

**DANCING  
AT THE  
ABYSS**

**I. B. Rad**

cc&d 2015 chapbook  
scarsuoteciind  
publications

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## DISCLAIMER

As a fictional character, the author assumes no responsibility for anything said in these pages. Any similarity between the content of these poems and actual reality is purely coincidental, as is generally true of “the media.”

# GENESIS

## But for Sin

If Eve and Adam  
hadn't sinned  
they'd as yet be  
rattling round  
God's  
interminable  
Eden,  
dumb as fence posts,  
weary of one another,  
having no one else  
to play cards  
to party  
or swap mates with,  
or otherwise share  
their earthly paradise.

# Lot's Wife: Modern Variations

Could it be  
the story of Lot's Wife  
is an allegory  
for being too backward looking,  
its famous pillar of salt  
denoting her interment  
in a halite mound  
formed from her sea of tears  
over biblical Hiroshima's  
impending holocaust?  
On an allied note,  
does Lot's wife further exemplify  
an emigrant's heartfelt plight  
at upending her entire universe  
for a surer if alien future,  
craning to see what was lost  
as well as what was gained?  
Or candidly, was she simply  
a doubting Thomas  
who couldn't take anyone at their word,  
not even envoys of almighty Yahweh  
(Who'd ever think,  
as *Master Of The Universe*,  
He'd sink  
to taking down  
a little hick town  
like Sodom)?  
Then again, is the term "she"  
the key  
to our biblical yarn?  
Was Lot's wife an intrepid protofeminist  
refusing to subserviently follow  
her husband's lead  
or take direction  
from two angelic henchmen  
of a patriarchal, tribal Godfather?

## There's Always Something

I've learned  
that into every life  
a little rain must fall  
and so I've built a lifeboat  
to float upon the flood;  
yet, if one day  
some clement sun drifts by  
to dry away our tears;  
well then, poised like Noah  
at salvation's doorstep,  
my profoundest fear's  
drowning in the mud.

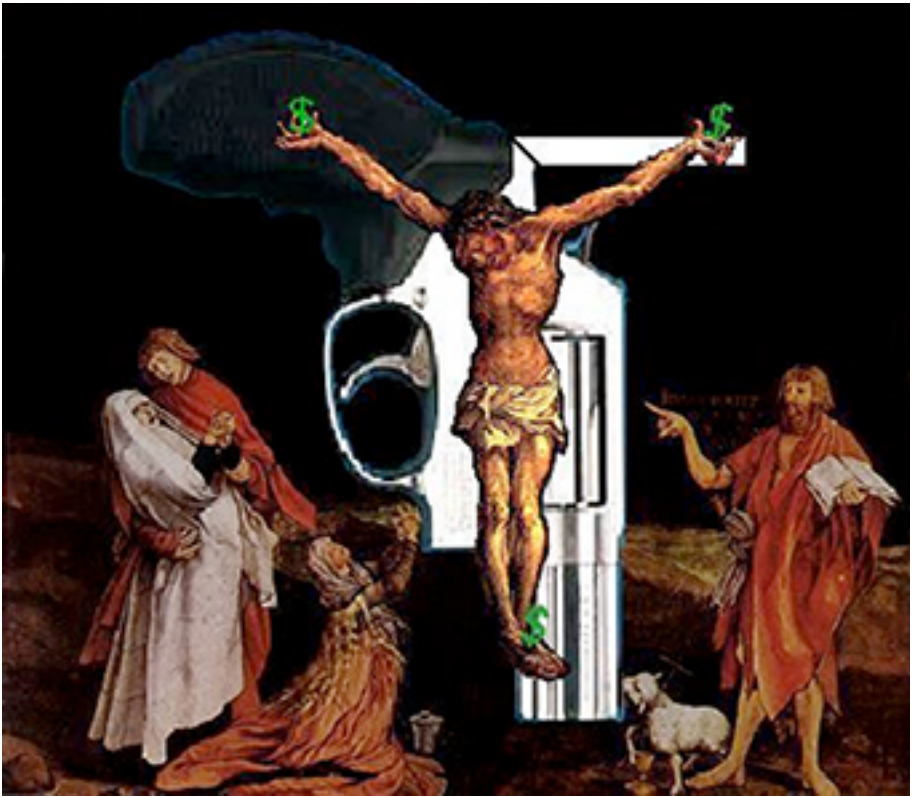
## Hang Ups

Claudius,\*  
by mild palsy favored,  
feigned the fool  
and so, beguiling many,  
bided a respectable span  
to be hung with royal purple,  
lauded emperor of Rome.  
Applauded by few,  
Christ featured himself  
“son of God”  
and so enjoyed  
a somewhat shorter run,  
the crowning role,  
a Judean felon  
hung up on a cross.

*\*Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus (e.g. Claudius I) 10 B.C. - A.D. 54*



## A New Cross to Bear



Collage based on work of Matthias Grunewald

## Hypatia\*

Besides backing Alexandrian prefect, Orestes,  
in opposition to archbishop Cyril,  
Hypatia also inflamed Cyril's disciples  
by being an acclaimed pagan  
who flouted her proper "woman's place,"  
so irate Christians dragged her to their church;  
then, for a touch of piety,  
tore her limb from limb  
and burned her remnants in the street -  
an early though effective form of censorship.

*\* Mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, exquisite Hypatia (370? - 415 AD) was head of the Neoplatonist school of philosophy in Alexandria, Egypt. Her death was mourned in the ancient world and she remains a symbol today.*

## My God's Better than Your God

Despite exceptions,  
much of human history's  
disfigured by the premise  
'My God's better than your God,'  
with apostles of that imparity  
ministering merciless atrocities  
to lord it over others' deities.  
And as vengeful Gods  
have come and gone  
over tedious millennia of torture,  
pillage, rape, devastation  
- surely enough to satisfy  
any divinity's bloodlust  
for human sacrifice -  
what insight  
has this unsavory past  
brought so many of us?  
'My God **IS** better than your God!'

## “In God We Trust”\*

Too often we relegate faith to religion  
trusting most other practices  
are based on dispassionate logic and fact,  
forgetting that use  
of federally issued currency,  
investing in stocks,  
or stashing it in a bank,  
let alone using a credit card,  
are faith based transactions;  
that the bottom line is  
for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health  
we’re all wedded to the gospel  
of humanity’s sole universal theology,  
the only denomination  
preaching the God  
of the “invisible hand”  
and “free markets,”  
Capitalism!

\* *Written after reading Yuval Noah Harari’s engrossing book, “Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind”*

## The New Man

In a bygone Soviet era  
Marxist commentators constantly extolled  
the advent of a “new man;”  
which is to say, an evolution of its citizens  
(both men and women)  
into consummate comrades  
tailored to forge a workers paradise.  
Analogously, today’s crony capitalism  
demands its own species  
of new man,  
a pliable hermaphrodite,  
so in America’s plutocratic utopia  
corporate/ political/ Wall Street stewards  
are no longer requisite  
as its ultimate citizens  
will go fuck themselves.

# TESTAMENT

## Parallel Lives

Mostly poetry touches on  
the human condition,  
love, angst, hate, war, religion...  
even so, on a cosmic scale,  
since the universe  
gets along quite nicely without us,  
it could just as well complain,  
'Everything's not about you!'  
So why then  
can't a leaf  
fall from a tree  
without intimating  
aging and death  
or a wave  
sweep up on a beach  
without erasing someone's footprint?  
Well, to be fair,  
Isn't every species horizon  
at least partly bound by its needs?  
Don't birds have territorial disputes  
in 'our' yards;  
and does a spider worry about  
spinning its web  
in 'your' house,  
or a tapeworm  
show the slightest contrition  
over human suffering  
as contrasted to enjoying  
a good lunch?

## “Truth”

“Truth” is popularly portrayed  
as an intermediate shade of gray  
between too polar extremes,  
black and white;  
yet, “truth” is most often  
shifting patterns of dark and bright  
beneath a sunlit tree,  
its’ fluid limbs  
dancing to the wind



## The First Casualty

Waging trial by media,  
news anchors  
comport like sportscasters  
at a Roman coliseum  
where, locked  
in mock combat,  
pundit-gladicators  
playing to the throng  
thrust at one another  
never landing  
that fatal blow;  
the upshot being,  
wounded by all sides,  
*truth,*  
their only casualty,  
if not by any public  
'thumbs down,'  
dies, mutilated,  
on the ground.

## Even the Smallest Stone

I've read  
"even the smallest stone  
in a riverbed  
has the history of the universe  
inscribed on it"\*  
and, in view  
of modern cosmology  
and the Earth's geology,  
it's true,  
so who'd ever dream  
I'd leave  
a stone unturned?  
Yet, curiously,  
I seldom stoop  
to scoop up rocks  
and if I do  
all I can ever see  
is a missile  
to skim over water,  
to fling at a pesky dog,  
or, at best,  
a hefty lump  
to pose as a paperweight  
- such is our basic  
metaphysics.

*\*Written after reading Hikaru Okuizumi's marvelous, "The Stones Cry Out."*

## Patriotism

Patriotism  
inoculates a community  
against foreign invasion;  
yet, if offensively applied,  
it inflames the body politic,  
and, like an immune reaction gone awry,\*  
afflicts healthy civic organs  
such as freedom of thought  
or speech,  
or any constituent  
rejecting the party line.  
But then, sadly,  
as the adage goes,  
“Nobody’s ever lost an election  
by waving the flag.”

*A not uncommon medical condition leading to a variety of maladies including Lupus.*

## The Approaching Front

At daybreak,  
forecasters predict,  
the approaching front  
will bring  
its anticipated drizzle  
of corpses  
and an oppressive downpour  
of traumatized and fleeing  
while emanating  
from the burning city  
a crimson sky  
will lighten  
an otherwise  
leaden landscape.  
And the night?  
Well, it's initially dark  
or darker, lacking  
a scintilla of hope  
save "life goes on"  
and, in time,  
tomorrow, most certainly,  
will come  
tomorrow...

## The New Jerusalem



**Collage based on work of Giotto and Photo of Stage Set for WPA Anti-War Drama**

## Dancing at “The Abyss”

There’s a club dubbed “The Abyss”  
where everyone who’s anyone  
dances on the edge,  
where terrorist and general  
separatist and loyalist,  
leftist and conservative,  
elbow one another,  
high on jingoistic near beer  
and solidarity’s addicting upper,  
cultural-ethnic superiority,  
where war and death  
prance cheek to cheek  
to an orchestration so enthralling,  
with a culmination so invigorating,  
it’s left all caterwauling,  
“ From crematoria of Europe,  
to killing fields of Rwanda,  
Syria, Cambodia,  
we’re dancing at The Abyss”

## Until the Lion Lays the Lamb

Until the lion lays the lamb  
I fear our future's rather slim.  
Love between such dissimilar beasts  
is less improbable than peace  
surmounting that monumental hump  
honest international unity.  
And from such unseemly intercourse  
what might the issue be?  
Time to love enough for you and me.

# Our Nuclear Family

## 1. Nuclear Proliferation

Once I held nuclear proliferation  
an unmitigated disaster  
but now I've begun to appreciate  
growing nuclear parity's just  
confirmation of our humanity,  
for what better antidote to "global warming"  
than "nuclear winter."

## 2. Fusion

What could be more majestic  
than the blinding sunset  
of a hydrogen bomb;  
no ambiguity there,  
just cogent notice of national intent?  
Who could neglect to ignite  
in its stellar flair,  
resist fusion's melting caress,  
or fail to glow to its warm radiation?  
It's sort of like getting  
an out of the blue valentine,  
what's not to love?



# Manhunt 1941

Hanging on my wall,  
its' title penciled,  
"Manhunt 1941,"  
a small print  
depicts 3 Nazi soldiers,  
with several hounds,  
pushing through  
a wintry woods,  
its foreboding mood abetted  
by casting its bleak perspective  
in shades of blue  
and by placing actors,  
plants, and shading  
to draw attention  
to footprints in the snow.  
In the foreground,  
nicely contrasting  
with solid figures  
of hounds, trees, and soldiers,  
tall leafless vegetation  
is drawn with fine point  
lending unexpected delicacy  
and even beauty  
to that chilling scene.  
And, even now,  
as I review  
those remorseless troops,  
I shiver  
knowing  
it's four years more  
until, at last,  
the game's over.

*\*George Ivers (1922 - 2001), creator of "Manhunt 1941", was born in Poland. As a member of the Polish division of the French army, he was captured by the Germans and was a prisoner of war on 3 separate occasions, escaping each time (perhaps giving him a special affinity for this subject matter.) Later, he immigrated to the United States. His works appear in many collections such as the Brooklyn Museum, the Jewish Museum, the New Jersey State Museum, and even the White House and the Vatican.*

## **Thank God**

Out of God's lowering heavens  
a twister bolted,  
slaying sixty  
cripling a thousand,  
barely a building left...  
Thank thee Lord for thy bounty  
that left mine standing.

## “Joy to the World”

Opposite my apartment  
there's a park  
where they say  
deals go down every day,  
though tonight,  
on Christmas eve,  
it's pure meth white  
like snorted snow.  
You'd swear the view's  
a wintry landscape  
by Andrew Wyeth  
or, perhaps,  
some precious scene  
from a Christmas Card, except  
for those few telltale tracks  
popping this seasonable vein  
to proclaim,  
“Joy to the World!...”

## God Helps Those ?

While promoting cuts  
for social programs,  
politicians cite,  
“God helps those  
who help themselves”  
as if it were  
biblical stricture;  
yet, their actions,  
“speaking louder than words,”  
pantomime another meaning,  
“God helps those  
who help themselves [to everything!]”

## The Cloak of Invisibility

Slipping on an invisibility cloak  
assumes no novel chemical formula,  
no deep insight in physics,  
no awesome engineering,  
nor is it purely fictional;  
instead, it's incredibly ordinary  
as simply the affliction  
of becoming poor  
assures invisibility.

## Uncle Sam Gives Liberty the Ax

Poor ol' Uncle's  
gone an done it, axed  
statuesque Ms. Liberty.  
Whack! Hack!  
He's offed an arm!  
Screech! Slash!  
She's lost her head!  
Chop! Plop!  
Liberty's not got  
a leg stand on!  
Now, arrested through lawsuit,  
ol' Uncle's protestin  
*HE's* a hapless victim  
who's lost  
inalienable freedom  
to express  
constitutional  
proclivities.

## Talking to the Man in the Moon\*

In 1969, during their historic lunar walk,  
who'd have thought  
astronauts Aldrin and Armstrong  
might also have been conveying  
a tribal admonition  
to the man in the moon?  
Months earlier, at a high desert moonscape  
in the western United States,  
they met an elderly native American  
who was puzzled by their behavior  
and, after explaining  
they were training for a lunar landing,  
the man disclosed he and his tribe  
believed sacred spirits lived on the moon;  
then asked them to pass a secret message  
to those holy spirits, in his native tongue.  
And so, after rehearsing the words  
until they could articulate his lines verbatim,  
they returned to their base  
repeating them to an interpreter  
who broke out laughing, chortling it meant,  
'Don't believe a word these people are telling you.  
They've come to steal your lands.'

\* Based on an anecdote found in Yuval Noah Harari's book, *Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind*

## The Free Market (La Serrata\*)

Who ever coined *that* phrase,  
“the free market?”  
Frankly, it’s anything but “free.”  
By the time you’ve bought legislators,  
hired lobbyists, sponsored partisan foundations,  
funded Astroturf movements, supper-PACs,...  
you’ve dropped a bundle!  
Yet, given your return on investment  
like fraudulent financial regulation,  
sweetheart deals, tax loopholes,  
gutting safety/environmental standards,...  
it’s a steal!

*\*Why La Serrata? Google “La Serrata and Venice” and see!*



## Goya in the Time of King George\*

Goya, in our land  
where Saturn devours his children every morning,  
rigs markets in the afternoon  
and goes to mass on Sundays,  
where the “Prince of Peace”  
becomes the God of War  
and Mammon reigns supreme,  
where witches and incubi eclipse our skies  
and gnomes and hobgoblins roam our streets,  
come paint our vapid king and queen\*\*,  
our slaughter of the innocents,  
our Adams raping Eves.  
Goya, come paint us mainly,  
not as we’ll pay to seem  
but as we are!

*\*Although the Spanish painter Francisco Goya (1746 - 1828) is perhaps best known for paintings such as “The Naked Maja” and “The Clothed Maja”, he is equally revered for his satirical/“dark” paintings and etchings that depict follies and superstitions in his native Spain. These include paintings such as “Saturn Devouring his Son,” “The Witches Sabbath,” “The Incantation”, and “The Second of May”, to pick a few, and 3 collections of etchings, “The Caprichos (caprices), The Dispartes (follies) and Proverbios (proverbs), and “The Disasters of War”. The regal vapidty depicted in his painting, The Family of Charles IV, is probably more a tribute to realism than an attempt to satirize his royal patrons.*

*\*\*“Goya in the time of...” was written during the reign of Mr. George Bush.*

## Principle Uncertainty

Quantum mechanics  
portrays that wondrous realm  
where no one knows  
a particle's true location  
or its' actual bearing,  
where it may even maintain  
two positions simultaneously!  
But who'd have guessed  
these marvels likewise ensue  
in the macroworld,  
as American politicians  
daily prove.

## Porn Stars

I was eyeing porn stars  
humping and grunting on TV,  
switching to election returns  
during less explicit scenes  
when I started laughing  
at one aroused candidate  
going through the motions,  
climaxing at what she'd do  
if she got in office,  
for I knew,  
unlike posturing politicians,  
porn stars  
actually do it.

## Letter to a Senator

Despite being vilified, recent Supreme Court rulings  
hardly scratch the surface  
for while affirming corporations as persons  
and campaign contributions as protected speech  
they fail to fully incorporate the relationship  
between money and personhood in America  
whose poor, working, and middle classes  
scarcely count as citizens  
while those most fiscally endowed  
command more representation than entire cities.  
Accordingly, I ask that Congress legislate the following:  
“Instead of ‘one person, one vote’  
citizens will be treated as stockholders  
with each individual’s share of America  
commensurate with their relative wealth;  
consequently, as at any stockholders meeting,  
each person (including ‘American’ corporations)  
will have the number of votes  
corresponding to their net worth  
(which, in today’s America, is their actual worth.)”  
I’m certain that this “Voting Reform Act”  
is an equitable reflection of American democracy  
which will avert the necessity  
of bribing and lobbying elected officials  
while enabling our legislators to be more candidly obedient  
to their true constituency.

Respectfully yours,  
(Corporations are people too!)

I.B. Rad

## Our Nine Black Robed Priests

The constitution's  
America's holy writ  
with its own black robed priesthood  
hearing high profile appeals  
of lower court rulings.  
And despite disconcerting schisms,  
after months  
of shrouded deliberation  
this conclave finally issues  
that puff of smoke  
so breathlessly awaited  
by media pundits,  
the definitive edict,  
its papal bull.

## Oh Lawdy, Don't You Cry for Me

Proselytizing creeds  
promise true believers  
a fast track to paradise;  
though God only knows,  
maybe heaven's parceled  
into many astral globes  
and a beneficent God Almighty's  
got one for Baptists,  
another for Catholics,  
a third for Mormons,  
a fourth for Sunnis,  
a fifth for Shiites,  
and on 'n on  
till kingdom come  
- to hell with atheists!

## Don't Bite the Hand

How accepting  
that darling little dog  
standing before its “master,”  
licking a hand,  
wagging its tail,  
hoping some little treat  
might be tossed its way.  
And so you stand  
before your Lord,  
one petitioner  
on bended knee  
praying some small want  
will be granted.  
But given the world  
as it is,  
you might just as well  
curse unjust fate,  
smash your Deity’s graven image,  
rail heresies,  
and become an apostate  
who’ll bite the hand  
that never feeds you.

# Letter to Natalya Gorbanevskaya

Thirty years ago  
I discovered that rare force  
of your banned poetry  
only learning later  
you'd demonstrated against  
Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia  
and that disclosing protester prosecution  
landed you in a psychiatric hospital,  
resolved at length  
by emigration.

Then, ever so much later,  
communism fell

Well now, since those heady days,  
you'd be appalled to find  
history's gone full circle  
with Vladimir Putin  
gnawing on Ukraine  
like a dog on a bone,  
claiming it's because  
that bone's stuck  
In mother Russia's craw,  
with democracy and liberty  
an elusive rabbit in a hat,  
vanishing at a wave  
of the conjurer's paw.  
But then, as you'd already written,  
"the way of penitence,  
like the path of sin,  
is never-ending"\*

*\* Natalya Gorbanevskaya (1936 - 2013) was a rare Russian poet that the author first met through the book, "Russia's Underground Poets", pub. 1969. The ending lines of this poem were taken from an article in "Modern Poetry in Translation" written by Yuri Kublanovsky, translated by Daniel Weissbort. A sampling of N. Gorbanevskaya's poetry, translated into English, is available on the internet.*



## Old Dog

While war storms by,  
recession turns us paupers,  
and politicians rob us blind,  
I fret  
as old dog lazes  
in front of our TV  
and barely opens  
a single drowsy eye.

## “One Small Step for Man”\*

Twin sets  
of hominid tracks  
stamped in stone,  
what can their pattern mean?  
Was the deeper, wider trail  
laid by a male?  
[Note the abrupt sprint  
of the lighter print  
which then curves in  
on the other.  
See, where they converge,  
the fainter gait on tiptoe...]  
Just two sets of imprints,  
an heroic instant  
locked in stolid rock.  
As to the pair’s intent,  
should we even know?

\* *These tracks are generally attributed to an early hominid, Australopithecus afarensis.*

## She's hot

She's hot  
but cool  
or sexy  
she's definitely not.  
Like a mom  
whose mischievous child's  
got under her skin,  
she's increasingly tempestuous,  
her temperature's climbing,  
her hair's on fire;  
yet, like an unruly child  
fooling with matches,  
we recklessly burn  
fossil fuel  
then scurry about  
countering droughts  
and snuffing flames out  
as though we just didn't know  
our best bet's  
not fouling our nest  
- at least until we're set  
to blast off  
and infest  
the universe.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many of these poems have been published in *Children, Churches, and Daddies* (cc&d) as well as other *Scars Publications* poetry collections.

*But for Sin* was published in cc&d v243. *Lot's Wife: Modern Variations* was published in cc&d v260. *There's Always Something* was published in cc&d v223. *My God's better than your God* was published in cc&d v255. *Parallel Lives* was published in cc&d v254. "Truth" was published in cc&d v236. *The First Casualty* was published in cc&d v260. *Even the Smallest Stone* was published in cc&d's collection book "(not so) Warm & Fuzzy". *Patriotism* was published in cc&d v168. *The Approaching Front* was published in cc&d v251. *Dancing at "The Abyss"* was published in cc&d v257. *Manhunt 1941* was published in cc&d v187. "Joy to the World" was published in cc&d v252. *The Cloak of Invisibility* was published in cc&d v243. *Uncle Sam Gives Liberty the Ax* was published in cc&d v234. *Principle Uncertainty* was published in cc&d v258, *Letter to a Senator* was published in cc&d v225. *Our Nine Black Robed Priests* was published in cc&d v253. *Don't Bite the Hand* was published in cc&d v260. *Letter to Natalya Gorbanevskaya* was published in cc&d v255. *Old Dog* was published in cc&d v201.

Poems in this chapbook have also been published in *A Little Poetry*, *The Cynic Online Magazine*, *Poetry Superhighway* (*Poets of the Week and Holocaust Editions*), *Lucid Moose* (*Gutters and Alleyways*), *protest poems.org*, *International Zeitschrift*, *Word Slaw*, *Heavy Hands Ink*, *Cerberus*, and *The San Fernando Poetry Journal*. The cover illustration, *Dancers*, was provided by Janet Kuypers, Editor, *Scars Publications*.

I am also including 4 additional collages that may or may not be appropriate for inclusion in the chapbook. I indicate where they might fit in (below) but where any are actually included, if at all, is up to you.

The illustration *To Hit a Home Run You Have to Play Ball* would probably be best by either of the poems *The Free Market* or *Letter To a Senator*

2. The illustration *The Creation* would probably be best beside the poem *But for Sin* or *There's Always Something*.

The illustration *Total Eclipse* would probably be best beside either of the poems *The New Man* or *The Free Market*.

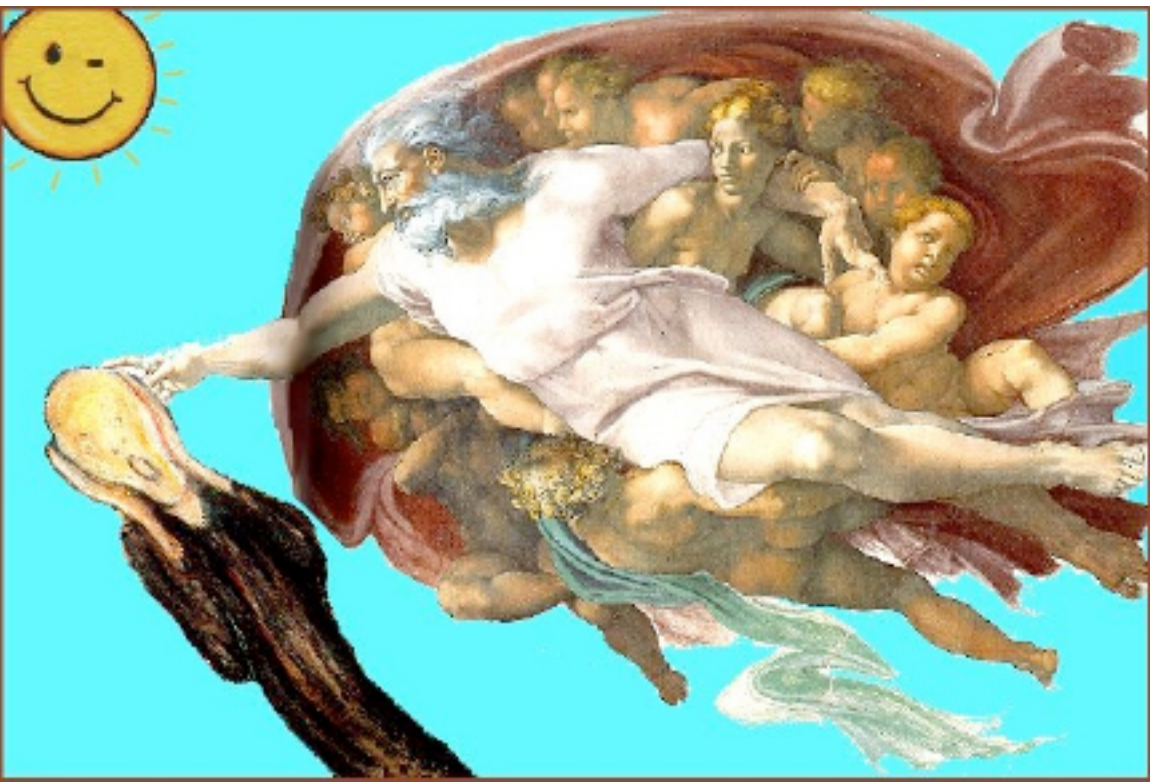
4. The illustration *Dark Matter* would probably be best beside the poem *The New Man*, *The Free Market*, *Letter to a Senator*, or *In God We Trust*.

# To Hit a Home Run You Have To Play Ball



Collage based on work of Uncle Sam's engravers and soviet artist, Victor Deni

## The Creation



Collage based on work of Michelangelo Buonarroti and Edvard Munch.

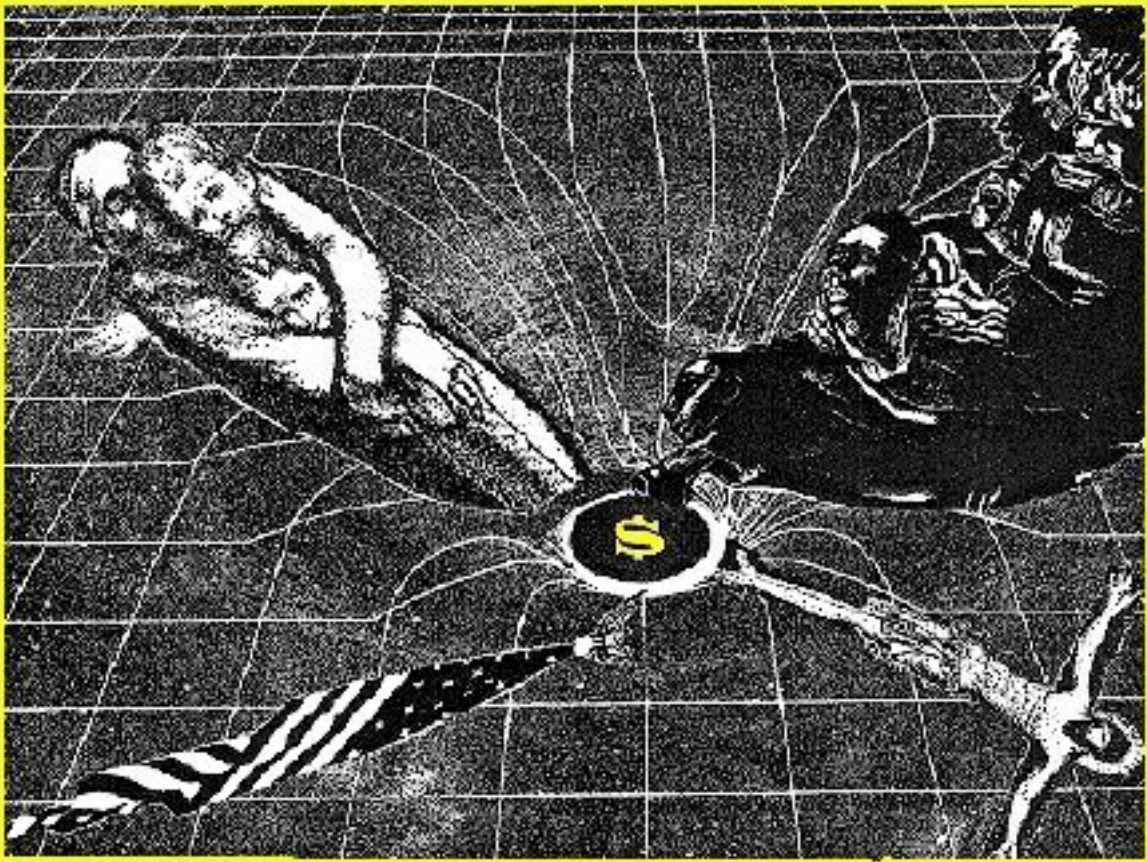
# Total Eclipse



Collage based on work of Uncle Sam's engravers and Archibald Willard



## Into the Black Hole



Collage is indebted to the work of Kathe Kolwitz

