

children
churches
& daddies



the **UN**religious, **NON**family-
oriented literary & art mag

ISSN 1555-1551



9 771551 155002

v**172**
May 2007

table of contents

poetry

Jane Stuart1

the boss lady's editorial

Are We Safe Yet?.....2

poetry (the passionate stuff)

Mel Waldman.....10

Richard Fein11

Christian Ward.....12

Brian Hosey *art*.....12

Adriana DeCastro *art*12

Je'free12

Kelly Ann Malone13

Stanley M Noah13

Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal ..14

Thomas Rucker14

Janet Kuypers14

Roger N. Taber.....15

Nicole Aimiee Macaluso *art*15

Sara Crawford.....16

Michael Tillman.....18

Joseph Veronneau.....19

Jonas Lehrer20

Tegan Kehoe20

Laura E. Bontrager21

prose (the meat & potatoes stuff)

G.A. Scheinoha22

Aaron Wilder *art*22

Pat Dixon23

Kenneth DiMaggio.....24

A. McIntyre31

A Summer Morning

Jane Stuart

A sleeping city
full of nightingales
rests under the moon...
Your little feet
and quiet hands
remind me
of dancing shadows,
moonlit songs,
a waking dawn
and one star's
silver twinkling light.
The whispering wind
shakes out its bells
at dawn.

Scars art

pages 11 (Bob holding Mak, then in the pool with Claire), 13 & 14 (moon in Florida), 16 (airplanes in Nashville and Naples), 17 (airplanes in Nashville and Puerto Rico), 19 (lake Michigan at sunset in Michigab, tthe boys from the Plush Horse in a boat in a pool, David on a row boat in the Everglades, and Joel on an innertube in a pool), 30 (car kiss), 33 (el Yunque tropical rain forest). Cover image of high schoolers playing a game at a show at Operation Snowball.

the boss lady's editorial

Are We Safe Yet?

I don't know, I know I say I write poetry, but I know I graduated with a News/Editorial Journalism degree, so I've had this old newspaper article (from the *Naples Daily News*, actually) sitting on my desk for months, and the headline emblazoned across the top of the page says: "U.S. military hold AP photographer in Iraq 5 months without charges." And I just had to throw away that old newspaper page and ask, are we safe yet?

After I don't know how many months, years we have had the discussion over weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (even after everyone has pretty much agreed that there weren't weapons of mass destruction set up by Saddam Hussein for attacking us), to destroying the dictator Saddam Hussein when W's father couldn't do it (my husband keeps saying that the Iraq war in 1990-1992 was a U.N. led mission and we didn't have the authority to get Saddam, even though every American wanted to get him), to declaring that our "war" efforts are to liberate a third world country (which really has something to do with the lives of U.S. citizens, what our military is *supposed* to exist for), I just keep thinking back to President Bush (you know, just for ease of writing I'm going to call him W from now on...) saying that we're safer now that we've battled Iraq. A ton of other sources will say that our entering that country and staying there has created *more* people who hate us, and if you compare the number of deadly attacks (2 in Clinton's reign of 8 years and 3 or 4 that I can count off the top of my head in W's reign), we've had *more* terrorist attacks since 9/11 than before 9/11. And W keeps saying that we're safer (after he stopped searching for Bin Laden and decided to go after Saddam Hussein, who had no direct ties to 9/11), and the only image that keeps popping in my head is an image of the Bush family driving along in their hummer (not like they'd use something fuel efficient), with Jenna and Laura continually asking over and over again (instead of 'are we there yet?') the question, "Are we safe yet?" And after they ask one too many times, President Bush (I mean "W"), their father, turns around and yells, "If you ask that one more time, I'll turn this car right around."

Anyway, that's the image I get in my head. Maybe it's fitting for the

way our President looks at this conflict in Iraq, I don't know, but it's all I keep thinking. He does seem to have a bit of an "I don't care" philosophy, coupled with his Texas macho-bully persona. You think I'm silly for saying he doesn't care? When asked by reporters about W's search for Bin Laden within a year of 9/11, W said something to the effect of 'Bin Laden isn't a concern for him to find'.

Ask any American (from a fear-mongering Republican to a Hacky Sack playing Democrat), at *any* time after 9/11, if Bin Laden was a priority to find, and I think you'd get a different reaction than the reaction of our President.

Want to hear some more collaborating evidence of W's manners? Carol V. Hamilton noted in *Being Nothing* on ctheory.net (<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=427>) that "according to *The Perfect Wife*, Gerhart's biography of the First Lady, Bush was 'snarly' upon learning that his daughter Jenna would undergo an emergency appendectomy, 'like he was pissed at her.'" I heard (from Progressive Talk radio 680 in Memphis, Air America) that when W's daughter Jenna had the emergency appendectomy, W was going to Florida. When a reporter asked why he was leaving after his daughter just had surgery, W said something to the effect of, 'I don't care how she's doing until she cleans her room.'

Now *that's* a caring man. Macho all the way.

Last year, President Bush stated: "Any time you hear the United States government talking about wiretap, it requires -- a wiretap requires a court order. Nothing has changed, by the way. When we're talking about chasing down terrorists, we're talking about getting a court order before we do so."

C Ra McGuirt (of Penny Dreadful Press) notes this: "This is what happens when people allow themselves to be terrorized. This is what happens when people become so preoccupied with "security" that they (ironically) give away their security for the illusion of security. This is what happens when the media becomes a flag waving patriot. This is what happens when people stop questioning authority.

Why is this a "gruesome truth"? Because most people want to see their country and their government as something noble, something to be admired regardless of it's inherent nature. The truth is though-- our nation is a chaotic world of good and bad. It must be tended to. Like a gardener who tends to his garden with constant water, fertilizer, and attention, we must tend to our nation with constant inquisition, analysis,

attention, and action. When it comes to the gruesome truth, like the gardener, we must get our hands dirty from time to time.”

Interesting point, C Ra. You giving away security statement remind me of the Benjamin Franklin quote: “They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

» » »

My husband read to me a chapter of a book by Barbara W. Tuchman, and I'd like to quote it here before I tell you the name of the book. See how fitting it is to our current situation.

America intervention was not a progress stucked step into an unsuspected quagmire. At no time were policy-makers unaware of the hazards, obstacles and negative developments. American intelligence was adequate, informed information flowed steadily from the field to the capital, special investigative missions were repeatedly sent out, independent reportage to balance professional optimism — was never lacking. The folly consisted not in pursuit of a goal in ignorance of the obstacles but in persistence in the pursuit of despite accumulating evidence that the goal was unattainable, and the effect disproportionate to the American interest and eventually demagig to American society, reputation and disposable power to the world.

Okay, the book was *The March of Folly From Troy To Viet Nam*, and this was the beginning of the chapter talking about Viet Nam. Does it sound at all like what we're going through today? And do we ever learn from our mistakes?

» » »

Well, I can't answer that 'learning from our mistakes' question whe I see the decisions W makes when it come to the war (you know, I hate calling it a war, only congress can declare war and we haven't had a war sine World War II, forget Korea, forget Nam, forget Iraq...), and I really don't know what the end goal of my editorial should really be. I've been thinking about writing something about the inadequacies of W's reign of terror, so to speak,

but I don't know where to start. I hear about Jim Webb, a new Democrat Senator for Virginia and the deciding vote for Senate to change for the Democrats... Now, his son is in Iraq, and his son was just recently almost killed when Webb was introduced to the President. Webb even found out the W was briefed about his son before their meeting, and W was told to keep that under consideration when they met and talked — even Think Progress (<http://thinkprogress.org/2006/12/05/bush-webb-son/>) stated that “Bush Was Warned To Be ‘Extra Sensitive’ About Webb’s Son.” Well, when they met, W said, “How’s your boy?” (and the thing is, W can find out more about how Webb’s son is doing than Webb can...) But Jim Webb said as a response, “I’d like to get them out of Iraq, Mr. President.” W responded, “That’s not what I asked you.” Webb said that he wanted to punch W for saying that, because he felt the audacity of W’s comment for his son Jimmy, who for all intents and purposes *should* be going home to heal from his serious injuries. Now, if you want to hear about a house divided: the Republican wing of the world (with sources like Bill O’Reilly and the National Review commenting on this...) would call Webb “rude,” “inappropriate,” “disrespectful,” or “classless” for making the comments he did to W. But on the flipside, The Daily Kos reported (<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2006/12/3/202133/415>) that “this President could be so crude and uncivil as to strut the power of his office and demand that Jim Webb tell him how things were going with his son while in full knowledge that his son had almost died.”

You see, with almost any topic I’d bring up here, everyone will choose their polarized sides. But let me throw another one your way, with a possibly slanted perspective on an attack that happened in our country only a week after 9/11. Do you all remember the Anthrax in the mail scare? Well, Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_anthrax_attacks) will even tell you that “The 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States, also known as Amerithrax from its FBI case name, occurred over the course of several weeks beginning on September 18, 2001 (a week after the September 11, 2001 attacks). Letters containing anthrax bacteria were mailed to several news media offices and two U.S. Senators.” Now, I’m going to lay out for you who the Anthrax-laden letters were mailed to: the media letters were mail to ABC News, CBS News, NBC News and the New York Post. The Government letters were addressed to two Democratic Senators, Tom Daschle of South



Dakota and Patrick Leahy of Vermont. But over the radio I heard people suggest how letters were mailed to the media and to Democrats (anyone that may ever be against the President?). Could these targets have been chosen to help the Bush kakistocracy instill fear in not only the general public (because of the 9/11 attacks) but also in his opponents? Now, I searched for info on the Internet and found TONS of places talking about conspiracies... I even read in BBC News (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/archive/1873368.stm>) on 14/3/02 state that “a Newsnight investigation raised the possibility that there was a secret CIA project to investigate methods of sending anthrax through the mail which went madly out of control.” CBS News (<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/06/28/national/main513694.shtml>) even reported that “The FBI is investigating the possibility that someone secretly grew the deadly anthrax mailed to politicians and media outlets last fall at an Army laboratory in Maryland and further refined it at home” (with the Tetrahedron Publishing Group even reporting on this, at http://www.tetrahedron.org/articles/anthrax/anthrax_espionage.html).

» » »

As I said, I really didn't know how to start this editorial, because in wanting to talk about how the Bush Administration has actually made us less safe than we were before W started in office — or even a year after 9/11/01. There are so many little tidbits of information, and it's hard to piece everything together to form any cohesive storyline. Like, I'd hear stories about the history of the Bush family, and... Well, how do you piece together distant ties to the Nazi party, or to funding the original Planned Parenthood — which was an organization to promote abortions in “the undesirable element of society” (i.e. blacks and Native Americans and other minorities)?

Let me tell you a little something about W's grandfather, Prescott Bush (1895-1972). Now, Prescott was involved with the American Birth Control League (makes sense for a Republican), and served as the treasurer of the first national capital campaign of Planned Parenthood in 1947.

Hmmm. Planned Parenthood. I've always thought it was a place to help guide pregnant women to not have abortions but to either keep the child or carry it to term and put it up for adoption, which would make sense that a Republican would support it, but apparently I was (in part) wrong — Planned Parenthood will help you find information on sexual health, birth control, emergency contraception and abortion rights. Now,

looking briefly at the history of Planned Parenthood, they seem like a strong organization fighting for women's rights. But when I read further, Planned Parenthood became the product of the union between the eugenics movement and the "birth controllers." The eugenics movement, tainted by public hostility to their Nazi-like ideologies, united with the birth controllers (from *The History of Planned Parenthood*, by Mike Perry, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PROLIFE/PPHISTORY.TXT>). "In short, Margaret Sanger herself believed that the organization she had founded had not altered its 'primary objective' - stopping the 'multiplication of the unfit.'"

The unfit? The name "Planned Parenthood" even came in a 1938 letter from Dr. Lydia DeVilbiss, a Florida physician, birth controller and racist. Choosing a name suggested by an open racist illustrates once again that the new name didn't mean a new agenda." Racial minorities were considered very threatening, and birth control could be thought of as a way to keep the minorities exactly that — minorities. Citizen magazine (01/20/92) even posed (<http://www.blackgenocide.org/sanger.html>) that Dr. S. Adolphus Knopf, a member of Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League (ABCL, which along with other groups eventually became known as Planned Parenthood) warned people at a March 1925 international birth control gathering in New York City of the menace posed by the "black" and "yellow" peril.

I don't make this stuff up (Hell, I do my damndest to cite my sources). But the thing is, the forming of Planned Parenthood throughout the early 1940s coincided with Prescott Bush's involvement with the organization.

»»

Oh, if you think I'm grasping at straws to tie the Bush family with Nazis (you know, with the Nazi-like ideology of the eugenics movement), I'll search for something else — like this, from the Guardian (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,12271,1312540,00.html>): "Prescott Bush was a director and shareholder of companies that profited from their involvement with the financial backers of Nazi Germany — a firm of which Prescott Bush was a director was involved with the financial architects of Nazism. His business dealings continued until his company's assets were seized in 1942 under the Trading with the Enemy Act." There was even a civil action for damages brought in Germany against the Bush family by two former slave laborers at Auschwitz.

Want more evidence? "Even after America had entered the war, [Prescott Bush] worked for and profited from companies closely involved

with the very German businesses that financed Hitler's rise to power. It has also been suggested that the money he made from these dealings helped to establish the Bush family fortune and set up its political dynasty."

In *George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography*, Webster G. Tarpley & Anton Chaitkin (<http://www.tarpley.net/bush2.htm>) in Chapter II: The Hitler Project, it even notes that "The Bush family's fortune was largely a result of the Hitler project. The powerful Anglo-American family associations, which later boosted George H. W. Bush (41st U.S. President) into the Central Intelligence Agency and up to the White House, were his father's partners in the Hitler project." I mean, I even found out that Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prescott_Bush#War_seizures_controversy) explains about the war seizures controversy.

» » »

And I'm sitting here talking about the Bush family fortune ties to W's grandfather trading with Nazis in the WWII era, and it made me think of how every liberal under the sun at one point was equating W with Hitler. Now, I don't think there's any real evidence to support these claims (although in some aspects it's better to call W as a fascist, because as the definition goes, does have a tendency toward — and actual exercise of — strong autocratic or dictatorial control), but Pravda even made the remark (http://english.pravda.ru/mailbox/22/98/387/11693_bush.html) that "Nazi leader Herman Goering once remarked that it was easy to lead people into war, regardless of whether they resided within "a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, a parliament, or a communist dictatorship." All that was required, Goering argued, is for their government to "tell them they are being attacked, and [then] denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to greater danger.""

Does *that* sound like Republicans arguing with Democrats during this "war on terror?" But Pravda even summed it up by saying "how easily Americans can be manipulated, how willing they are to be lied to, and how vacuous the freedoms of speech and press have become when the bulk of information is filtered through corporate-controlled media that profit from jingoism, propaganda and dishonesty."

A MoveOn.org ad (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,107426,00.html>) even stated: "A nation warped by lies. Lies fuel fear. Fear fuels aggression. Invasion. Occupation." Sounds like they're talking about the Bush years, right? Well, it was showing images of Hitler, before it said "What were war crimes in 1945 is foreign policy in 2003."

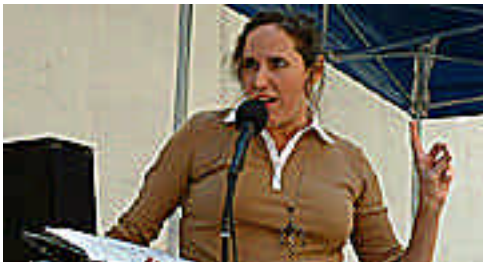
Although it's interesting to hear people say these things, there are also a number of sources outlining the *differences* between Bush and Hitler (see <http://www.politicalhotwire.com/1307-adolph-hitler-vs-george-w-bush.html>, for example). It might be easy to jump the gun and rashly call our leader someone so vile, but it doesn't help your case if you can't back up your statements with real facts.

Not that everything the Republicans say is purely fact, but as I said, check your sources. Jumping to conclusions without evidence to support your theory won't help your cause, it will probably only hurt it.

It's not easy figuring out how to put all of these seemingly unrelated facts together, which is why my editorial is beginning to look more like a hodgepodge of assorted random facts. Because it's hard on the surface to piece all of this together to formulate one cohesive statement. I can say that he has hired the most ethnically diverse cabinet in the history of the United States. But I can also say that his decisions (probably with the blind support of a Republican House and Senate for so long) have probably in many respects hurt this country more than helped it. I don't know if Nancy Pilosi and the Democrats taking over the Senate and the House will have a real effect — I don't know if they'll be able to stop the war W wants to keep going strong by cutting off funding for any potential additional soldier will happen.

I know I'm just the editor, but there are a lot of things about this country's future that I don't know. And I don't know what steps have to be taken to make us feel safer — and make us literally *be* safer.

If I listen to my founding fathers (and people like Benjamin Franklin) and keep in check how I've always lived my life, I'll be doing everything I can to keep my liberties — while occasionally looking over my shoulder



to make sure that everything is as safe as I need it to be.

Janet Kuypers®
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

Photograph from the 08/28/05 Chicago Poetry Fest, photographed by ChicagoPoetry.com

MANHATTAN PLANE CRASH

Mel Waldman

We thought it was another terrorist attack in Manhattan.
But it was a Yankee pitcher, with his flight instructor,
flying low along the Hudson and East Rivers, swallowing
the sweeping urban view and mystique, a short celebration
of life in this magical city, after an unexpected defeat in Detroit.

After circling the Statue of Liberty, his Cirrus SR20 flew north
by the East River. Soon it went off the radar, vanishing over
treacherous waters.

Suddenly, it changed its course, heading toward Manhattan and
a high-rise on the East Side.

In the end, in the microcosm of a life flashing before his eyes,
faster than his last strike the Saturday before, in the Division
game against the Detroit Tigers, he remembered, perhaps, his
son's smile and his wife's gentle kiss before crashing into the
Tower.

It wasn't terrorism. Yet the burning building evoked horrific
memories. Once again, there was dusty death and fire and a
tempest of debris falling from the sky.

And one wonders if a Yankee pitcher/rookie pilot could fly
below the radar, couldn't terrorists do the same?

YOU'LL UNDERSTAND

Richard Fein

And then he smiled, picked me up and said,
“When you’re old enough, you’ll understand.”
Finally when I reached eight,
he sternly talked down to me,
like a preacher from his pulpit,
“When you’re old enough, you’ll understand.”
Lo! I grew twice that age.
And while slamming my bedroom door, he screamed,
“When you’re old, when you’re old,
enough ! enough! enough!”
Then his voice lowered
and through the slammed-shut door
I heard him whisper “you’ll understand.”
Now my impatient child fidgets.
I smile, pick him up,
and mumble heavenward to my dad
(mumble so my child can’t comprehend)
“so tell me already, father,
what am I supposed to understand?”



Goddess

Christian Ward

The universe is the shape
of her face, every atom
configured to mirror
her movements whenever
she moves.

Galaxies swirl in her hips,
the base metals and elements
products of her prayers.
Words are powerful,
but only in her hands.



Sunset, art by Brian Hosey

Enlightened

Je'free

I am a spiritual amputee
limping to cross time zones
with nothing,
but a postcard of the past

I have never seen light
like the sun has never seen shadows;
or, have been nonchalant
as a blind man who ignores the day

I have lived death
in the fluidity of life
with the attainment of nothingness,
like hollow hallways of air

Embroidered memories of self-glory
make me want to un-suture my ego
This time, savor hard sweat,
than a pretended clean image



Wheel Within a
Wheel, art by
Adriana DeCastro

Under a Fingernail Moon

Kelly Ann Malone

A pregnant lunar display, plugged into the sky—This is not for me.
I exist under a fingernail moon, casting less of a glow.
Providing scant beams, if any.
I prefer the thin, silver rim that pleasantly dips south-east.
It does not pierce the clouds, but gently hovers above them.
It leaves us below to find our own way.
It causes us to forge our own light, so that we may
discover the path within the eclipse of our destinies.



plastic

Stanley M Noah

there is something
about the
ease
of



credit card use--
cold cash is
heavy
to let go,

the long numbers
the spelling
the raised dots

plastic feels like
serendipity

of your name

in your pocket--

like an autobiography
you spent
blindly

you hold it
and
you feel
the braille



WHEN THESE BABIES ARE BORN

Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal

I'm upset for my babies.

They're not doing too well.

For months you've filled me with medications.
I feel my babies are gasping for breath.
I have told you I was pregnant.
But you don't seem to believe me.
I have dreamt of the terror you have
Done to my body. If I were a man,
I would choke you with my own hands.

Somehow when these babies are born
You will have to answer
For their grotesque features. You

Have been doing bad things to me
Because you don't like me.
One day you will have to answer for your crimes.

Moonlight

Thomas Rucker

The moonlight spills golden
cream,
through the sleepy reign of night.
Creeping westward slowly,
setting behind the mountain's realm.



Moonlight

Janet Kuypers

moonlight is a hypnotist
putting people in a trance
whenever you look at it
it takes over your soul
no one can stop it
but no one wants to

BEATING UP THE PLANET

Roger N. Taber

Running a gamut of earthquakes,
beating the flames

Sheltering in Iraq from shrapnel
raining down

Watching children of a lesser god
beating up butterflies

Letting our leaders get away with
beating drums

Standing for democracy's bouncers
beating up flowers

Paying the price for politic players
beating odds

Treating poverty's weeping wounds,
(beating its hunger?)

Singing praises to a Greater Power,
(beating terror?)

Preparing to swim with polar bears,
beating ourselves up

art by Nicole
Aimiee Macaluso



Airport

Sara Crawford



The music of words from twelve different languages
fill her ears.

They all sound the same.

The business man flips through the newspaper.

Headlines read

“Many foreclosures don’t go through”

“Investors get a better picture”

“Imbalance in Net speed frustrates many”

the printed words

the photographs

What color are my wife’s eyes?

I don’t remember.

A mother waits.

Her dark eyes scan the crowds,

coffee held in her worn hand

the color of earth

Searching.

I have so much to say.

She’s been gone so long, my daughter.



Distractions and colors.

Cities light up on the board

flashing

Austin: Delayed.

Kansas City: Delayed.

Not hers.

It’s so cold in here.

What time is it?

She looks at the businessman’s cell phone, peaking

out of his pocket.

It gives her the time.

Time to go.



Walking through security.
Strip down.
Shoes off, necklace off, earrings off, belt off, keys in the bucket.
It still beeps.
Security guard finds some unnoticed change in her pocket.
Maybe he'll send her back.
Delayed.

She walks past vendors
selling overpriced food and magazines.
She tries to find her flight
sits down in front of the gate.
Boarding.
Now boarding.



This is it.
There's nothing else to do
except walk onto a machine that will send her to you.
What if we crash?
What if our wings fall off?

(Send a white bird up into the air
to her.
It will smile at her through the window
and she will know warmth.)

She walks onto the plane,
finds her seat beside a pair of blissful lovers.
She sits.
Waiting.



ON A WEDNESDAY

Michael Tillman

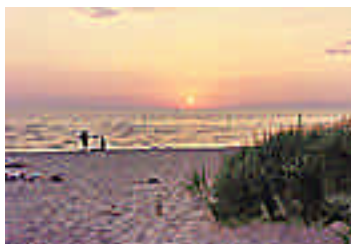
Standing before the pedestal wearing
knee high leather boots, the collar up
on her black button up shirt,
flayed khaki skirt and blonde pixie cut.
Tied black satin waste belt.
No earrings, as always.
(That would be too feminine.)

5'4"ish but taller than ever in academia.
A woman, cleaving her way into a man's world.
She spouts off philosophy, stopping mid
sentence to sip bottled water.
She criticizes capitalism and calls
us all borderline psychotic.
"For every cup of coffee, you're killing an Ethiopian."

She articulates art and speaks in a way
deliberately non-simplistic.
Quoting Kristeva and pounding her
tiny fists on the podium, she attempts to
explain the aesthetic value of the Holocaust.
In a room full of men, she reshapes our
perspectives, trumping Hegel and Aristotle.

She walks across the stage, her boots clacking,
to write French terms on the board.
"Pour Soi" and "En Soi."
Foreign words with no meaning.

Outside the window Hispanic men
hammer and nail
dimensions and numbers together.
Strangers in a strange land.
The making of foreigners.



Lake Champlain

Joseph Veronneau



Over by “the point”
teens jump awkward
holding legs inwards,
hoping not to bash their skulls
on the risen rocks below.
Wind blowing in from the West,
towel-less skin shivers
as spiders cram the woods
behind.



Off in the distance
people glide in canoes
sifting out from the pines
that hid them.

Head-first dives
off of granite platforms
casting selves as offerings
to mossy rocks and animals
who could not finish their trek.

It was made into one of the Great Lakes
to receive federal funding
to clean it up,
then uncrowned of all its glory
once the job was done.



Teens still spiral
to near deaths
under summer constellations
releasing sweat.

The Drawing Board

Jonas Lehrer

I've only kept a few things
In between every place I've been
and Home
The search for paradise
Is a long circle back to square one
Souls are a compilation of
'Back to the drawing board's
For what you always believe is the last time
Hope is a song you sing along to
From point A to B
There are so many obstacles between shore and sea
So many things you forgot to factor into the equation
You intended to be so many people
Before you found out you're just you...
Still confused, and struggling with the truth

This
Living

Tegan Kehoe

A bus sleeps in two garages
after a week or a month
is there an "away" and a "home"?
each shed's own fumes and odors
appealing when they are ahead
no driver would care
they've got beds
hotel beds with stiff plushy blankets
home beds, sweeter
the busses are just numbers.
Number 2365 knows the quality of lighting
in many terminals
the soft hum of dying engines
garages in Albany and the Big Apple.
At both ends
someone comes and sweeps up
gum and soda and alcohol
all of the sticky things that fall from travelers
at both ends
there is a conclusion to the day.

a poem by Laura E. Bontrager

what I am learning

about language
and the world.

the words,
I know they are supposed
to be teaching me --
history, honor, mistakes,
morals and math. compassion
and current events.
but no,
language is a barricade.
it is bricking us all
inside ourselves.

how I learned it:
a news story about
overseas darkness. tragedy
in solemn dark eyes:
the women raped in africa.

a woman hiding under her bed, one
tied up by her sobbing son, another
discarded by a war-weary husband.
this woman
not crying, not ashamed, not
anything other than honest.
only when I saw her I heard
the alien isolation
of her language, not
the woman.
it was a wall. it kept me
deaf.

until
the woman,
this woman mouthing in stone-smooth
unknowable tongue, her lips
giving out sounds, outside even
her own self and so
outside me--

she raised her arm.
and it
dangled
from her elbow, dangled
her broken wrist, her broken
hand, her curled up
broken fingers.
the bone like an ashy
double-jointed trick only
broken.

her two mourning bones,
separated and longing for the other,
still sheathed in skin but
unable to keep it quiet--
her bones shouting,
demolishing the silent distance.

high school english never held
knowledge like this. only

I see no students. no one
here willing to learn.

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

STRAIGHT FROM THE MORGUE

G.A. Scheinoha

Oh, that it was so easy to reproduce you. Simple as pulling a newspaper clipping from a wallet, unfolding it. Then you rose out of the photo and tumble of print beneath. As if this was the most normal thing in the world.

“You’re a little yellow around the gills. Must be jaundice coming on.” Answered only by that look: you twit. How’d you look if you were carried around in somebody’s billfold, carelessly creased, never seeing the light of day but once in every, ooh, I almost forgot, willya lookit this, however many years? Enough to rile anyone’s acids.

Especially when you’re just a paper thin apparition of your former self. Much simpler to send you back. Tear the sheet in half down its length or crosswise. Yet that’s no real solution. Just leaves behind half a memory, sharp enough to paper cut, bleed out whole, best forgotten yesterdays.



Approved After Red Inclusion, art by Aaron Wilder

Goofy Kids

Pat Dixon

Way back when you and I were young, our folks bought us generic sneakers for five bucks at the local Woolworth's store, and we wore them till they were smooth on the bottoms and all our toes were cramped up at the front. None of these modern two-hundred-dollars-or-more sneakers for us--the kind kids must have nowadays or "die" of embarrassment!

And these goofy kids nowadays are always "losing" them one way or another. Just last Wednesday I was driving home from the market, and a gang of five or six kids--three or four small boys and a couple of slightly older girls--were playing in the street half a block ahead of me. When they saw me coming, two of them put something small in the middle, at the left edge of my lane, and then they all ran and sat down on the curb to watch what I was going to do.

Thirty feet away, I could see it was a kid's blue sneaker, and they all wanted me to drive my wheels right over it. In fact when I slowed down and swerved slightly, the two girls jumped up and began to shout, "Run over it! Please, mister! Run over it!"

I smiled at them and at the boys and shook my head slowly. All of them looked disappointed, especially the little kid who was sitting on the curb wearing just one sneaker.

In my rear-view mirrors, I could see him taking off his other sneaker, and one of the girls tied its laces to those of the sneaker I had just driven around. Then she began tossing the two joined sneakers straight up towards the telephone lines that were above the street.

Huh! thought I. That kid wants his folks to get him a newer, "better" pair, so he's having his "friends" help him wreck the ones he has! I saw the sneakers land twice near the girl before I turned the corner to my house, but I felt a little bad for the poor parents who were going to be victimized.

Anyways, garbage pick-up in my neighborhood is always on Thursday mornings, and so I was hauling my trash and recycle stuff out to the curb that Wednesday evening after dinner. It was still fairly light out, and danged if I didn't see a little pair of sneakers silhouetted against the sky, hanging right over my driveway where the cablevision line crosses to my house.

Those dang little scamps! thought I, and I went and got my garden rake and step ladder from my garage.

After I got those sneakers down, I went indoors and got a couple of plastic bags to put them in, and then I tucked them down inside a paper bag with my own garbage. What would you have done? Those dang kids! There was a little left foot inside the left sneaker.

part 13 (the May 2007 installment) of

THE DRIVE

Kenneth DiMaggio

The more I held onto that fading poetry the less I could appreciate the reality bunkered with convenience stores, fast food restaurants, and public storage rental spaces. I was still going to try and steal myself a ride on the train. Even if the train was now a ghost. I had no fear of making a journey that was haunted, a journey into the netherworld. What did scare me was that when I crossed over the blue collar river Hades, there would be no old warriors to greet me and tell me tales as well as prophecies. No Odysseus or Penelope to leave me with a little sly wisdom for a future that often seemed insurmountable—a future that was now like a collapsed and crippled giant. But could this monster be tricked with words and intelligence the way Odysseus tricked Polyphemus?

Before I finished relating the history of this abandoned train yard, The Young Artist and I had already started exploring it. We had stepped into one of the box cars: she entering first and then giggling as she put out her hand for me to take and help me in. Getting into this car did require a bit of a hop. What always impressed me about these old cars was how *solid* and *heavy* they were. The lip (or edge) along the car, (and which you stepped on to get into them) was a narrow but thick beam of copper colored iron or steel. The floor of the car was also solid and non pliable, and the corrugated panels had a lot of ridges like the steel of a shipping container. I always gave the panel a pat with my hand: just to feel something that heavy, massive, permanent. So much of the textures that we are surrounded with daily, seem weak, disposable, easily crushed. The floor of this particular car, however, was littered with the detritus of our disposable world: old newspapers, some rags, a ripped sleeping bag with part of its stuffing bleeding out, a white plastic bleach jug, probably used for water or maybe alcohol for cooking or drinking or both.

Hey, didn't the old hoboes drink the same stuff they cooked with? Wasn't that a true hobo test? To survive your own Sterno?

Well, the person who camped out here was probably a local; some of the dried out rags that were once clothes still had a faded Red Sox name and logo on it.

"Yuk," I said, as I kicked at this dried out rag.

"What's the matter?" the Young Artist said.

"That T-shirt says, 'Red Sox.'" I said.

"So?"

"Red Sox suck; Yankees rule."

The Young Artist shook her head.

"You're such a fucking boy," she said.

“Hey, everybody’s got to like at least one sport, even artists.”

“I didn’t say that I do not like sports,” she said.

“Then who do you like? The Mets? Well, at least they beat the Red Sox in the series.”

“Um—excuse me? Did I say anything about baseball? Did I?”

I slightly put up my hands; okay, so you don’t like baseball.

“I happen to like as well as play Lacrosse.”

I tried not to, but what the hell, smirked just the same.

“Shut up,” she said. “And this place,”

She meant the boxcar, and then sniffed.

“I feel like I should be wearing a gas mask.”

She had a point. There was a trace of oily-turpentine like smell. In all of these cars. Maybe the recessive oil from the leftover fumes from the toxic products it once carried, and certainly some less than captivating contribution from the transients who bedded down here. The old individual era may leave behind some interesting ruins, but it can also leave behind some nasty smells.

“Well, if you ever want to get a cheap whippet high...” I said, as I followed The Young Artist out of the box car.

The air between the rows of the boxcars was a bit more sweet smelling. A narrow street was made from the way the cars had been lined next to each other in two rows. Because the cars were fairly close to each other, there was always a little shadow along this short freight train avenue. The ground was a bit more damp too; consequently, the air felt less toxic and more cooler while we walked down the street that we dubbed, “The Great Rocky and Northern.” We often paused or stopped to admire the outside of a car, poke our heads into another, read the graffiti and then leave some of our own. Especially on an old refrigerator car that already had a decade’s worth of previous scrawling.

“Well, since you’re a poet, you get to leave a message first,” The Young Artist said. She handed me one of those art class crayons. They look like a short stubby ruler with a tapered edge. This one was yellow. Perfect for the copper color of the car.

“Wow, I feel put on the spot,” I said.

“Writer’s block?” she said. She then stated inspecting what seemed to be the wheels underneath this car. As for myself, I nervously tossed and turned the crayon in my hand. Then I started out scrawling over a piece of corrugated steel. Most of the previous graffiti consisted of pledges made by young lovers: Sammy and Yanira 4-ever & evah ya-all.” Some of the pledges were more personal, celebrating, or making an unashamed declaration: “Respect where you smoke, drink, or pee, because Melissa lost her virginity here!” And some of it, well, this car was not the romance that it was for the kids. ‘Fucking ‘Nam and dope brought me here.” And from me, it should have been so simple to leave a message. I had almost half a thousand pages of them back in my car, but all I could think of while I looked at this corrosive metal were much too soon uncelebrated, anonymous, wasted lives. So, the only thing I could think of when it came to write was: “In memory to a transient or dead America,” followed by today’s date and year.

This place had to be more than just an isolated bitter end.

As for The Young Artist, it was supposed to be her turn to leave a message. When I turned to give her the crayon, she was already a car down from me, and hunched over and digging through what seemed like the wheels of a car. As I got closer, I saw her other hand holding what seemed like a small pocket full of rocks or hard clumps of earth.

“What are you holding?” I asked.

“Nebraska, Idaho, and Montana,” she replied, while continuing with her work.

I took a closer look at her hand. Still rocks and hard clumps.

“These rocks and pieces of earth stuck between these wheels—more like glued between them. That’s all the souvenirs left from a journey across those plains and mountains you were earlier talking about.”

“And how do you know which rock is Nebraska?” I asked.

“And how do you know it’s some great poet when he’s turned to bones and dust?” she said.

“Ouch,” I said.

“There’s nothing ‘Ouch’ about it,” she said. She straightened back up and put her handful of rocks in her bag. “Look at all the clothes and styles we go through in a year. Bones, they just stay the same.”

“And also anonymous,” I added.

“Then you’ve got to be more of an archeologist in your art.”

“I have a hard enough time just getting images to work,” I muttered.

“That’s not enough,” she said. “You have to be able to see more than just the images here.”

She put one rock into my hand.

“You want me to come up with an image for this rock?” I asked.

“I want you to come up with a story—if not the entire history—of the train that this rock came from.”

And why not the wagon train that rolled across this country before this diesel one, because twenty years worth of Connestogas probably rolled over this rock. What more could I say. I did know the rock was almost triangular, still covered with a rusty clay, and almost made a perfect fit in my palm. At some point probably, it got “hopped” on to an open zooming box car, and then lost between the rust and the wheels where this car came to its final stop—a thousand or more miles from its regular route. Regardless of where this rock came from, there was never going to be a seed or story that could “sprout.” It could only be a fragment, and one that for the most part would have to be false. This stone may have been mute and anonymous—but it was also durable—just like the brakemen, engineers, and hobos who rode this train: strong hard men who could never clean themselves of the earth and the dirt that they always traveled with. At the same time, they were men who never left behind any history, men who died without name, without date. The only thing they had to identify them, was the train that brought them all together—and that train was just about gone. How much longer before it would not even be around as a reminder?

“I can’t tell you what you want,” I finally said. “Because I would be telling the story about the people who lived and worked in this city; people who were tough, hardworking, and for the most part, hard drinking. But people who died without leaving any story behind or names for even people to remember them by.”

I threw the rock into the ‘tunnel’ of cars that still remained ahead of us.

“Why’d you do that!” she said, sounding hurt.

“You asked me to anthro-pologize, if that’s the word, and I did. And I could only see the journey of my background, and the only thing I can tell ya, is that I need to take a journey away from here.”

“No plains? No buffalo? No—“

“No wild Indians?” I said, finishing her line of thought.

“I wasn’t going to say that!” she defensively said. “I’m not racist.”

“No, but half of these guys riding on this train probably were and those same guys probably broke their last cigarette in half to share with the Black fugitive who just hopped into their car. Their journey must have been scary as well as exciting. I just wonder if it ended the way they imagined. Probably not. People who ride the trains are a lot like poets and artists: dreamers, but ending with a broken dream is better than ending with no dream.”

She then spoke “between her breath” but loud enough for me to hear:

“What happened to you? Get too many rejection letters?”

“Not enough to arrive as some half crazed artist with a lot of bull to tell in some loft in an old factory.”

“We’re being a little more positive now,” she sarcastically said.

“My rejection letters are the one thing that come in the mail with my name on it, and without asking me for money. I don’t mind rejection letters, just bills.”

“Which—you haven’t been paying.”

“Alright. Bankrupt. Not even middle age,” I said, with a great sense of fulfillment.

“Sounds like you’ve been on that train already,” she said.

“Hmmm—guess I am. How about another rock. I like this game.”

“No—I think you’ve had enough rocks. Maybe you’d like to smoke a joint.”

We both laughed.

“Besides,” she added, “we’ve come to the end. Here’s the caboose.”

“Not quite the end,” I said. “There’s those two passenger cars.”

The two oblong passenger trains suddenly seemed to have promise about the same way as two dying roses do in a field of dead, brownish, gray crabgrass. What the hell. What was this trip but a journey through a dead, failed paradise? So we might as well take a brief tour through yesterday’s tragic pieces of luxury. We still took a peek and short walk through a caboose—which was a rancid butter color—not the romantic fantasy red that both of us could have used right now. Inside was even less imaginative: it was like being in the office of a small hotel’s check in desk—a space of a short hallway; a space that still smelled like a decade’s worth of old stale cigar smoke. So quite a few card games must have been played by the conductor, the brakeman, the engineer on the desk in the corner; though I hope

not all at the same time—somebody should be driving the train! And card games during those nights when the train had been rolling so long since it crossed the Mississippi that Kansas seemed like Nebraska and Nebraska seemed to go on forever until it was stopped by something rocky like Wyoming or Utah. Until then, deal me in Joe and put on a pot of coffee. It's going to be an all nighter until we come to the next mountain range that breaks up America.

"You don't think the conductor might have sometimes been alone? Writing letters—or telegramming little notes to his sweet heart?"

This was The Young Artist's response in anticipation of my mobile-saloon type fantasy of the caboose.

"The trains had telegrams on them?" I asked.

"They had to have something so that the train people could let their own people know that they were okay," she said.

"Because sometimes, late at night," I said, "when outside this small window here looked like one big tumbleweed blowing graveyard—"

I then paused—but it was not of my own doing. There was nothing else to think of or imagine after the flat, dead landscape: a point where you wanted to get through as quickly as possible.

"The passenger cars? Remember?" she said, reminding me of where we were supposed to be going.

"Yeah, right," I said. But now it felt hard to leave this caboose—as if there was still something unfinished; still something that needed to be said or written.

There was also nothing to be spoken on the way to the two cars—at least between the two of us. The Young Artist was walking slightly ahead of me. She was focusing on those cars. She seemed eager to get inside one the same way a risk free kid cannot wait to get on the most dangerous ride at the amusement park. Her sly squint and smile seemed to ask: are you getting on? Do you know what you are about to step into? Before I could answer, she had turned back around—and just as quickly, walked up the two or three steps that led to the car, disappearing into it.

"Wait..." I only managed to softly say. I wanted to speak louder, but—the sight of her entering into this arch-topped door of this car; her long black dress trailing behind her; her hair and scarves making a slight rustle: an elegantly dressed woman from another era, sneaking off to meet the man who earlier waited upon her and her soul-dead but brash husband; or maybe it was the ghost of such a woman, condemned to make an assignation that would never prove fruitful now that she was dead; the risk that she should have taken while she was alive. As The Young Artist passed into this car, she briefly turned to look at me: her face now a slightly bemused spirit, knowing that it had fatally charmed one of the foolishly living.

I grinned; scraped my Converse shod foot back in the dirt and then said: "So you want to play, ha?"

I ran the short distance to the car, and hopped up the three steps to the doorway, and then paused as I beheld a decaying room of tarnished brass, rotting upholstery, yellowing black and white checkerboard tile, jaundiced glass, dulled faded chrome, graying mahogany. I was looking more at an elongated dining

room than a sardine can with anonymous seats to sit in. Not in this car, where weary travelers had windows you could open and seats that were velour'd and elegantly mahogany-armed the same way they were in the balconies of old movie house palaces. The floor was a black and white checkerboard corridor: what you would expect on the patio dining area of a restaurant on the Rivera, and the concave ceiling above was exquisitely inlaid with ebony and lightly colored wood. In its day, this was a car where high tea must have been served and from men in ice cream white suits and gloves and softly pushing a linen draped cart with a glimmering silver and pewter setting. The purpose of this car was not to get from point A to point B; rather, it was the purpose of points A and B to serve as a frame for getting great enjoyment of life; thus the true purpose of this car. A purpose that was foreign to this land of bungalows and factories.

Ah, but it was such mundane and monotonous landscape that would eventually triumph over this once elegant life.

But where was The Young Artist?

Not on this car, I began to realize as I slowly walked down the aisle. I still took a brief, cautious look to the left and right of me. As if expecting to see a now shocked dowager looking up at me, and a pin striped, fedora'd ,tooth pick chewing gambler squintingly eyeing me. But the only ghosts were in my "Guys and Dolls" and "Agatha Christie" fed imagination. This car sadly—was empty.

There was still one more car, and I do not know why, but I had a hunch that I might not find it empty.

I entered this car more slowly; as if I was the spirit. I was so quiet, that I did not hear my own footsteps. I did not even hear or feel a rustle. Now it was my turn to surprise her, I mentally smiled. Yet my "ghostly" entrance was more than that. This was the first time that we had been separated; where she had run off to be alone. Yes, I think we were briefly separated before—but this time, it felt different. This time, the "props" in our journey were less comforting the same time they were more poignant. This time, the ruins showed more of a wreck or crash that took place in the heart, and after it did, permanently crippled it.

I stepped into the car.

It was empty; I still sensed she was inside it. We had been too close these past couple of hours for me not to feel her presence hiding and snug in one of the seats towards the opposite end of the car. And if I knew she was here without actually seeing her, she probably knew the same about me. There was no more need for stealth. Walk with steadiness. Walk with the confidence to meet any surprise. Walk as one who was now living; in spite of being in a present framed by a dead, once splendid past.

She was in the second to the last seat: the one by the window. She sat with her hands loosely folded on her lap. From the way she was sitting, she only had to turn her face an inch or two away before she would be looking out the window and lose the mediation that she was in before I had gently interrupted it, stopping at her row. She softly smiled to acknowledge me, but her eyes were still "half lidded" and had a filmy, dreamy gaze to them.

I softly smiled, and then said:

“Any of these seats taken?”

“Been empty since I got on,” she said.

“Nothing sadder than an empty train,” I said, sitting on the seat across from her.

She turned to look out the window.

“Well, the landscape outside,” she said.

I folded my hands and crossed my leg.

“It’ll get better,” I said.

“Think so?” she said.

It was a question I did not expect, but nevertheless, a question that had to be answered. And from what was a sweet—and also silly “game.”

Nonetheless, this easily thrown out comment seemed to have more power and more riding on it than anything else we had previously talked about. Which is why there was only way to answer it: by softly, partially rising. And moving to the seat next to her, and once I was seated, take her hand and reassure her eyes that now seemed to think otherwise.

“Yes...” after which I strongly whispered: “It will get better.”

And then both of us—at the same time—and from what felt like the same desperate need for reassurance, strongly embraced and hugged each other; rocked and rubbed each other for warmth and support; caressed what was shy and delicate; her ear, my cheek, the edges of her soft lips—

“No,” she quickly said as she gently pushed me away.

“It will only make it harder,” she continued, “and it was never—“

“Yeah, okay,” I said as I drew back.

“We’d been so disappointed with each other tomorrow,” she said.

“If you say so.”

She took my hand, and squeezed it hard enough so that I had to look at her.

“We’d both be lost together, when that’s not what we want. Do you know—”

She closed her eyes, softly laughed, and said with quiet embarrassment:

“Do you know what I earlier thought while you were walking towards me? When I didn’t even see you—yet knew you were coming—and I thought that was because you were my twin—a lost twin—but twins that could never be together. I’m sorry.”

She gently gave me back my hand and then turned to the window.

“For a moment—for a moment I thought—“ I hesitatingly said, “that I had imagined you.”

stay tunes for more parts of this story in issues of cc&d...



THE JUNGLE

A. McIntyre

We waited for the American outside the shop. It was ten past twelve. Bet he isn't going to show, grumbled Gaz. We'll give it half an hour, I said, Then we'll go. The day was very hot, the sky a deep clear blue. The middle of the day, and we were the only ones in the street. Gaz smoked a cigarette staring into the glass. What do you think about all this? he said. Better not to know, I replied, Useful if we get any trouble though. He nodded, Yeah. Keep on the right side of him for sure. Oh, he's ok, I said, Seems to like us. We're white after all. Gaz started to laugh, smoke belching out of his mouth, White might is right, America, he grinned, Fucking America, seig heil. Hey, you guys, I'm late. The American was strolling up the street in the shade, I got held up. The guy who was supposed to give me this was late. He waved a fat roll of newspaper. You wait till we get into this. Glad you could make it. He was sweating heavily, his purple T shirt soaked through. Don't worry, I said, We've only been here about ten minutes. The American was rummaging with his keys and the lock, You guys all right? I'll roll a couple of cigars, and then we'll get going. Lucky with the weather. How's work? I asked. Oh, quiet, everyone's on holiday. Gonna get busy though, got a visit in a month. Someone coming down from the north. A big shot.

The shop was blissfully cool. You guys sit down, I'll be a couple of minutes. We sat at the table beneath the chandelier, the sweat cooling on our brows. Now get a look at this. He carefully unraveled the newspaper, revealing part of a lush green bush. The quantity and the odour were intimidating. I could tell it was going to be stronger than the stuff the night before. Gaz looked at me and raised his eyebrows. Good, I said. Oh, yes, said the American, This is the mother of all plants. That guy you met last night, the guy with the hands. His father grows this out in the country. Fresh, absolutely fresh. Plants as high as this room. In the hills. He

quickly rolled two Havanas, slipping them into a tin which he shoved into his pocket. Then he packed more weed into two old Marlboro cartons. For you guys. We'll pick it up on the way back. For you to enjoy at your leisure. Should last you a while. I'm leaving again soon so I'll give you some now. In case I don't see you. Thanks, I said. Yeah man, thanks a load, said Gaz. The American grinned, De nada. Vamoos. I can get it any time. He locked the door, and we started walking.

The town had been a Spanish fort, built when they defeated the Olmecs. The old quarter was clustered around a steep hill, the cathedral and the houses constructed from crude blocks of stone. We walked downhill over cobbles through narrow winding streets, the houses becoming shabbier as we reached the outskirts. Cobbles gave way to dirt. Dense vegetation seemed to be trying to invade the modest space carved out by human beings. When we could see the beginning of the jungle, we were in a shanty town, an illegal settlement. There was no road, just paths between the shacks beaten into the dirt by generations of bare feet. The inhabitants were Indians. They stood watching us as if we had just stepped out of a UFO. They're harmless, said the American, They think we're gods.

We crossed the red dirt soccer fields, and entered the jungle. For a while, I could still hear the occasional sound of a truck, or hammering, a car horn, but these fragile reminders were eventually lost, the only sounds being the crunch of our footfalls on the path, the infrequent shrill call of a bird high up in the treetops. Twilight, impossible to know the time. Where exactly are we going? asked Gaz. It was an obvious question, but we hadn't yet ventured it. The American turned round and grinned, Lambs to the slaughter. Thought you'd never ask. Like I told you, there's an old farm in a clearing, about half an hour from here. We don't want to go too far otherwise we'll have to set off early, to get out before dusk. It's a drag to be here after dark. This guy used to farm duraznos, but he died and the place went to pieces. No-one lives there, and the place is full of trees busting with fruit. You'll see. I come here every year. Usually park the jeep on the other side of the hill and cart the fruit off. I stared at the droplets of sweat dripping from the American's ear. It was hard to imagine a clearing.



Hard to imagine anyone wanting to come out here and farm. I wondered how the man had died. Either side of us impenetrable forest, the odour overwhelming, a mixture of new leaves and decay. Clots of fungi. Occasionally the path was lost, but the American knew the route, pushing through the foliage with his arms. I realized why he wanted to be out by dusk. We trudged along in silence, the American out in front, then me, then Gaz because he was tall and had

trouble with the branches and vines. The air was stifling, the sweat pouring down us. I would never do this alone, and it was good to see that the American knew what he was doing. I began to wonder about snakes and insects, but I didn't say anything fearing that I would appear foolish. No-one talked because of the effort, and conversation seemed out of place.

Here we are, said the American at last. He pushed into a clearing. I could hear a stream, and the air was suddenly cooler. Like entering a cave hacked out of the vegetation. A little grassy meadow, the stream at the bottom of a small hill. The sun penetrated, a sword of dusty golden light. Through the trees I could see the ruins of a stone farm house. All around, planted at intervals, trees laden with duraznos ready to pick, the fruit ripe yellow. Damn, will you look at that, said the American. Who lived here? asked Gaz. Oh, an old fellow, a Frenchman. Married a local girl back in the '20s, after the Revolution, and he farmed this place till he died. He's buried up there with his wife. The fruit still comes along every year. I always leave some fruit on their graves. The American pulled out the tin. We'll have us a couple of tokes on this, and then we'll get some fruit. Go ahead and start. He handed a lighter and the cigar to Gaz. Concentrating, Gaz carefully lit the end, sucking slowly,

inhaling, then once more. Smoke flooded out, momentarily obscuring his head. He passed it to me. Whoooooa, he said, as the smoke cleared, God. He seemed to stagger. I drew on the cigar, holding the smoke, then I took another drag. I passed it to the American. I was instantly stoned. The American took three tokes, stubbing out the joint when Gaz and I indicated we'd had enough. Strong? Bloody dynamite, said Gaz, Jesus. See what you mean, I agreed, realizing all of a sudden how much we needed the American. The undergrowth buzzing around me. A pleasant crashing behind the eyes, the air full of life. I didn't know where the hell I was. We couldn't get back on our own. I wondered if Gaz had woken to this. But it was all right. The American wasn't going to disappear. He placed the tin on a stump. I'll leave this with you, if you want any more. I'm going up to get some fruit. I'll bring some back. The American strolled towards the end of the clearing and I watched him vanish over the brow of the hill among the trees. He saw that we were not in a state to walk.

I could barely feel my legs and, when I tried to move, I stumbled. Gaz laughed picking up the tin. It's not funny, I said starting to chuckle, then I was laughing uncontrollably, disturbing the silence. It was like laughing in church. Shhhh, said Gaz. Who's there? I asked. Gaz looked around, You never know. Imagine living here, the Frenchman, at night. Remembering the graves, I shivered, lost, Hey shut it will you. Where's he gone? Gaz stared, Dunno. Jesus. I peered through the trees. Far away I could hear stamping, then shouting, Man this is a bumper crop, I'm coming back here with some buckets. The American was on the hill behind the farm house. Jesus I hope he doesn't fuck off and leave us here, said Gaz. I nodded, Too right. That's some bloody strong stuff, eh? Yeah. We stood in silence listening for something. Just the occasional screech of the bird. Bloody quiet, you'd never think it was this quiet, can you believe it's this quiet? It's not so quiet with you rambling on, I said. He grinned, Silence, the deep silent silence. Think they have leopards here? You what? Leopards, he continued, Leo Pardis, the spotted lion. No way. Then I remembered, Jaguars maybe. Jaguars? Yeah. Unlikely though. But just imagine, I muttered, Just imagine, you're standing here, and then

out from the path, a growl, a Jaguar. What would you do? I'd hot-wire it and drive it back to Liverpool, said Gaz. We studied the end of the clearing. The vision, a huge striped face leering out of the green. Beautiful and deadly. Last moments, the realization of death. I thought of an old British film. The African night. The horses panicking as something rustles beyond the kraal. The hero coolly saying to his delicate wife, Lion Marjorie, as he loads the .303. I stared at Gaz, Lion Marjorie. He jumped, Hey shut it all right. I don't want to think about it. I can't bloody move, that stuff's got me legs. Me too, I said, Fucking crazy. We stood opposite each other and started to laugh again. Gaz's eyes were swollen and red. Tears running down his face. I could barely stand, my stomach muscles were bunched and I couldn't breathe. Finally I managed to ask, What's so funny? He scratched his face where an insect had bitten him, I was thinking, you know, I'd forgotten, this is the fucking cricket season back home. Can you imagine, I mean what the fuck are we doing here? We're in the middle of the bloody jungle. Somewhere someone is coming in to bowl, the pleasant pock of pig skin on willow, and here we are standing in the bloody jungle. Out of our gourds. And I've got my passport with me and all me papers. Not much use out here, eh? Cricket. Absurdly abstract, the word, the game. Concepts so funny we had to sit down. Shhhh. What? He'll hear. Who? The Frenchman. Shut up. No, the American, he'll think we're nuts. Ah, he's stoned too, said Gaz, He knows all about it, same radio channel. Where the hell is he anyway? We were alone in the silence. Was he watching us? What if he had brought us here to rob us, to kill us. He might be a pathological killer. All the myths about Americans. Crazy Vietnam Veterans. Panic tore into my mind, savaging. We didn't know him. He could be anyone. I looked at Gaz to see if he was on the same band wave, but he was absentmindedly staring at a large leafy plant. A fern. Beneath the plant something moving. My senses took their time to classify what I was seeing. A large hirsute creature oozing over the ground through the grass, changing shape as it progressed. I looked closer. A clump of hundreds of hairy caterpillars, clustering together, flowing slowly up the slope. My God do you see that? I whispered. Yeah, said Gaz, Caterpillars,

never seen anything like it. You don't want to fall into that. Sting the fuck out of you. We watched the apparition, mesmerized. Hanging together for protection. Like fish in the sea. The ever-present lurking danger within the harmonious beauty. Comfortably forgotten in quiet English suburbs.

You guys wanna come up here? The voice surprised us and we wheeled around as if we had been caught smoking at school. We can't really walk properly, I said. The American was grinning, Told you it was strong. It deserves a word other than strong, said Gaz, Strong is not the word, brain damaging more like. The American clambered down the slope, pushing through the trees. Get a look at these here durazos. He opened a plastic bag. Have some. We took the fruit, biting into the soft sweet flesh. Juice dribbled down my chin. Bloody good, I said, Just right. I spat some seeds. The American pointed towards the hill, I'm going to come back with the jeep, the old track beyond. Bring a couple of buckets and grab some. They're just here for the birds right now. Going to waste. When did the Frenchman die? asked Gaz. Oh, about thirty years ago. And no-one claimed the land? Nope. Just went back to the jungle. The graves have something to do with it. The locals think the land still belongs to the Frenchman and his wife. Why I always leave some fruit on their graves. Like they're still here. Some Indians live out in a clearing nearby, but apart from them there's nothing for the next two hundred miles. Just the jungle. Then the border and more jungle. And beyond that a war. You come out here much? I asked. Now and then, to get away from it all, bring a joint and get some peace and quiet. Once hiked in a couple of days and camped. Awful spooky though on your own. At night. Never seem to get used to it. Who knows what the fuck's out there. Reminds me of Nam sometimes, 'cept there're no slopes trying to fuck me up. Just a bunch of confused Indians trying to hang onto the old ways. Gotta watch it though, always gotta watch it when you're on your own out here. I was trying to spook him about Jaguars, I said, pointing at Gaz. Bloke's a madman, said Gaz defending himself. Jaguars? No Jaguars here for at least fifty years, said the American, Killed them all off because of the cattle. Nothing out here can do you much harm. A few rattlers, and you gotta watch the coral snakes. They can take you

out. Spiders maybe, a few widows around. Some bad plants and fungi. Nothing much. But there's the chupacabras, he added, That's what gets me when I've come out here to camp. Feel like a child all over again, I'm ashamed to say. The chupa what? said Gaz. The American frowned, wiping the sweat off his face, The chupacabras. Something out here kills cattle, especially goats. For some reason goats. No-one knows what it is. No-one's ever seen it. Leaves the goats sucked dry of everything. Just the husk of their skin. Two big puncture marks, and sucked dry inside, no guts left, just the skin. A recent thing. Only been going on for about a year or two. No people as yet though. But they say it's just a matter of time. Holy shit, muttered Gaz. You're not joking? I said. No, absolutely serious, replied the American, Swear to God. Guys have come out here with guns at night to try to kill it, whatever it is. No-one's ever seen anything. Hear stuff though, strange screaming. Happens about once or twice a year. The Indians say it's the Devil. Leaves strange three toed prints, walks on two legs. You're messing us around, I said. No, insisted the American, Really. I mean it. Swear to God. What do you think it is? asked Gaz. No idea. The American paused, Maybe it is the Devil. An eerie silence ensued. Just the monotonous shrill bird call that seemed to originate in my head.

We wandered off, each our separate ways. I wanted to look at the stream to see if I could spot any fish. Gaz was kneeling, examining some mushrooms. The American was standing at the edge of the clearing. He was listening. Something had attracted his attention. Edgy, I watched him. He turned round and held up his hand. Silence. Then I heard. Hermaaana. Hermaniiiiita. Puuuuto. Far away, muffled, way down the trail, echoing. Gaz stood up. Hermaniiiiita, puto gringo, hermaniiiiita. Voices carrying through the trees, on the breeze, still far away but growing nearer. Puuuuuto cabroooooon. The American had not moved. Gaz came over. What the fuck's that, he whispered. Someone coming down the trail, I replied, my throat dry with fear, Sounds like several people, not friendly. Hermaaana, hermaniiiiita. Puuuto griiiingo. Grim calculations already doing their work. The neutral isolation mocking. We could be in serious trouble. It had to be. We had been seen leaving the town. Three gringos, heading into the jungle, beyond

the law. Time for revenge. A posse, some local gang. Leather jackets, explosive aggression. Knives. That was the way here, no rules, we were in America, a long way from anywhere. A chance to stomp some whites, spill blood for the humiliations of generations returning with stories of abuse from across the border. We were going to pay for beefy Texans perpetrating hatred on migrants in squalid border jails. No use trying to explain to them, I say old man, wait a minute, actually, you know what, we're not Americans, actually, rather, British you know old chap, we're not responsible, it's really not cricket. Maybe the gringos were carrying money. They knew what we were doing. We were easy meat, out of our heads with marijuana. Just three of us. Ten could take us. Maybe there were more. We were really up the Khyber. I remembered the unique trauma of a fist connecting with my head. The jolting nausea. My brief encounter with university boxing, when I thought I should toughen up a bit, get fit. The controlled environment, a ring with a referee. University boxing when I thought I was tough. That was bad enough, the numbing blows, the blood, the crunching pain of fists hitting nasal cartilage. Here no control, no referee, no Marquis of Queensbury. We were really in for it. At best a severe beating, at worst . . . Hermaaaaaana, puto griiingo, yo te chingo hermaniiiiita. The voices nearer. Multiplying. Oblivious to our reactions, the American was quickly working on a large piece of wood, busting it down to form a crude club.

Gaz and I stared at each other, pale with fear. My mouth was so dry, I could barely speak. What do you think's going to happen? I rasped. The dull Liverpoolian accent, resonant with innate traditional violence, Dunno, wait and see. He was a big lad, he had been bricked when he was fifteen. He knew what was coming. Shaking, he started to remove his watch. I followed suit. We were going to make a stand. We had to. There was no choice. There was nowhere to go. The grim logic horrifying. Hermaniiiiita, puuuuto griiingo. Hermaniiiiita. Puuuutooooo. They were close. A couple of minutes, and they would be on us. Maybe twenty of them. I imagined the charging faces filled with blood lust, the smell of violence and sweat. The voices seeming to multiply. There would be a brief exchange of blows, flashing glaring pain,



shouts, the loosening of bowels, then a pummeling that might know no end. Our parents receiving news from the efficient clinical consul, They were last seen walking towards the jungle. No traces have been found. We're terribly sorry. A small footnote in the news back home, Students Disappear In Mexico. And everyone thinking, Silly little prats, getting lost in the jungle. Dr. Wright at the beginning of the academic year, And really, no-one has the slightest idea

what happened to them. Some might think we did a bunk, and just shacked up with some local women never to return. Pub myths, while our bodies finished rotting in the undergrowth. Maybe someone would stumble on our bones. We would lie near the Frenchman and his wife. Hermaaaaaana. Hermaaaaaaniiiiita. Puuuuto. The American was jogging towards us holding the club, not a trace of fear, Should've brought a gun, godammit, don't know why I didn't. Fuck it, that would sort it out, the motherfuckers. He pointed, When they come, they'll be out on that path yonder, where we came from. Stick together and fight the hell out of them. Hit them as hard as you can. Really fucking go for them. Show no fear. Sounds like quite a few, but if we make a good stand we might have a chance. A cliché as suddenly real. America, the old logic of the West. Make a circle and fight like hell. Go down fighting. How did we get into this mess? How many hapless fools asked themselves the same question, stuck on the plains while maniac savages closed in for the kill? All those westerns, films about English country lads fighting off Pathans, bayonets, crazed Zulus with assegais, rubbish you watched on a Sunday afternoon with beer, the rain pouring outside, battles you read about, Rorke's Drift, Gordon and the siege of Khartoum, it was about to become our

reality except no-one would ever read about it. How we fell under a rain of blows, gloriously beaten to death. I was shaking uncontrollably. Gone quiet, said the American, They'll be coming soon. I could see the strain in his knuckles gripping the wood. We waited, staring at the foliage, silent.

Movement up the path. Positioning maybe, checking us out before the final confrontation. Here they come, said the American. He moved forwards. Gaz and I followed. From my stomach, flowing like sludge through my body into my knees, I felt an embracing weakness. A deadly fatigue. I wanted to lie down and get it over. I wanted to sleep. Stoned. Of all the times to go into a fight. The American slapped the club into his hand, feeling the weight. Just like the old days, he muttered grimly, Takes me back. We'll meet them here. Do as much damage as you can. We were about twenty feet from the path. They would see three gringos, one tanned and hard looking, two pale. They would tell from our eyes who was going to give them the most trouble. We wouldn't last long. We waited. Footsteps, first contact. My heart jolted. The bushes rustled, brown hands pushed the branches aside. A little man walked into the clearing, blinking. Then another, and another. They were about five feet tall, tubby, dressed in jeans, no shirts. They were carrying packages slung beneath a pole. Broad grins revealed bright teeth against their copper skin. Their heads were squat and Asiatic. Indians. I exhaled in relief. Buenas tardes, said the leader. Buenas tardes, we replied. They marched through the clearing back into the jungle. Behind us, as they receded into the undergrowth, we could hear, Hermaaaana, hermaniita. Puuuto griingo. Gringo cabroooooon. Exhausted, Gaz sank down onto the turf. I never ever want to experience that again, he said. What the fuck was that all about? I shouted, Fucking crazy bastards. The American was grinning. He had tossed aside the club. Just trying to spook us, he drawled, They knew what we were doing out here. Must've seen us leaving the town. They wanted to fuck our minds. They know what to do. Centuries of experience. Real experts. We'd better get going. We don't want to take any chances. There may be others. And it's going to get dark soon. Remember the chupacabras.



children churches & daddies

the **UN**religious,
NONfamily-oriented
literary & art mag



the unreligious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine

Produced By Scars Publications and Design

Editorial Offices Children, Churches and Daddies; Scars Publications and Design
829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA

Internet ccandd96@scars.tv > <http://scars.tv>

Publishers/Designers Of Children, Churches and Daddies magazine; cc-d Ezines; Scars Internet Radio (SIR); TheBurning mini poem books; God Eyes mini poem books; The Poetry Wall Calendar; The Poetry Box; The Poetry Sampler; Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters; Reverberate Music Magazine; Down In The Dirt magazine; Freedom and Strength Press forum; assorted chapbooks and books; music, poetry compact discs; live performances of songs and readings

Sponsors Of past editions; chapbooks, books, past Poetry Chapbook Contest; past Poetry Book Contest; past Prose Chapbook Contest; past Prose Book Contest; Poetry Calendar Contest; Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites); Collection Volumes

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium, England, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malta, Norway, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey (as well as input from both Japan and Slovenia). Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues (via news and philosophy) as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. Children, Churches and Daddies is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published monthly by **Scars Publications and Design** Janet Kuypers.

• To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; if mailed, include SASE 6 bio. Work sent on disks or through e-mail preferred. Previously published work accepted. Authors always retain rights to their own work. All magazine rights reserved. Reproduction of cc&d without publisher permission is forbidden. Copyright © 1993-2007 **Scars Publications & Design, Children, Churches & Daddies** Janet Kuypers. U.S. Government

copyright © 2004 Janet Kuypers on the logos for **Scars Publications and Children, Churches & Daddies**. All rights of pieces for written pieces and artwork remain with their authors.

subscribe, or i'll have to kill you.

get a **Children, Churches and Daddies** subscription 4 only \$50.00/year (issues are \$5.00 each, + \$1.00 s&h, so \$6.00 per issue... so a subscription is like getting 4 issue free!). Order issues on line with a credit card (via PayPal) through the issues link at **cc&d** mag, or mail checks for issues or subscriptions made out to "Janet Kuypers" **only** (not to Scars or cc&d) to the address in our masthead. Get a subscription. You'll thank us for it.