation, the ask-out one, but it never happened. She took a week off, and by the time she returned, we'd broken up in my imagination, because I ran out of things to say to her.

Art Amidst Stasis

danny mckeever

I don't know who you think I am but let me tell you just in case you
missed it. I'm a short white irish italian I smoke I drink I think
therefore I write my heart out on these pages
I bleed for the world everytime I take stages and make them conversations
when the homeless sage asks for a dollar I find the need for love to be
contagious
I read newspapers filled with marketing target bullshit phrases
selling faces in pain to shaky nicotine stained hands and it burns
hotter in me than a pile of streetwise garbage can blazes
I can't erase this compassion or this need to take action over social
states of stasis
our oasis isn't nameless it's the fraction of empathic love
we feel when we share our world with faceless strangers
the greatest danger we confront is our utter lack of bluntness
when talking about the history of american cages
my social studies days were lost in the lies of eighth grade textbook mazes
comprised labryinths of white supremacist justifications
I don't blame the teachers they aren't paid enough to know the difference
between slave wages and railroad migrant asians
when they take the train they don't remember the chain gangs that
laid the track or
how broken backs gave way to gospel the hot spell of crime in these
absent minded times might simply the rind of a watermelon
left to rot for ages
and I'm afraid the hype about my generation will be lost to our doped
up hazes or
that we'll choke when it's time to stand and be counted amongst those
minds
that still might save us
all the time blinded by the prospect of fame our artists tame their rages
miss the point and wind up famous
forgetting that their passion used to be to pave the path for changes
and the aftermath of greedy art is the start of something dangerous

while collar greens boil on ghetto ranges link card exchanges WIC for
NAACP starbucks coffee grazers raising doubt about the validity of
Jessie Jackson's armored chevy blazers rainbows push the poor into
shallow graves of poverty and the money from the lottery
funds the schools with wooden nickles
and infants from the thighs of teen age babies rain like skittles
it's a whistle stopping traffic in my mind when it's more important to find
invisible missiles in Iraq than to counteract the terrorism of assault
rifles attacking
our south side neighborhoods where crack is sold like chiclets to children
dodging bullets between mid terms and prison
hung up on american cages
it's just the way it is some things will never change
it's just the way it is some things will never change

like I'll never grow taller and I'll always love pasta with maranara
the way my nonni used to make before she lost her mind
and while
north side waiters powder noses between shifts and kids
overdosing in the desert raves of california
while sex slaves are being trafficked from czechoslovakia to the united
states and
russian women sold as wives to lonely americans on web pages and while
supreme courts consider telling us what marriage is while
considering death sentences for 17 year old gang bangers while
sudanese blood flows out from continents we choose to forget about and
the maoris in New Zealand sing the songs of their slain ancestors while
my grandmother forgets who she is in an alzheimers clinic
thinks I'm her husband one minute, a stranger the next while
a college degree gets people lower paying wages and machines replace
millions
who used to bag groceries while
families are starving and mommas can't get daddies to help pay for their
babies and the village it once took to raise a child has been
replaced by a welfare check
that doesn't even cover the cost of a decent calculator, while
governors increase tolls for roads that are already paid for but doesn't
bother
with the pot holes crippling cars south of the south loop, while
we fight wars we weren't asked to and build walls between our friends with

callous words and cowboy slang while
artists on the radio make it fashionable to kill people and
priests make confessing a matter of sexual deviance, while
our grievances go unanswered and we look out for ourselves
I see only people holding mirrors up so that they feel less alone
you may not know me but I tell you again in case you missed it
my namesake is irish but my earthquake is human
my soul is your shoe and my poems are true cause my lies are too boring
I don't have the solutions to every problem I listed
I just wish our poets would try not to be so Def so that they could become
better listeners I wish they would worry more about honesty and less
about celebrity
that's too much to ask from a poverty consciousness but when an artist feels
so poor so unheard
that they take the spoken word and turn it into a commercial and
rehearsal after rehearsal for that one big slam that will put them on t.v. and
make them the fantasy they never felt they achieved that is when art
bleeds integrity and the sharks of contradiction swallow the
whole fuckin scene
when the only thing that matters is not how far you've come or
how much green you've amassed but
how many people are bettered for you having
passed from your mother's tit to an earthen pit.



Birthday Fairy, art by Cheryl Townsend

Alcatraz
art by Billie McCorkle



Dead Share

Lisa Flaherty

At once, a heart thimble, an armor of gestures, I look on
as you stumble (the wrong way) home, with
 a girl. What makes you stumble?
My decision to wear a black dress?
my faithless grin
a clog, a gargle, a sigh
 the animation in a small room, the able-bodies writhing,
my rest against your fits, the swagger perfect, an
expensive sweater - scratched to be fashionable -
 the poses I create and shake off like shale
you under the canopy with me and my new lover
the imaginary storyboard of my ride home
the possible mathematics, a car-full of drama, the cats
howling in our wake
the trains dragging
the closet visits, the lust and regret, the name
 at the top of the list?
Someone I don't know is in my bed, and it's evil,
the way I crawl in.

3 Fragments

CL Bledsoe

1

People chatter like birds also similarly leave pamphlets about
redemption
 splattered
on my windshield
 from a distance they appear to be parking tickets
so that whenever I see anything religious
 I'm instantly angry

2

Someone tell me why the wind tastes like
burger king why the rain plops splatters gives the dirt
cellulite We are so stupid we believe what we
 tell us we deserve what's coming to us They
deserve worse Eat till your heart's content
 if it ever is send me the recipe

It isn't so much the smell of traffic as the taste
 of asphalt under our tongues when we jump
I've noticed no one corrects me when I mention
 that all we need is rev
olving doors (no fibber's going to get me)

3

Eat everything on your plate whether hungry or simply
out of greed otherwise we eliminate the disparage-
ment
 between the classes I noticed in my university days
 the dynamic of students' standing around
in front of each building determined the major
represented by that building for example
the English building was surrounded by smoking
 professors students sucking

up to them boredly discussing cultural happenings

the business building was full of people standing
in the halls talking If there were only two
people they'd be arranged so as to obstruct
as much traffic flow as possible I'm not saying this
was on purpose it's more meaningful
as a coincidence

Lonely

Karissa Askvig

Shining blue circles
Looking over a fence
At two boys.
Fighting
Over one truck
The blue circles filled
And tears fell
A wish was made
To have someone
Anyone
To fight with.

The same circles
Still looking
This time out of a bus
They saw
People
Holding hands
Smiling, laughing
Another wish
Another day
The same feeling.

Trans-Galactic

Jason A Wilkinson

my spaceship crashed
now what do I do maybe
I'll start a religion
have them
traipsing around on all fours
looking for me
under stones
ruined buildings
;give them stupid hats to wear
that never fit attractively
I'll tell them that
they are not animals that
they are BETTER that
a capitalist hierarchy is marvelous
because everyone is so full of charity
be advised:
fucking and sucking
are way too enjoyable (you need a
degree of separation between
master +servant don't you?)
-not till Heaven till
the bombs drag this little outhouse away
into vibrating strings
cracked eyes/bikini tops
petticoats till the sky is rouge certainly
anything named Babel was
ripe to fall
like Hitler and Mondale
Thalidomide and Free Speech
I'll prophesize Armageddon then
hand them the tools to achieve it
desert into glass rip out the page and
take it from the top.

What Its Like

Josh Nolan

dishonored dogs, ostricized and
 fermenting in cowls towards
lonely experience moonlight
 straying from the constant
contact of conciousness, knowing
 God without death, death without God

this spastic journey of life
started way back, before belief of beyond
only sharing someone else's past
re-living the same punishments
another pipe-dreaming soul's fight for survival
belittled, plagued by a festering torment

i'll go gray and stiff dreaming under crucifix
wasting smiling, clockwork fakes thinkwork
celebration, barbaric chanting, faster than beauty

simplicity opened
slow motion soft
jittered fact and fiction

candy-coated worries lie in
 flashing pan memories
seemingly infinite infantile stupor
 profane and sacred meaning search
when inside the world comes off

Daughter to Mother

Jacqueline M. West

You went temporarily blind
somewhere in the Black Hills.
July 1989:
Through two days of driving
you dozed in the passenger seat,
dried contacts sticking to your eyes,
and woke with sclera pink as candy,
lids limned with saline, matted and swollen.
In the damp darkness
we came to the campground,
and you had to be led from car to tent.
I, the only other “lady” in our family,
took you to the Ladies’ Room;
waited, as you had always done
beside the sinks, keeping up a flow of talk
for you to follow like a string.
Then I brought you back to bed
through the obstacle course of trailers and grills,
smug in my needful function.

I was nine.
We had reversed.

Once I was no more of you
than an eyelash, a strand of hair;
a minute Eve stemmed from your surplus.
Your need splits the last root.
I can hear you sigh behind me,
watching one rebellious leg
run off on its own.
I am still yours,
still something I’ve stolen.

Political Carnage is the Last

William Dauenhauer

Political carnage is the last
resort for those that would
impose their self-centered
opinions on the world.
It's called armed conflict,
warfare, political action--
it is political bare faced,
statecraft showing its true colors.

Political carnage fills
the void when threat or ruse
or mere persuasion fail
to acquire the desired ends.
We dress young flesh in uniforms
before the fulsome sacrifice--
proffer encouragement, advice,
recommend raw heroism.

LAMENT

Marisa Foltz

Morning,
heavy with silence
A captainless ship
has been set adrift.
It floats with an imploring past
that lingers, heavier
than the fog that has
ascended upon this
mirror lake
of a thousand reflections
that hold on to nothing.

BLACK WIDOW

C. Brendan Clark

A dirty hotel,
in a filthy city,
prompts us to engage in acts even less lovely.
The years stretch across empty promises,
till they forget their way back to where we began.
The hourglass unwinds as memories sway in a sober tide
of everything I always longed to love escaping from.

But how you captivate me
in your self seducing vibrancy.
While all the drab feelings that you shape,
remind me of the webs I could never escape.

And I am trying to run but I am lost in dark eyes,
burning with the shrill obscenity of frozen romance.
Tangling myself in the memory of raven strands,
woven into locks of enchanting disillusion.
Climaxing in a spell of skin so satin and pure
I disappear in the intoxication of disguising a dream.
Imprisoned by emotions I can't let go,
I tried to run, but I'm out of breath.

You've always made me show myself.
Helped me come to know myself.
Showed me how to elate myself.
And finally how to hate myself.

Or rather the emptiness between us.
The silence we proliferate.
The hollow years bound by fate and fears.
But we shall never come undone,
only spend some time untangled.
I'm not drawn to you, though you always find me.
Always find a way to spin your web around me.
My cruel, eternal, occasional mistress.
My dear consuming Loneliness.

1838 Days- Some Bitterness & Sentimental Crap

Michelle Greenblatt

I wake to Kyle typing on my computer

sometimes I have trouble telling him there is a split melon in my stomach

I think he understands anyway

but maybe not the part about its guts seeping thru the mucous

membranes that line the protective edges

so it doesn't enter my bloodstream

& it does

this is where I learned it. after pounding my head

vigilantly against the stone complaints of others for maybe

8 years while being so hungry my stomach started digesting

itself, melon & all, I finally spoke the obscure, "objectively,

I think, maybe it's time for restitution." perhaps it wasn't

so objective but

someone had to intervene & best it be me lest it be
love on fire hurling days & months (60 months, 12 days) since
I was fucked with a gun & have never been the same, the spark
in my skull musty

though still burning I should have hurled it at him before
he told his friends I was crazy & a liar because that's when
I started to disfigure my fingers. consider this, then: 1838
days to slash my fingertips so I couldn't write but then
type with my tongue because I can't not be what I am. I may still
hold fire, but I'll never take anything
with me except what I cannot slice off my brain & some recognizable
poems. & Kyle. & Kyle. by the second month I knew my laughter sounded
strained so
imagine what it sounds like now : a sort of shrieking.

how can I help it? for the last few years I've been working! on:
punctuation? because I see poetry / lack of it / what resembles it
as something more important as anyone's self. stick me in a sarcophagus;
don't think I haven't been there. lowercase Me to i. i didn't have a chance
after the second burial but i kept trying. so the lesson would be
i came around knowing once someone knows your legs are shapely
& your face is pretty & so thinks you are a joke [Ha] the inscription
is nice enough best to just stay there

& trace the boisterous noise with your inner ears
of those crazy enough to not label themselves “Insane” or “Addicts”
but to call you “Accursed” & maybe teach you once you are underground
you can finally learn to uppercase Yourself

when Kyle unburied me I thought of a rose ashed to dust a garden
a garden of dust a different voice I thought I’d try a different voice
& maybe take my medications all 9 of them, best to sheath myself
I’m best sheathed
sheathed shucked when he said he’d suck my purling river
out well he did he certainly did but Kyle wakes me with soft
kisses the river a dry trickle relentless & building a dry mouth
finding saliva, after being fucked into dust, dust revived first into
Bride of Frankenstein & then resembling something a little more a little more
with
her own body parts. .

Kyle waits patiently though he wants to kill Aidan & find the fist sarcophagus
& all the cenotaphs he built while I watched from behind a tree
the funeral services held for me
Kyle waits for me to wake up (still) kissing me & waiting for the mustard
seed to blossom.

4.12.2005

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

The Presentation of Billy Bordano

Ken Kash

John Gold walked for hours – covered in blood. His journey began deep within the wilderness at the crack of dawn. John reached his final destination at nine forty-five a.m. He snuck around the side of a small, brick house and peered inside a window.

John saw his longtime friend, Arnold Haywood. Arnold, always considered very eccentric, sat in his living room this Saturday morning, painting his lips black. Arnold wore an oversized muumuu, something he did quite regularly, even though he was very tall and lanky.

John shook his head and walked around to the front door. He rang the doorbell. Arnold opened the door a moment later with a smile on his face. When Arnold saw the blood on John, his smile faded.

John knew why Arnold's smile faded. He saw blood covering John's face, neck and shirt. A gash circled its way around his left eye. Minor abrasions littered the rest of his face. Some blood appeared to be splattered, some appeared to drip down his chin and some blood belonged to John.

"Are you okay?" Arnold asked.

"This cannot be. I refuse to accept it. I refuse to believe it; but I do," John answered.

"What happened?" Arnold asked.

"If you want me to leave I'll understand," John said.

"No, no, come on inside."

Arnold led John inside and to a La-Z-Boy. Before Arnold sat down on his couch, he removed his muumuu to maintain some semblance of normalcy. He now wore mesh shorts and a tank-top (and black lipstick).

"Do you need anything?" Arnold asked.

"Just for you to listen," John replied.

"Okay, I'm listening."

"Every human being on earth knows me as John Gold. But the ones down there know me as 'Sleeping Ali Baba'."

“Who are the ones down there?” Arnold asked.

“Just listen. I have always been considered the normal one and you have always been the weird one. Yet nothing very strange has ever happened to you. Let me tell you something Arnie; there are demons and they are everywhere...

It all started last Thursday. I have had the same Thursday routine for fifteen years. I woke up at six thirty, shaved, showered, had breakfast with my wife and kids and went into work. I walked to my secretary Freida’s desk and we previewed my day. I had a staff meeting at ten, a conference call at one thirty and a projections review with my Director of Finance at four. My day went smoothly and the next thing I knew it was five. I didn’t quite feel like going home so I stayed.

After twenty minutes of staring at my computer screen, Freida said I had a man to see me. His name was Billy Bordano. I had never heard of the man, but was in no hurry to leave, so I had Freida show him to my office.

The man who walked in looked like a cleaned-up rock star. He had jet-black hair pulled into a neat ponytail in the back of his head. It looked like he used excessive amounts of hair gel. He had a thin goatee and was wearing suit as black as his hair. I couldn’t quite place the designer. His dress shirt was white and he wore a silk, solid-red tie.

‘Mr. Bordano, is it?’ I asked.

‘Yes. Thank you for seeing me on such an unexpected visit,’ he replied.

‘No problem. What is it I can do for you?’

‘Well I know it’s a longshot but I’d like to do advertising for your company. I know you already have somebody but I believe I could work wonders for your business.’

The man was obviously an amateur; but I needed a good laugh before I went home. So I asked, ‘What did you have in mind?’

‘I’m glad you asked. The first thing I need to know is the last time you replaced a light-bulb in your office.’

‘Huh?’

‘I’m just kidding. Now listen. Advertising is getting your product in consumers’ minds by any means, half consciously and half unconsciously. For the next five minutes, you’re going to be listening to me; but at the same time, you will wonder what light-bulb you changed last, and maybe which one will burn out next. Would you say that’s accurate?’ he asked.

‘Very,’ I replied. I was beginning to think he was unconventional but maybe not an amateur.

‘Good. We’re getting somewhere. Now I don’t need to tell you how much impact media – newspapers, television and movies, have on our lives.

For instance, did you ever see the movie Fight Club?’

‘No,’ I replied while thinking now I’ll get to laugh. He is an amateur.

‘Well one specific scene in a recent movie had a huge impact on me. There is a scene where the two main characters are driving down a freeway. They are having an argument about many things but the one point is control. Now I believe that control is an illusion. No matter how much you think and believe you have it, you really don’t. The two characters are verbally fighting in the car. The character driving the car convinces the man in the passenger seat to let go of control. Brad Pitt is the character driving and takes his hands off the wheel. Edward Norton is the passenger and he quickly puts on his seatbelt. They let go of control and crash into a parked car. Since watching that scene, a day hasn’t gone by where I haven’t thought about doing that. When I’m driving in my car and see a bend ahead in the road, I always wonder what would happen if I let go of the steering wheel? Where would I end up? Would I get hurt? If so, what would get hurt and what would eventually stop the car? But I never have the guts to do it.

‘Now that’s advertising. That scene is a subliminal message your brain transfers into your idea. Now my advertising company can do that with your products. We put the message into the heads of the masses. Your product will be in their head so much they will have to buy it or go mad. What do you think?’

He was a very good speaker but an amateur businessman. However, I could use a guy like him on my sales staff. He was enigmatic but honest. He had great energy but in no way was I going to switch advertising companies. I’d been with the other firm for ten years.

I said, ‘you’ve come a little late in the day, Mr. Bordano. Why don’t you put something more specific on paper and we’ll talk.’

He replied, ‘I will. Thank you for your time.’

He stood up and gave me his business card. We shook hands and he left. I sat down in my chair and thought about the presentation of Billy Bordano.

The next week was a blur. I couldn’t concentrate on anything. All I could think about was - my name is John Gold and I have always been in control, or had I? Is control possible? Where does it come from? I tried and tried to get these thoughts out of my head but for some reason I couldn’t.

I didn’t hear from him again. I called him but the number was disconnected. I wanted to know how he put those thoughts into my head. I never, ever questioned myself before I met Billy Bordano.

Then last night something happened to me. I had my normal, seemingly controlled day and had just started my twenty-five minute commute home. It was Friday; I knew traffic would be horrible, so I decided to take back roads on my way home.

Night shrouded its black cloak over us early last night. I was driving down a road I've driven literally hundreds of times. The road was eerily dark and empty. The streetlights were unlit and trees swallowed my car like a snake.

I have no idea why I did what I did next. An irresistible urge took control of my mind and body. The compulsion told me to let go of the steering wheel. I succumbed to the impulse. A left turn came upon me and my car kept straight. My car bounced and jerked down a hill, entering deeper and deeper into the woods. The adrenaline rush was exhilarating - until an Oak Tree abruptly stopped my descent.

The next thing I knew, I was on the ground. I felt a fresh, warm trickle of blood running down my face. I knew I had a nice cut above and around my left eye. I was only semi-conscious when I saw an unbelievable sight.

I saw a house in the middle of the woods. It looked like any normal white house and even had a white picket fence. My ears were ringing; but I could hear noises emanating inside the humble abode.

I was able to stand up and limped to the front door. I knocked and a raspy voice answered, 'What's the password?'

The fantastic words which escaped my lips gave me the nickname 'Sleeping Ali Baba.' - OPEN BLOODY PIG.

The door opened and I stumbled in the house. My vision was blurry but I know what I saw. It looked like a costume party but there were no costumes. Beasts inside the house danced with awful gyrations.

I saw human-like beings, covered in hair with beady eyes and big sharp teeth. They were playing instruments. I saw little gremlin-like characters on a stage singing, 'I don't believe in charityyyyyy, I do believe in sin. If you want you're gonna bleeeeed and we're here to tell you why. I really hate societyyyyy, God never really liked me. Our goal is to punish thooooose who really think they're good.'

A man without a face handed me a challis. He had no eyes, no nose, no mouth, not even ears. I lifted the challis and drank what was unmistakably blood. I gagged and dropped the challis.

When the challis hit the floor, the crowd became silent. Everything looked at me. A mammoth monster with three arms (the third protruding from his chest) grabbed me. He led me up stairs and shoved me through a door.

The second floor was worse than the first. The entire floor was one room. Horribly deformed creatures, weeping, filled the room. A being with no arms, no legs, one eye, a crooked nose and half a mouth lay on the carpet. One poor soul, with two holes where eyes used to be, was naked and had no genitalia. Its near-lifeless body hung from a noose. I needed to leave the room before I vomited. I found another set of stairs. I ran up them and went through a door at the top.

The third floor was different from the other two floors. The third split into separate rooms. A naked man, lying on the floor with at least a dozen female vampires all over him created the scene in the first room. They encircled him and sucked his blood. The man stared at me as he lost all color. I couldn't take it and exited through the door to my left.

The next room I entered was horrendous. A naked woman was tied to the wall as a beast chomped away at her stomach. The sick part was that a baby cried inside her womb. The beast was eating the child too. I exited the room by means of a door to the far right.

An orgy filled the next room. It was an orgy of beasts and vampires's. They were also biting each other. Each bite drew blood and their mouths came away with flesh. I exited stage right.

Hanging, dead beasts, gremlins and vampires packed the next room I entered. They were all half-eaten. I needed to escape this madness. I found another door to my right. As I placed my hand on the knob, I realized the next room was the center room and would be the last. I entered.

Lit candles filled the center room. A red carpet lined on each side with fantastically beautiful women, masturbating, stood at my feet. A king's throne, raised on an altar, shined majestically at the end of the red carpet. A man was sitting in the chair, beckoning me.

I slowly walked toward the man. As I reached the edge of the throne, I saw the ringleader of this lunacy. It was Billy Bordano.

He pointed at me and said, 'You, John Gold, are the very definition of normalcy on earth. Get on your knees and bow to me as I speak,' he commanded.

The women of the room surrounded me. They all held daggers in their hands. I was trapped. I feared for my life so I bowed. I asked, 'What do you want from me?'

He stood and then said, 'You never understood that earth is not about money, power, or control. It is about flesh. So I had to destroy you. You let go in your car now let go with us. Partake in our feast tonight. You will sing, eat and fuck with us tonight or you will die. Not only will we end your life, but also the lives of your wife and children. They will be tortured, raped, eaten and burned. Are you with us tonight?'

The women ripped off all my clothes. They held daggers to my throat, chest, stomach and crotch. Billy Bordano knelt down in front of me. He asked again, 'Are you with us tonight?'

What was I supposed to do? I had no choice but to agree with him. I spent the night with the beasts in a blood-drenched orgy. The women were the food. The beasts were the entertainment. The corpses were the wine and

Billy Bordano was the host. I cried all night and vomited about a dozen times. When the sun rose in the east, the party withdrew and I was sent away.

But before I left, Billy said to me, 'Find a friend and be with him by ten. At that time we will come for you.'

I didn't want to jeopardize my family so I came here. I didn't know who else to go to."

"Why in the hell did you come HERE?" Arnold asked.

"I don't know why I came here; but I know it's one minute 'till ten," John replied.

Arnold laughed and said, "Okay, okay, you got me. Quit playing around."

"I'm not playing around," John said. "You have always wanted the strange and unusual. Now you will have it."

The house began to gently shake. Figures inside the walls circled the living room. As their horrible faces begin protruding through the walls, Arnold could tell they were every bit as horrible as John described them.

Arnold momentarily froze with fear. The beasts broke through the walls. Arnold shed his prison of fear and tried to run. John tackled him by the ankles. Hairy, overgrown beasts with giant claws grabbed Arnold. They sliced his neck, back, chest, and stomach. He screamed in agony. John watched all this happen to his friend. To his surprise, he didn't feel regret.

The male beasts retreated and the lady vamps attacked. They licked and sucked at Arnold's wounds. Like vultures, the gremlin-like creatures chewed at his limbs. Arnold tried to kick and punch but his strength faded fast.

John maintained eye contact with Arnold. With his eyes, Arnold pled for John to help him. John did not. He would not lift a finger. It was better for this to happen to Arnold than John's wife and children.

John broke the eye contact and let Billy Bordano take his place. Billy knelt on one knee and looked down upon Arnold. Billy said, "We are the corrupters. We take the normal, the good, and the naïve and turn them into crazed monsters. Everyone has a demon buried deep within him or her, no exceptions. As for you, Arnold Benson, your demons are at the surface - and well, they just don't cut it."

Billy Bordano withdrew and the monsters resumed their attack. Arnold weakly tried to fight. The beasts easily overpowered him. As John watched his best friend die, he thought - some cannot hide their demons forever. The longer the demon hides, the more it festers and grows inside you. When it comes to the surface it is bigger, uglier and much more evil than it would have been long ago. If your demon has been hidden for years, pray you never hear the presentation of Billy Bordano.

Serenity's Blues, by Steve Fischer

Friday night upstairs and Sonny Vegas crushed out another cigarette, butts filled the ashtray and I felt I was neglecting my duties here to keep up a clean bar. Give them an empty ashtray and they'll never feel guilty about how much they smoked. They'll never know, you hope. That's they way things move.

Sonny leaned against the bar; those two puffy hands clutched the rail. I know what he needs. He combs back his jet black slicked hair away from his forehead with a stubby fingered hand.

"Steve? My good man, my brother."

I could really make him sweat if I wanted to. He looked to the swinging back door for Leo or Oscar. I eyed the door too. He nodded. I nodded.

"Yes. You know. That VO. No rocks".

I reached up for the bottle. I poured generous in the empty rocks glass. Debbie slid down the bar. Sonny took a good hit of the whiskey and licked his lips slick wet.

"You think you can get Debbie her's too. You know I take care of you."

"Blackberry brandy, right?"

He snapped his fingers and pointed to me like pistols, and smiled that broken smile of his vagabond ancestors. Then he lit another cigarette and blasted smoke up into the darkness.

The dining area door squeaked open. There must be a reason all the doors squeak and creak open in this place, I mused. It's a warning. Look up from where you are. Look up from your drink. Look up and prepare to move your hand off the thigh it rests on.

It was Serenity. She stomped up and clutched her purse close. Her light blue eyes blazed reflecting the candle lit behind the bar. Her hair hung in loose auburn curls. Her large hoop earrings glimmered. She stopped my breath.

"Is Leo here tonight?" she breathed first eyes darted from door to door.

"Yeah, he's in the office." I point with my thumb. She pushed off and knocked the swinging door open with her boot. It whined and swung and stopped.

Debbie settled into the seat next to Sonny. She lit up her own slender, long cigarette as I poured her drink under the bar. I handed it to her.

"Keep it low." I nodded to the door.

She sucked on the straw, turned on her stool away from the door and

clutched her drink to her mountainous bosom. She was sly.

The back door kicked open. The bar sighed. Serenity returned and took the first barstool. She straightened her black leather jacket over her shoulders. She fluffed her curls. Then stopped. Her head droops slightly, a perfect view of the floor behind the bar, her eyes pure, blue as a baby blanket.

“Gimme a red wine, Steve. Anything. Whatever you got open.”

I snatched up a decent Chianti. She tossed a crumbled twenty down and pushed it closer to me. The dance of the trade.

“What’s he doing in there? He hasn’t come out all night.” I asked her.

She swigged her wine. “I don’t know. He’s in there with John. I hated to interrupt. But he knew I was coming. I called.”

“Hey Steve, can I borrow some of your candle wax?” he pointed to a votive on the bar.

“Sure.” I shrugged.

Serenity leaned over to watch as I watched and Debbie giggled and held her brandy between her breasts. He tilted the votive and dropped a little pearly wax on the cellophane wrap of his cigarette pack. We leaned closer as Sonny smiled that broken smile and tittered. He mashed the molten wax between finger and thumb. He shaped it into a square as it hardened. He pinched the end and nodded that smile as he squinted at it.

He raised a finger. “Watch this.” he said and slipped the wax square in the hole between his teeth. “Huh.” he smiled a full smile and nodded. He tittered and took a sip of whiskey. “Ooops.” He pushed it back in.

The door banged open. Sonny slid his whiskey across the bar behind stacks of water and pint glasses and the garnish tray. Debbie oozed off her bar stool and walked back to the stage holding that brandy to her mounds.

“Can I have a water, Steve?” Sonny asked.

“No. What the fuck, you doing?” Leo hovered over his back. “Get back up there. How many breaks you gonna take around here. This ain’t no caravan life. The fuck.”

It had been a lengthy one. I sure did prefer that worn Sinatra disc that skipped too much to Sonny’s chintzy keyboard playing.

“Here, sweetly.” He went to the door, paused and turned. Serenity knocked into him like he was a wall. She grabbed his huge arm and he hoisted her back up. “Take it easy”. He looked around the dining room. If the lights weren’t so dim I bet he was red as Campari. He looked at me and pointed directly into me with eyes bulging. “I’m outta here. Keep the bar straight. If my wife calls, tell her I went on a liquor run.” He went to the door. He turned again. This time Serenity stepped back. “Capeesh Italiano?”

“Yeah.” And I nodded.

*

Sonny started his intro spiel, and I heard Leo and Serenity murmur behind the swinging door. Sonny fingered his keyboard console, and then switched on a drumbeat and he and Debbie launched into that old overplayed Sonny and Cher number. Yes, “I Got You Babe.” Schmaltz defined. Sonny’s glasses slid down his nose as he danced into the vocals, Debbie swayed heavily back and forth like a buoy bobs on choppy waters.

The sole table of four in the corner tapped feet and nodded amused. Sonny grinned back full set of teeth, his former transparent glass flower vase chipped on the lip and empty of tips stood on the piano next to him.

The door swung open. Serenity returned to her stool and lit a cigarette. Her gaze fell again. She rolled her cigarette in the ashtray absently. I heard Leo bang the office door shut and pound down the stairs to the kitchen and the backdoor.

It was safe enough now for me to dump out my herbal tea and pour myself that Chianti in the mug.

Serenity watched and smiled faintly, her eyes flickered from candle light like stars in the void. She roused her head, fluffed her curls and inhaled. “You been here, what, six months already, Steve?”

“Yes, just about that”. I said. Her smoke fumed in my direction.

“What do you think?” Her lips touch her cigarette and she pulled.

“What do you mean?”

“About the Bella Italia. How do you like Leo? You meet S. yet?”

“Oh I love it here. It can be a pain when it’s the weekend and I’m deep in the weeds.”

“This place is nothing.” She waved. “When I used to work at Dreads we easily had four times the bar business this place does. Oh, the cash I made in those days. This is small league, small change.”

“You used to bartend too?”

“Oh course. I was raised in a bar. My father took care of me. And he was a barfly. All my life I been in bars.” She tapped her cigarette.

Finally Angel returned from downstairs, probably moaning to the rest of the wait staff what a waste the night was for her- only one table and they didn’t even want desert. She clicked her tongue as she passed. Serenity chuckled.

“This one. It’s a bad night for her. Then it’s always a bad night for Angel.”

I lifted the coffee mug to my lips.

“How’re you doing with this one?” Serenity asked and looked over to Angel, who hung around her table and chatted. She was telling them all about Evan, her entire personal love life to strangers. They shifted in their

seats and Debbie went into husky vocals of Stevie Wonder's "Superstitious".

"Tonight she's fine. She complains, but tonight she's leaving me alone."

"Good. I know, she can overwhelm you with her shit. She's a good person though."

"Yeah, I can tell she has a good heart. To answer your questions though: Everyone's warned me about S., but she's always treated me nice, she's patient. She's not a bitch at all. She's very helpful too."

"Steve, that's because you're a guy. And quite an attractive guy at that."

"Leo" She waved. "He's nuts. I've never met anyone like him before. He gave me a break when he hired me. I didn't have any bartending experience at all. He's got problems though."

"We all got all this, Steve. Yeah, I love Leo. He's always been good to me. Whenever things are tight and I need another hundred or two for the rent, the groceries or whatever. He doesn't even ask. He knows I'm good for it. Steve, he's a good man. And a good man is as flawed as the come."

Sonny and Debbie ended the number and the corner applauded. I lifted up my hands and clapped too.

Sonny pulled the mike closer and flashed his new dental work at me. "Thanks. Thanks. Thank you." he bowed his head. "Our bartender, Steve. Ladies and gentlemen buy another round and drink. You'll feel better and we'll sound better. It's good all around!" The table raised nearly empty glasses to me and Sonny and Debbie.

Angel whisked by the bar rolling her hips and went out the door.

"He was good to my father too, Steve." She lit another cigarette as I emptied her ashtray. "My old man'd come in her for drinks and soon Leo wised up and would only serve him a bowl of pasta, bread and coffee. He'd call me and I'd pick him up. When I could. I got my own stuff to do too, you know."

"Well," I sighed, "I haven't seen him in here on my shifts. Are things better now?"

Serenity gazed past my shoulder at her golden reflection in the bar mirror. The candles flickered and the shadows behind the booze bottles lengthened and shortened, lengthened and shortened. Her cigarette burned slender fingers of smoke, which turned and sifted through her own slender flesh fingers.

"Yeah, better. He died a year and a half ago." she took a swift drag.

I felt uneasy. I stepped back and reached for the Chianti and topped her off. I splashed some more into my mug and stared into it. I rolled it around.

"I'm sorry." As though I had to ask the cause of his death. It was his life, the hunger that grows as it worsens, the disease that spreads with its own relief from whatever pain or regret or secrets he possessed.

*

“That’s alright, Steve. I miss him. I still talk to him though. I take him with me in the car and we drive around together, mostly at night when I can’t fall asleep.”

“Excuse me.” It was Angel at the end of the bar. “You think I can have a drink.”

“What?”

“One of your delicious Bloodymarys?”

“Of course.” I sighed. Of course, it couldn’t be just wine or a bottle of beer for good Angel. She had to work me.

“Want me to teach you how to make a great bloody Mary, Steve?” Serenity offered.

“Oh, Steve’s Bloodymarys are always great.” Angel said.

“Talk to me, Serenity.” I finished salting the pint glass rim with celery salt.

“You have your shaker? Ounce of vodka. Splash of pinot grigio.” I reached into the ice and pulled out the pinot and splashed a little over the ice. “Then just a little beer. Just open an MGD or a Rolling Rock, nothing fancy. Add your tomato juice. Or your mix. Worchester sauce. One or two dashes. A few drops of tobassco. Oh, and a lime squeeze.”

I covered the shaker with another pint glass and shook and shook till the hand holding it turned white and my fingers froze stuck. Angel squirmed at the bar and rubbed her hands together. I’d need to rub my hands together too after this cold pour. I strained the contents into her glass counter-clockwise.

“Mmmmm... Here it goes.” Angel said. I garnished it with a cucumber, olive and green pepper.

“Wait.” There was some left in the shaker. I pulled over two rocks glasses and poured. “Quality assurance.” I handed one to Serenity and kept the other. She’d need more wine. Her glass disappeared quickly. I never saw it.

“To the Bella Italia!” Angel raised her drink. We nodded and kissed glasses.

“Good, Steve. You got it right!” Serenity licked. I thought it was a little too hopsey from the beer. It had a sharp bite.

I left the bar to use the washroom. Sonny and Debbie droned on Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On?”. Debbie sang and Sonny did backup vocals, oooo’s, ahhh’s and responses. When I returned Angel and Serenity were huddled close and spoke in whispers. That Chianti tasted quite good, so I went to fetch another bottle from the rack. I had to sneak around Debbie and Sonny winked at me.

*

The door swung open again and this time it was Jose, who slouched in, hands in his pockets, Durango cap on his head. Serenity and Angel broke apart. Angel left her Bloodymary and went out the door to go downstairs.

Jose lifted the lid to the garnishes, found a pick and stuck a few olives on and munched them off. He was silent and leaned his right side against the bar as he listened to Sonny and Debbie.

“Que passo, Superman.” he asked me as I past by and set the bottle of Chianti off to the side.

“Nada, weh.”

Serenity lit another cigarette and glanced down at her empty glass. She pushed her crumpled twenty closer to me. “Steve, can you top me off?”

“Drinking no good for you.” Jose said and picked his teeth with a green cocktail straw. “You American women bad.”

“Get the fuck outta here. Who asked you?”

Jose looked uneasily at Serenity for a moment then picked his teeth and turned and left slouching just like his nephew.

“Yeah, I take my father’s ashes with me sometimes.”

“In an urn?” I asked as I filled her glass. I felt uncomfortable and envied Jose that he could just turn away and leave, but this was my job, and I felt like she needed to be watched. Not that I didn’t trust her.

“Yeah, that is till my boyfriend threw them out on the patio in the rain.”

“What?” I breathed.

“Yeah, we had an argument. He grabbed my father and shook him out all over the wet patio.”

“What? Why?” I couldn’t believe anyone would be so completely, utterly disrespectful. But booze and drugs and life and hopelessness will drive you to do the craziest, most shameful things imaginable, I began to see. The lighting in the Bella Italia was down dim for secrets and confessionals, for comfort and dreams also. She stirred her ash. Angel’s Bloodymary grew warmer. The corner table rose and left. Sonny and Debbie finished the song.

“Thanks, Steve. I gotta go meet someone now.” She pointed to the twenty. “No change.”

Her glass was empty again.

philosophy monthly

THE RELIGIOUS LEFT
OR JESUS WAS NOT A CONSERVATIVE

SHARI O'BRIEN *

At the end of the seventeenth century in the British colony of Massachusetts, twenty-four people who were perceived as guilty of witchcraft were hung or tortured to death. The mass hysteria generating the Salem witch trials was the product of a conservative brand of Christianity called Puritanism. Church leaders served as an advisory board to government officials; together they forged a coalition, a seventeenth century version of a moral majority regarding themselves as duty-bound to carry out the will of God. With illustrious "disciples" of Christ like preacher Cotton Mather urging the hangman to snap the noose around the neck of one warlock even while he unflinchingly recited the Lord's prayer, how could the good people of Salem go astray?

Despite the barrier between church and state that some have imagined the Constitution erected one hundred years later, religion and politics have been flirting on the North American continent for more than three centuries. In fact, the two have been carrying on an affair, sometimes more flagrant than clandestine. And while it may seem that the voice of the moral majority that shrieked in Salem in 1692 was muted by the twentieth century, there is a little doubt that it is blaring from high-tech stereo speakers today.

Interestingly, however, the Republican party has become the almost exclusive paramour of conservative Christianity only within the last twenty-five years. As recently as the 1960's, Democratic Governor of Alabama George Wallace was the darling of many southern Protestant denominations. The collective mission of Wallace and his Christian soldiers was not to keep the world safe from witchcraft, but to preserve the status quo of segregation across the South at a time when left-wing jurists - - no doubt Communists in the grip of Satan! - - were handing down landmark civil rights' rulings. Certainly this confederacy of Southern

Baptists that formed in the fifties, sixties, and seventies could never be accused of “liberalism”, despite membership in the Democratic party.

In 1976, another southern Democrat, Jimmy Carter, became the first president of the United States to describe himself as a born-again Christian. Though Carter shared Wallace’s formal party and religious affiliations, he was a political moderate who infuriated many southern Christians with his progressive views.

Alliances between church and state, then, are nothing new in American history. What is of recent vintage is that the Republican party, long the bastion of mainstream Christians like Episcopalians and Presbyterians, has become the stronghold of the Christian far right of almost every geographical region as the twenty-first century continues groping its way through its first dark decade. One faction of one political party has honed an image of itself as the bride of Christ. Correspondingly, by publicly exploiting ties to fundamentalism, conservative Republicans have convinced many voters that they have a monopoly on moral values.

The contemporary fusion of card-carrying Republicans and fundamentalist Christians traces its genesis to 1979 when Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority, a political action group composed of conservative Christians. Lobbying for prayer in schools and against such diabolical, feminist-driven plots as the Equal Rights Amendment, the Moral Majority promoted highly conservative candidates until officially disbanding in 1989. Its gauntlet was taken up by the Christian Coalition that distributed voters’ guides throughout the nineties, explicitly backing most of the Republican platform and conservative Republican candidates like George W. Bush, who became its poster boy. Today, what can only be deemed a theocracy has emerged from the marriage of the fundamentalist faithful and the now spacious right wing of the Republican party. Despite laying the blame for September 11th at the door of feminists, gays, and civil libertarians, this marriage is rock solid, spawning legions of adherents among otherwise rational Americans.

While those of the Religious Right are convinced their world view is grounded in the Bible, clearly, Jesus himself was not a conservative. In fact, the life and message of Jesus was antithetical to the conservative Jewish world into which he was born. A revolutionary who threw the money lenders out of the Temple (Mark 11:15), Christ was a bleeding heart liberal who befriended whores, thieves, and lepers. He preached a Gospel of almost unadulterated anti-capitalism, admonishing a rich man to sell his possession and distribute the proceeds to the poor “and you shall have treasure in heav-

en . . . For it is easier for camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"(Luke 18: 22-25). Evidently, members of the Christian Right gloss over this and other parallel passages as they steadfastly support tax cut for the wealthiest of the wealthy.

The Religious Right, moreover, claim that their God directed, in 2003, a preemptive strike against a sovereign nation, yet Jesus sermonized on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Time and again, Jesus urged his listeners to love not only their brethren but their enemies as well (Luke 6: 27-35). While the Christian Right mocks peace activists, they eschew the fact that Jesus was the Prince of Peace himself. It is probably safe to conclude as well that Jesus would express outrage if consulted about yet another kind of violence, that directed against the world's poor. The question "what would Jesus do?" on a planet in which, every 3.6 seconds, another precious life is lost to starvation is a rhetorical one. Put another way, those same "pro-lifers" of the Christian Right ignore the admonitions of their savior when they support political agendas protective of mega-billionaires and the corporations they control. Jesus urged his followers to feed the hungry and clothe the naked for "whatever you [do] for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you [do] for me" (Matthew 25: 35-46). Imagine a dialogue, then, between ultra-conservative Christians and their Lord about a state of affairs in which 15 million children die of hunger annually, yet the world's entire sanitation and food requirements could be met by the 13 billion dollars the Western world spends on perfume alone each year.

Certainly, I concede that one can identify biblical passages that seem to bolster the views of the Religious Right. For example, Christ said "Think not that I come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). And Paul in the New Testament states that homosexual offenders "will not inherit" the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10). But a strong case can be made that a Christian Left can be found in the very words of Jesus. And abundant proof is at hand in the Bible that Jesus today would disapprove as heartily of large sections of the Republican as of the Democratic planks. Jesus, and in fact Mohammed, Buddha, and every great prophet the world has known, belong to all of us, Republican and Democrat, conservative and liberal, the mighty and the powerless. The God who sent them all is a God of social justice, a God of mercy, a God of the entire Universe, or He is nothing at all.

** A poet, university lecturer, and attorney, Dr. O'Brien has been in recovery from conservatism for several years. Because it is a heredity condition, many of her relatives remain in its velvet clutches.*



Persistence of Subconscious

by Melissa Reid



Average Sexual Demon, art by
Edward Michael D'Durr Supranowicz



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