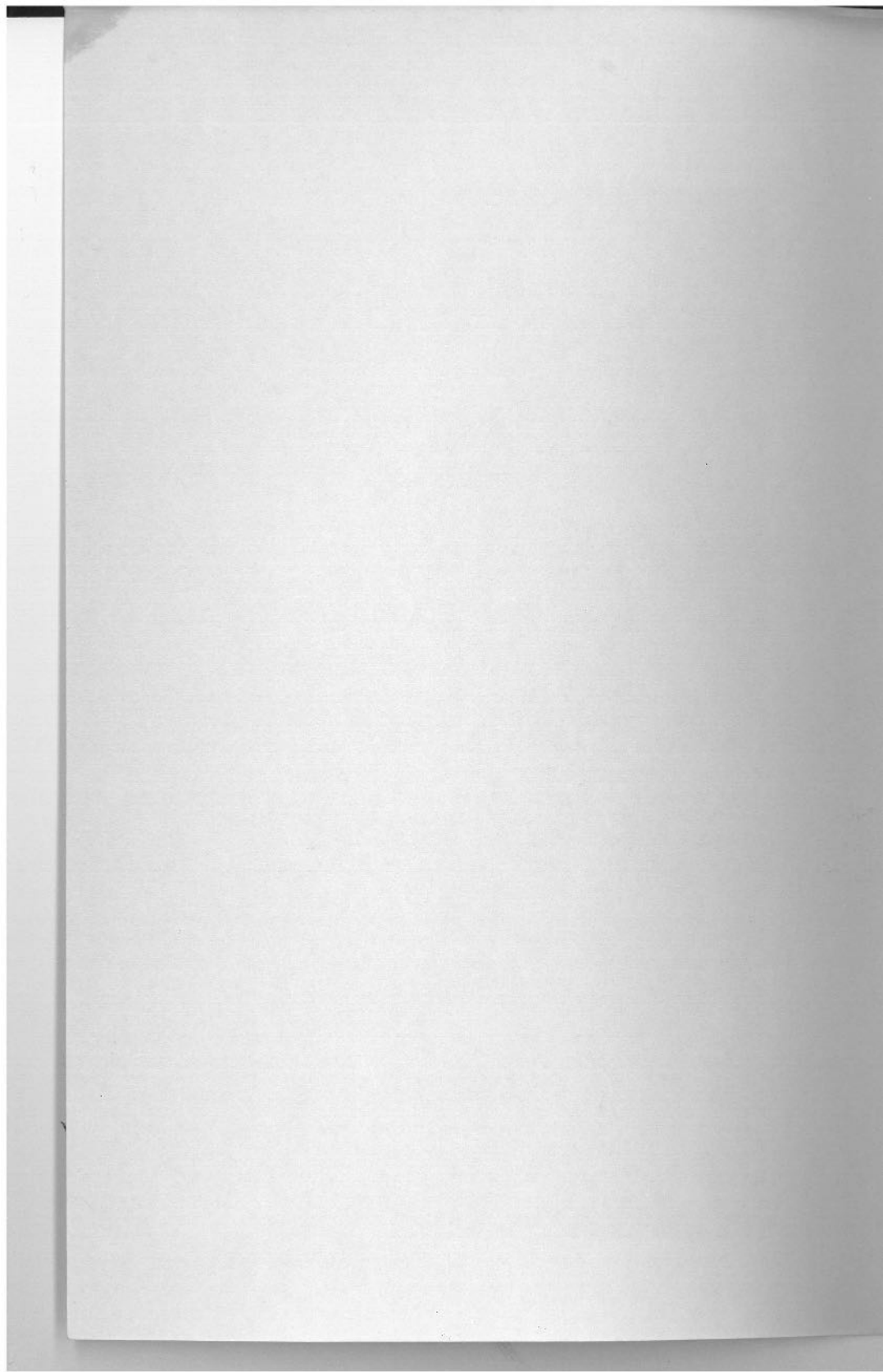


north

V1.2



"Lippio Grass" Audrey J. Hester
2008



north

SPRING 1999

editors

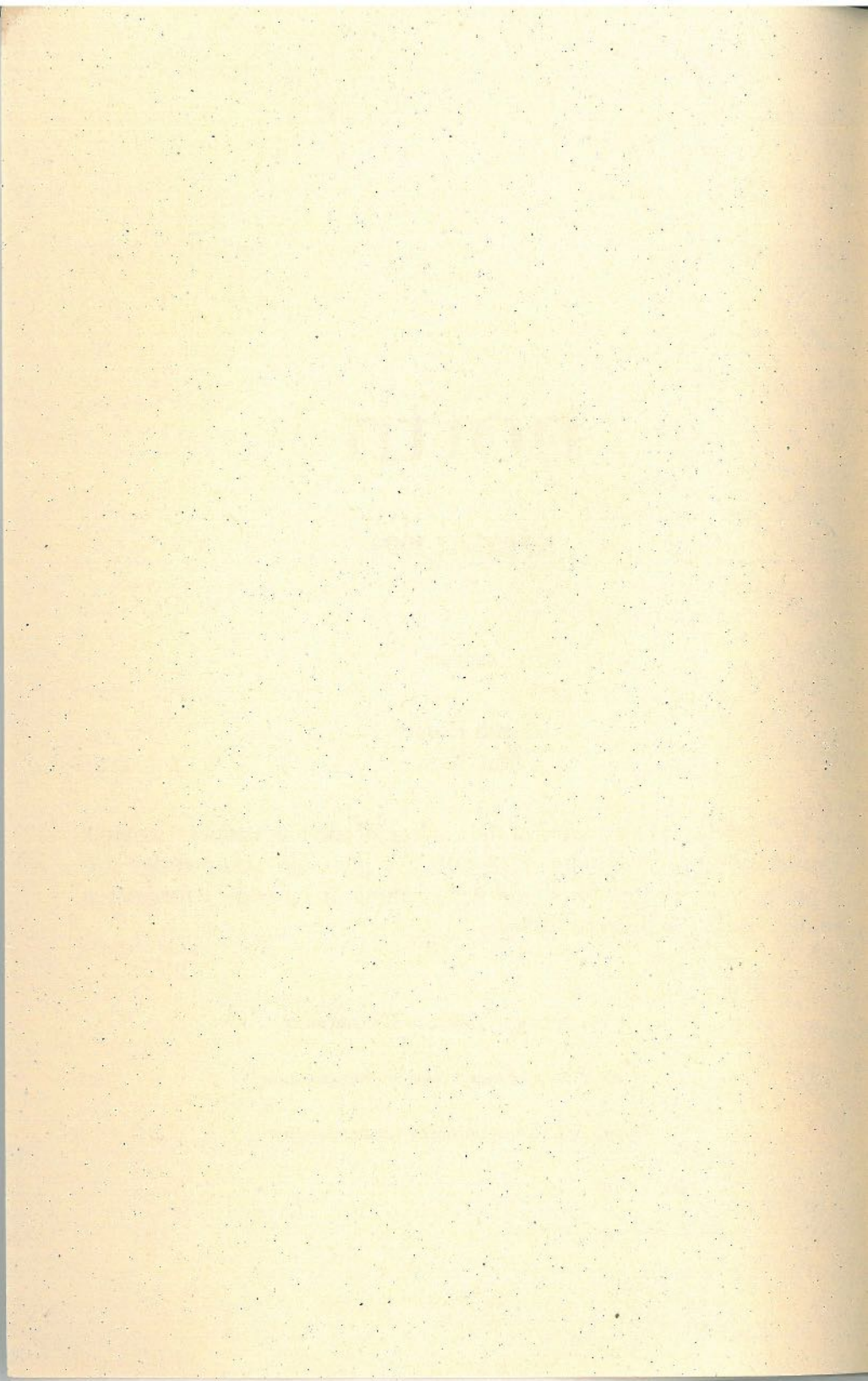
Keith Ebsary
Alex Welsh

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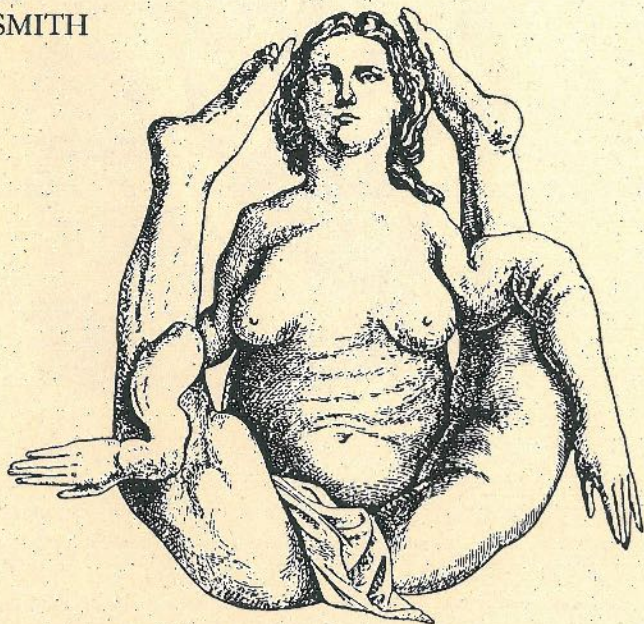
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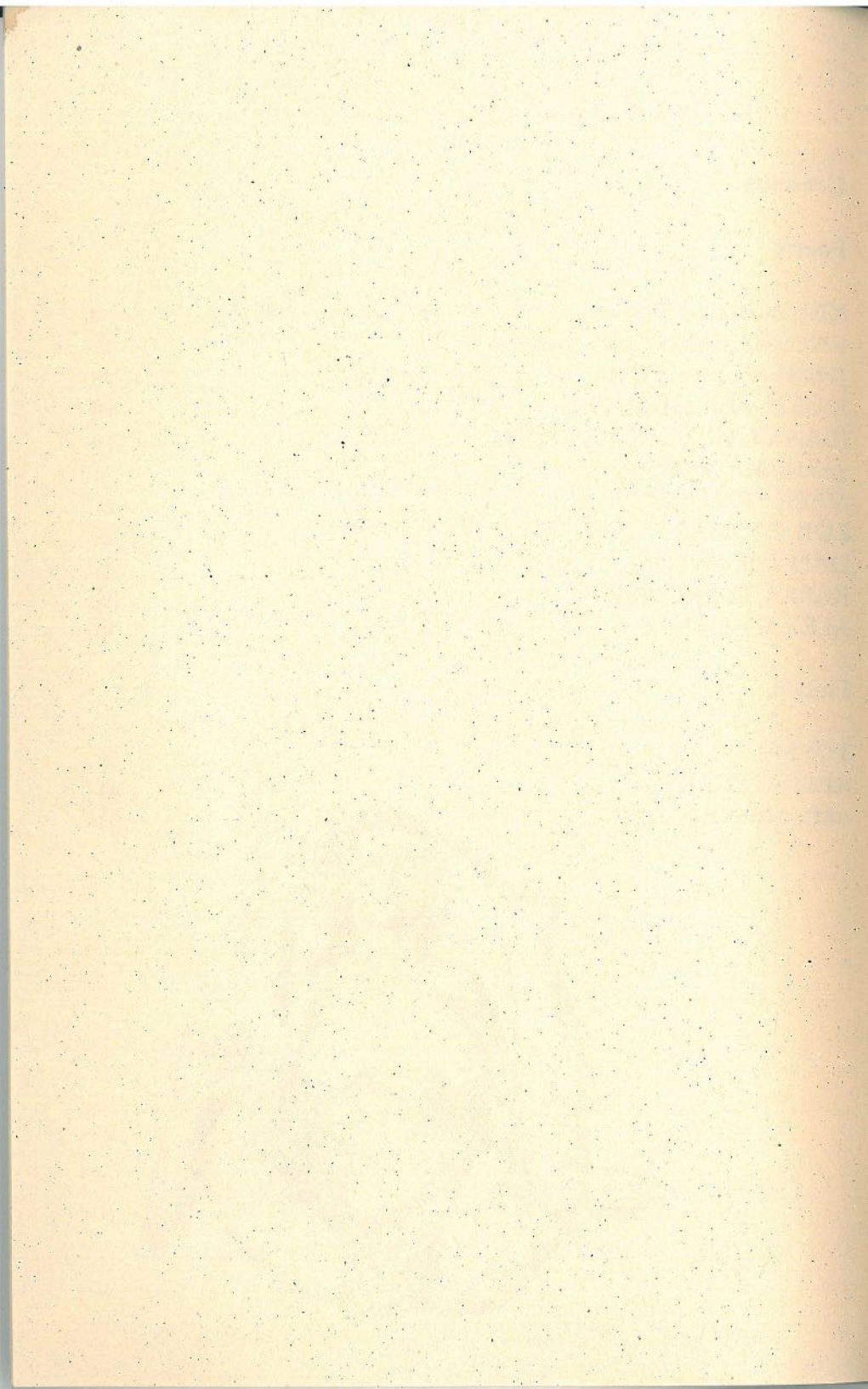
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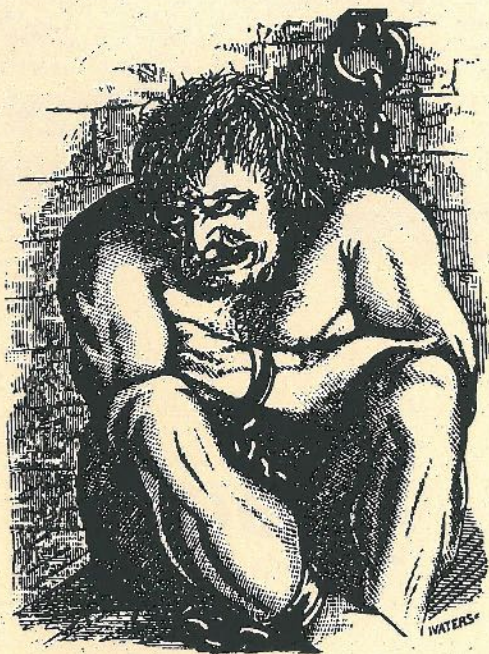
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One person asks another: "Why do you wear that straitjacket with such pride though the doctors say that you are entirely sane?"

The other responds: "Because, dear friend, it gives me permission to remain perfectly still."



ABSINTHE PERNOD FILS

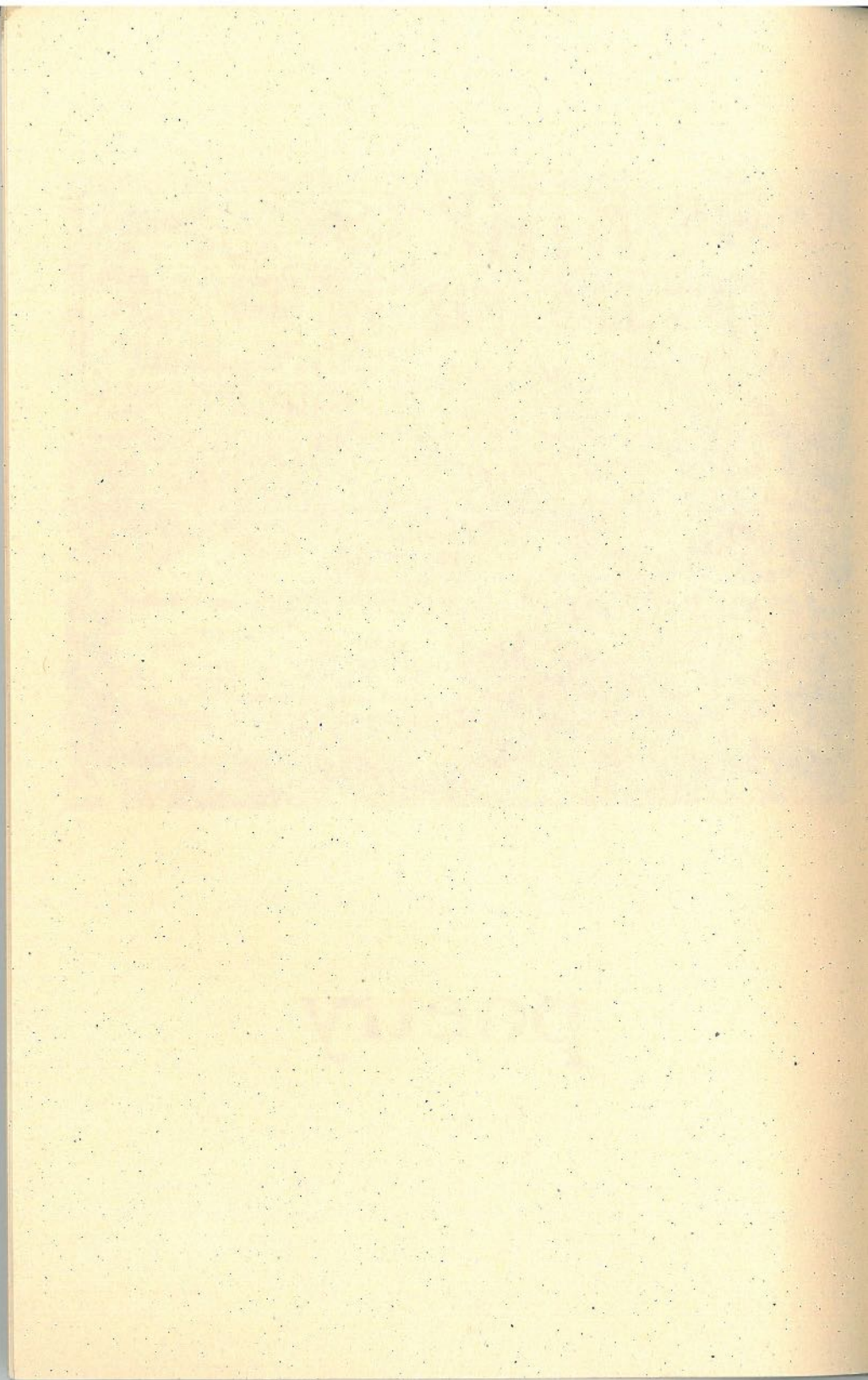
Established 1805



FAC-SIMILE OF THE LABEL



poetry



KEITH EBSARY

anonymous suicide found in the paper

you leave behind a life in newsprint
though i'm sure you're not a star

why the bridge they ask as they take you down
and collect your body with a fumbling sort of disgust
splayed inside the vehicle that takes you home

why anything your body responds
the reason is the result
i've told you all i know.

you thought this would be the revelation of your last great secret
but they're already at your house to find a dozen more
and pry you open like a child's fist
whose weakness is so easily disclosed

they will find tins of soup in the cupboard
and dirty laundry
left in your room

magazines you read
your toothbrush and razor

a few strands of hair plucked from a comb
photographs of someone you may have loved

evidence of life in all its simplicity
they look beautiful to me now.

but take all of this with you
take whatever you never meant to share
and bury what we didn't know
take it with you i don't want them

they remind me of something i should have done
and fit like blank catalogues into memories i don't have
if death is an accusation
you hung your words from the bridge
and suggested poems as you swayed

another body dressed
in the sad colours of life.

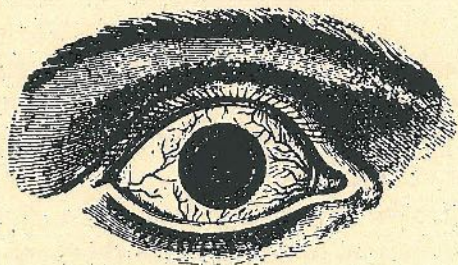


the old timers

slush their way through the footworn paths of downtown parks
carrying cases of empties to line up on the beerstore counter
for a handful of pocket change

set up like ruin on the streets as faded as their faces
they shift old bodies tattered together with jeans and ragged cords
and carry themselves with the beaten grace of a relic
someone found lying the dust

counting days and the price of museums
i walk behind them stepping over piles of dogshit
discovered by the melting snow



on the bus to quebec city

telephone poles divide the sky between tree and snow
where forests jumble together in
thick brown knots on land dotted with fences
and small farm houses

land of the canadian shield
that hides its mountains well and suffers roads
that always point north to an arctic centre;

land that i visit
in buses that frighten deers and rattle barn doors
painted with the names of old families who
survive in the names of small towns and villages
and claim the ruined artifacts disgorged each spring
by the fields that lie just beside the interminable stretches of highway
a rusty bucket sometimes exposed by phantom hands
or part of an old plow that once bled the young soil for life
though it drives nothing now except itself
further and further into the earth

in a salty winter vehicle paid for with an eighty dollar ticket
the traces left by others shift beyond windows that seem too thin
and end in country graveyards where flowers and hymns
and stones that bear no inscriptions
don't mistake my ideas for identities
for there's no one left to clear the grave
and i don't even know where they're buried

this history that escapes the attention of the speeding bus
is not a litany of accomplishments and successes
won by figures as they raised structures and families
against what they thought life was supposed to be
it's just a sad record of gradual disappearances
that whistles only through the lips of the living
when they find themselves alone;

but look carefully look again for it's just over there
where the field meets the road and bends into the earth
down an old well that draws nothing but dust

something glistens under the overhand
and melting ice patters against its side
like the faint clapping of horses in stables
stables turned into tool sheds
and then back into pasture

and the sound is more alive than any gurgling city
built around mistakes of the imagination
swallowing ages of dust because it is dust
and dries out the stumble forward

the bus lurches on past the space of both worlds
as one opens into the other
leaching stories from an absent teller
like the gathering of old acquaintances
as they reconstruct separate histories
from fragmented evidence of their own lives

around the rolling tires i leave histories of myself
near places i've never been
and will never commit to memory
my life a brief suggestion of a later absence
duly noted in the community newspaper
before i become part of the country again
and someone rediscovers me as a clod of earth
to be washed off their vegetables
 watching me for a moment in the sink
 before sending me back
 the way i came

Editor's note: This poem won the 1999 Hinterland Poetry Award sponsored by The Backwater Review, and will be published in their Spring issue, along with another poem.

ANDREA ENGLAND

disco died in '79

mother had a tube top
wore it on the porch
& clutched the cigarettes she never inhaled.
mother went to parties and had frosted tips
dancing drunk and dreading daylight
mother had a firebird
when they were cool.

now mom's got a datsun
another drooling infant in the grimy back seat
august's glare on the hood.
she goes to walmart, clips coupons, wears leggings
& grinds her molars anxiously.
when she felt the first flutter her stomach was still flat
disco died in '79.



JESSICA LANGSTON

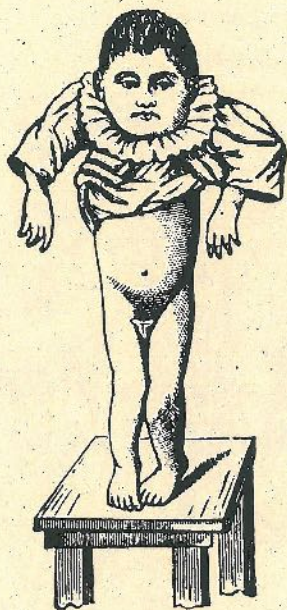
Betrayed.
My own tongue
swelling,
blocking my
word-symphony.

This is when
I would tell you
about smears
and stains
left on me by others.
How I scrubbed,
bleached.

This is when
I would tell you
there's something
about your tongue
when you glisten it
along your lips
it reminds me
of whispers
in raw gardens,
how we would
cling,
drool
like gorgeous puppies.

This is when
you would brush
your hair
out of your eyes,
touch my
hopeful
face with blunt
fingertips.

Still I blame you,
I sing
easily
when you aren't watching.



KRISTOFER LILJEFORS

a psalm

The echo of my heart's song
has suddenly been stilled;

by bitter spit, and
the acrid tap of
foreign fingers
in a distant land.

Is this the end for which we raised
our faces to the stars?

The smoke of candles long blown out,
twists lazily through the air.



JEAN CLAUDE MONTECCHI

There/Here

In sunny daze
along a shore
a calming breeze
there overcame.
Here sun's light plays
on sea's uproar,
while gusts gave ease
like saving rain.

Mind here unwound,
Heart as the dawn,
Sight slit by noon's
bright dizzy fire.
There vision found,
horizon on,
white cloud which soon's
to rain retire.

If just to fly,
and stay a wink,
in moment still
before I wake.
That dreaming dies
to hollows sink,
thieves from the will
for duty's sake.

Despairing, down,
eyes turned to ground,
to littered stones
all grey and lame.
Then Sight had found
a spider round,
whose size enthrones
her matron frame.

She spins and casts
a web that's hung
close the ground,
beside a tree.
She never fasts
nor is she stung;
her web will found
security.

So could there be
a web that I
may cast about
to fix the dreams?
A cloud must surely
fall out of the sky,
pulled down by doubt
to run in streams.

MARK SENTESY

Vienna boys choir

and they amplify the
swinging of gold incense
burner so that we hear the holy clink
and they sell tickets to mass
and we expect performance to be
sacred anthropology.
a baby's cry is eerily out of
place during the service the boys sing,
a clergyman's voice wavers fear at the
end of his breath this is a testing ground
where everything is spectacle you cannot

be nervous.
the boys finish thankfully no one applauds,
the choir out of sight and above our heads,
the organ normal uninspiring; and they take
collection too and swing the incense
burner again.

roped in the central isle filled with standing tourist
we cannot approach the clergy for communion,
and the seats are
decorated with rich fabric.
there is no wine. no blood of the new covenant.

we are led through a
souvenir shop into the glory of Vienna morning.

Cato, from *In the Skin of a Lion*, by Michael Ondaatje

Cato three miles after

his bare shoulders wet reflecting orange
flame, during the fire, he could have been
a wolf dancing out of the sizzling wood
rooms, the whites of his eyes staining
darker, and they are sure the drifts would
take him. in a pile of brilliant white snow,
he would learn a quieter darkness than Leningrad.

gentler than a paper thief,
dragging pine branches behind him
and crossing the track of larger beasts
than he
slowly his footsteps broadened
his eyes grew profound,
moving around the edge of a white lake
after thirteen miles
he is taken for a lion.

changing anything

while standing here
everything i do may
be provocative
beat the road with my
eyelashes, write, watch the sun set
hitch hiking beside prostitutes on the
road all night i dream
of the cars squeaking beat
not stopping, i want to see
them picked up--the two walking turning
in step--they'd fuck you together.

in the dark of a mercedes passing, the
flare of a cigarette.
they solicit truck drivers and one
comes back; in the cab
the girl suddenly changes
suddenly excitable

she with the wide white coat
comes in ten minutes out of the dark smoking
with a bitter tongue,
marking territory together in step
they laugh without changing pace,
anything.

and he like a dog
left by a drunk woman on a bus
without the door opening why
aren't the doors opening?
losing sense of smell
shallowly in
this city of thighs.



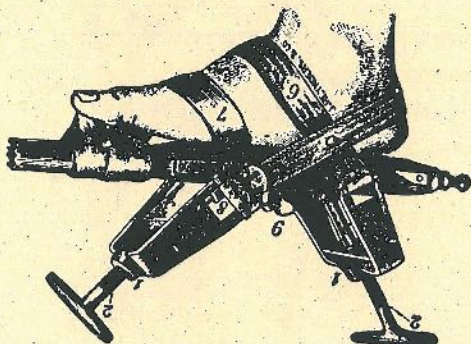
ROB THOMAS

here come the carrion birds

tar black squawkers
smelling of diesel and the rich odour
of life's seatbelt left unfastened
while moving towards
 those places we go
when we think about the girl

and we are speaking metaphorically
when we say
that this is where we will be betrayed
when the woods dissemble
a murderous intention
and the cold complicity of a road

but life is the risk
not something weighed against it
we shouldn't be lulled by the engine
it's so easy to fall asleep at the wheel



DAN THOMPSON

**Apology for Child-Bearing Hips
(To the Mistakenly Offended)**

Callipygian adj. [Gr. *Kallipygos* < *Kallos*, beauty
+ *pyge*, buttocks] having shapely buttocks

In classical days, any poet could praise
Any classical maiden's fecundity
With never a fear that his words may appear
To delineate bulk, or rotundity.

He could write of her rump as both shapely and plump
In his stately dactylic hexameter
Back when girls so endowed could not help but be proud
Of the girth of their pelvic diameter.

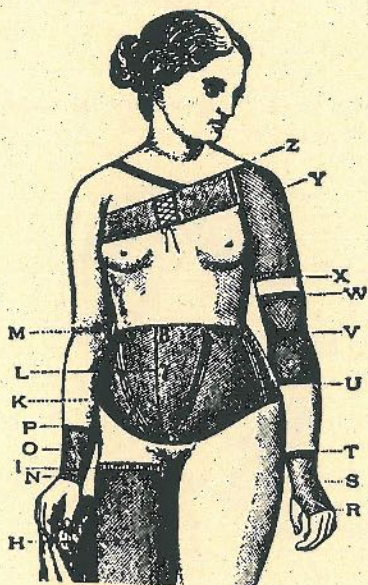
The great poet Ovid was dearly beloved
By Rome for corporeal verse,
So why should the same topic now suffer blame
As lascivious, lurid, and worse?

These barbaric times hold such reverent rhymes
In contempt, and then call them unkind,
Though their only intent is to pay compliment
To the beauteous, buxom behind.

But laudations turn lewd when their meanings are skewed,
And their poet is labeled a rogue
When the form of his passion opposes the fashions
Of *Chatelaine*, *Cosmo*, or *Vogue*

Well, waifs be confounded! I like my girls rounded,
With Rubanesque buttocks and breast-
A sentiment shared by the Romans, declared
By the Greeks, and embraced by the rest.

So interpret instead these three words that I've said
Just as would any sensible Phrygian:
When pronounced by these lips, the phrase 'child bearing hips'
Serves to say "you are quite callipygian!"



KARLA TURKOWSKY

Watches

pass girl waking down street -
want to reach out, touch,
feel the white skin to see
if it may be silk -
want to grab her, caress,
feel the warm breathe
and taste candy mouth
smile instead, mouth a hello,
and did she see you?
did she smile too?
and what does it matter?
one moment in your day,
a passion only in your mind -
means nothing to her
(if she even noticed)

watch woman in bar -
gloved hand, so poised,
hold wine that looks like blood,
as yours runs hard
veil of black hair is pulled back,
reveals a face of an angel -
a demon to steal your life,
and you'd give it
for just one fuck
dark eyes across the room
rest on you (or did they?)

a second for her to ground you
and you wonder how she knew you
better than yourself

empty shell, only watches
shadow in the corner
never live what you see
and isn't it better to observe?
never feel the pain
that love will always bring
and what is that love
that isn't just lust -
quick, passionate, that leaves
only shattered pieces -
that isn't just comfort -
used to the company and warmth,
that is silent and dull?

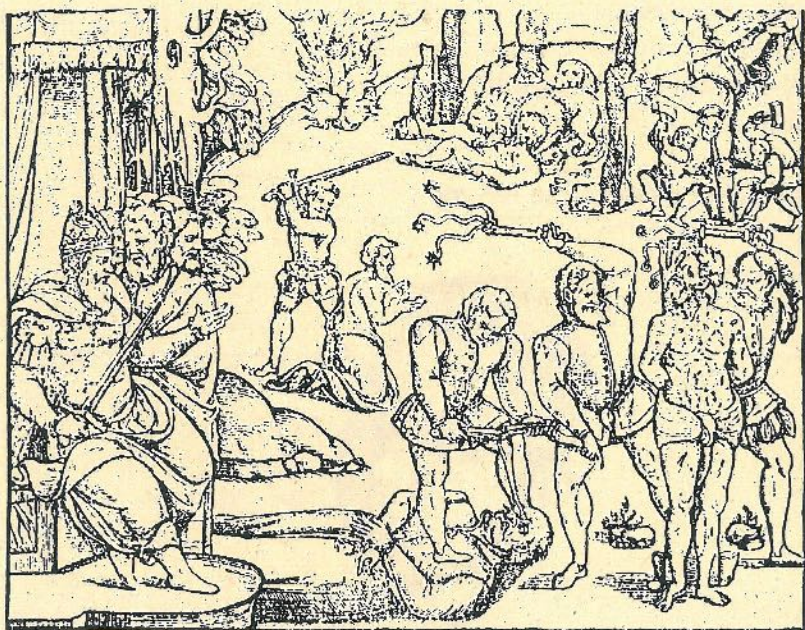
romeo and juliet always die in the end
true love never wins
pain conquers all



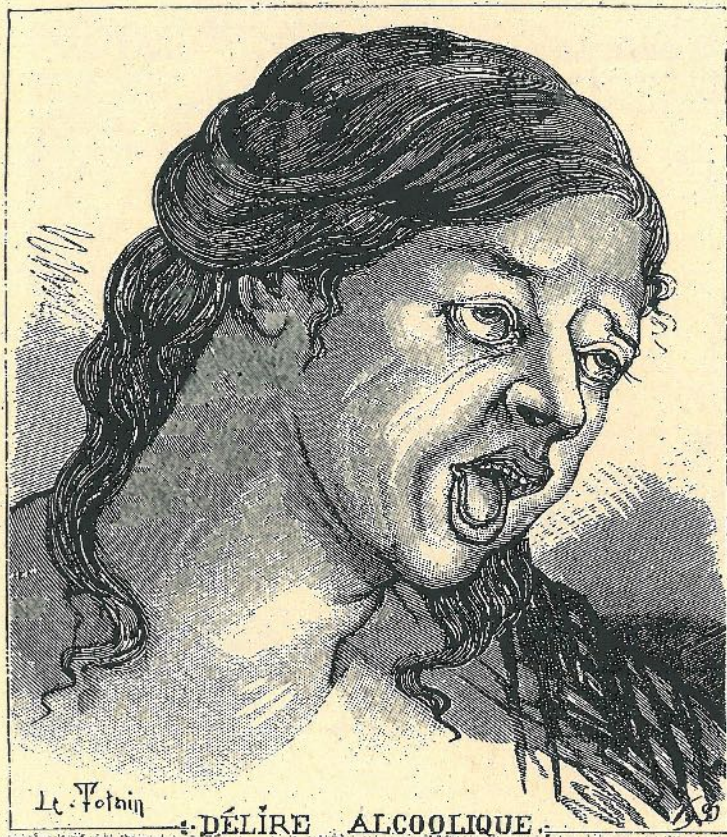
ALEX WELSH

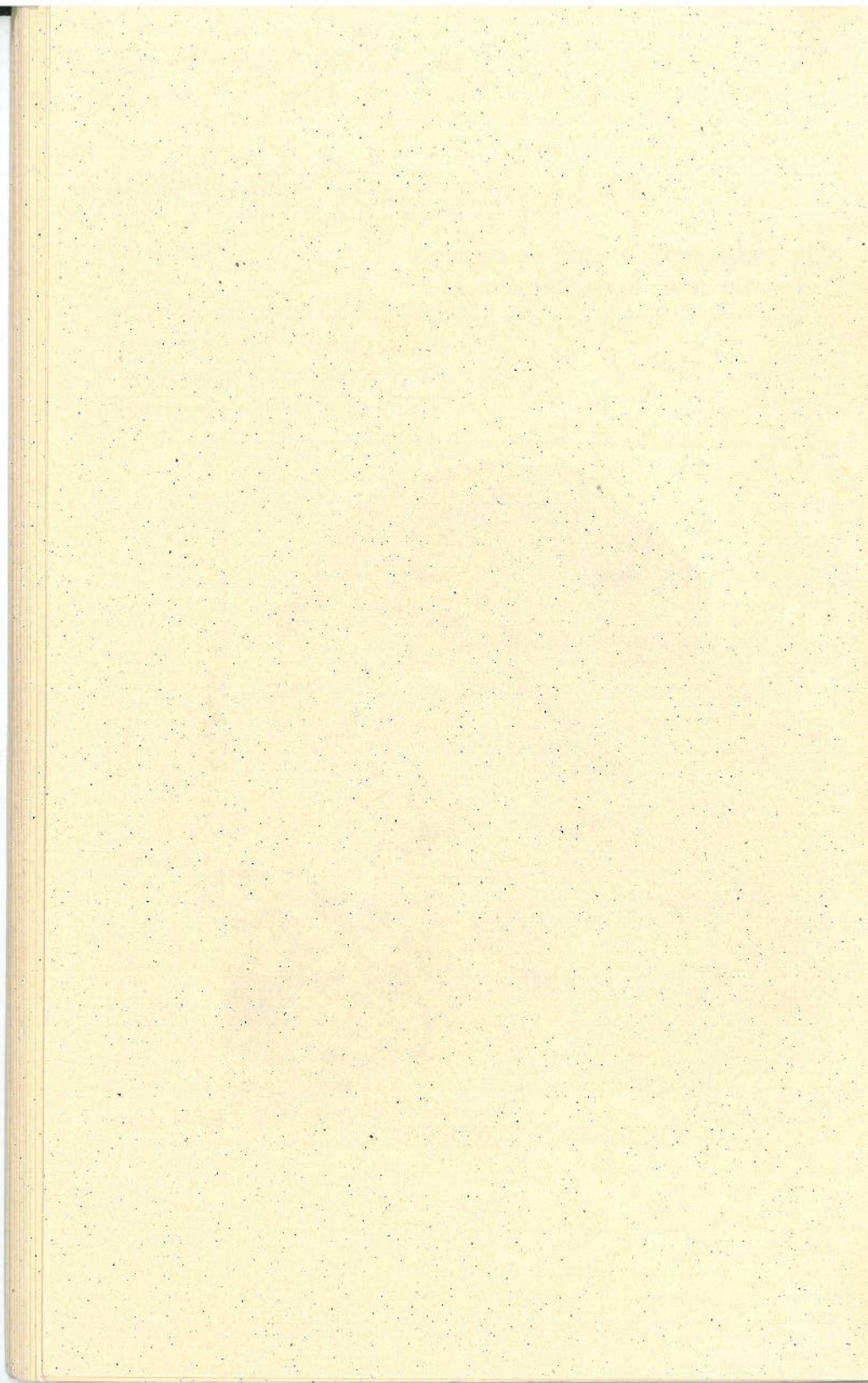
Up in Five

'Mild sun over slow moving high
Pressure system - twelve dead,
Car bomb, hostage shot in head
& Steve with sports is up in five.'



A weak man drinks to escape his sadness.
A wise man drinks to find his sadness.
A brave man is already dead for his courage.





Jugend dient dem Führer

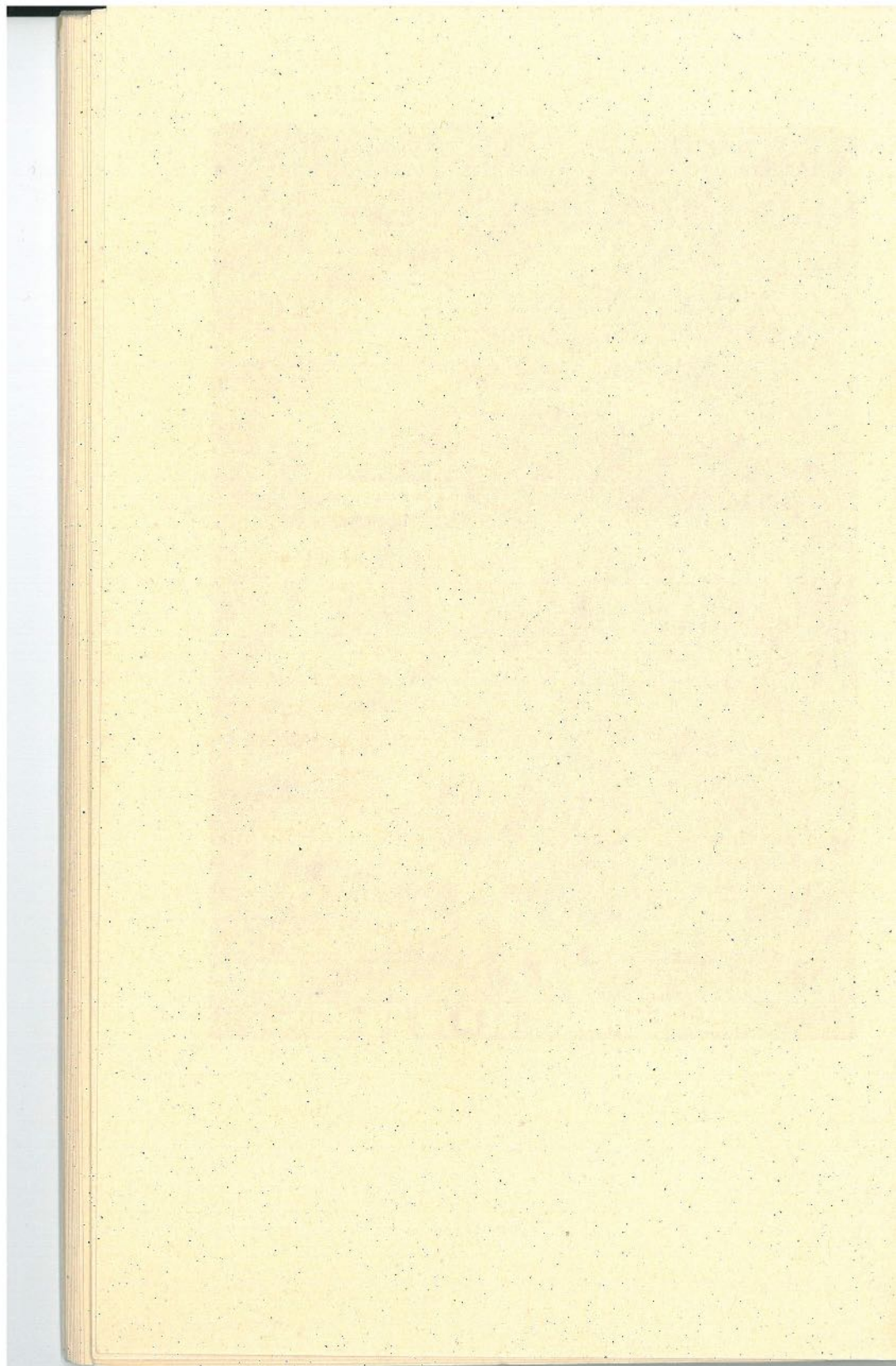
fiction

ALLE ZEHNJÄHRIGEN IN DIE NS.



12V

12V



Jonas and the Hundreds

by Tim Brownlee

Jonas was a dreamer. He would spend his days in the tall grass, watching the sky and the rolling clouds. He would fall asleep after the sunset and wake for a time in the evening, when on a clear night, the stars were only little candles. He would dream he held them in his hand. He would return to his bed after a time and wake again before sunrise. He would watch the colours in the sky at the sunrise—the silhouettes they would make of the distant forest and the tall grass, the way they slowly spilled into one another until they were just one magnificent, beautiful, indescribable colour, then a band of brightest white light and then the sun. He dreamed of that colour. It was the last thing he thought about at night and, walking from his house to the fields every morning, it was his only focus. He loved that incredible colour with his whole self.

His father would say:

“Jonas, why do you revel all day, looking at the sky, not thinking of your future? What are you to do when I am no longer here to provide for you food, to keep you safe? How are you to prepare yourself for the world if all you do is watch the clouds roll?”

His mother would tell him:

“Jonas, you never think of what you have done, or what you were to do but did not. While you are in the tall grass all day, I must do your chores and handle the work you have neglected. I know that you *need* to be out there in the tall grass, but why not during the night-time so that during the day, you could attend to your chores and do your work. We all must work, Jonas. You must know that.”

But he could not do that. He would always think, What am I to learn from chores, what am I to accomplish from work, that I cannot learn from the sky? Surely the sky can teach me more—the way the clouds push into one another, combine and separate, the shifting of the

shapes, and their final dissolution, the weather, the rain, the majesty of the empty sky—surely these are the things about which I must learn.

The years would pass. To Jonas, of course, they were only sunrises and sunsets, shapes and formations, wet and dry. Everyone aged. His mother and father grew older, greyer, weaker. Jonas would spend his days in the tall grass yet they did not challenge him. They would ask him what he was to do when they were no longer there, because they were concerned for him.

Jonas grew older too. He never really spoke to anyone but his parents. People would rarely come by. Of course, they all knew about him—everyone from the town did. They had all heard of the boy who spent all his days in the tall grass, never caring for work and his responsibilities. They would fill their lives with talk of him, of his parents of how they simply could not decide who was the worse, the boy for wasting his days in revel or his mother and father for allowing it. They would call him things: dreamer, reveler, useless. They would ask how he could cause so much pain, dishonouring his mother and father. They would ask how his mother and father could disgrace themselves and the town by allowing their only child to waste his days in the tall grass. But his mother and father did not mind their work. They loved their son. They loved him because he was theirs, because he was a piece of themselves. And somehow, they understood him. Though no one could fully understand, not even they.

But Jonas' mother and father were growing ready to sleep. He could see it. He could feel it coming and his mother and father could too. They had lived long, and they were tired. They had done as much as they could, and loved their house, their land, their work. Most of all they had loved their son and they were not afraid of what was to happen to them for they knew that they would always be close to their son. One afternoon, they finally lay down to sleep—the sun streaming in through the curtains. Lost in the afternoon, they closed their eyes and slept, hearts

full of the world.

That evening, Jonas did not go to sleep. He watched the sun set—the way the light slowly dissipated, separated, spread itself out so he could see it destroy itself. With the last shred of daylight, silent tears fell down his face. And then darkness.

For seven days, he did not sleep. He did not eat. He did not move. He lay in the tall grass and watched the sky—sometimes grey, sometimes blue, sometimes white, sometimes black. Storms would come and leave, just as the stars would. But they were always there. Each morning, the light would come. Some days it would be brighter. Some days clearer. Some days the light would simply be a faint murmur, scarcely visible through the rain. Yet each morning, the light would come. And finally, on the morning of the seventh sunrise, he sat up. Surveyed the lush green fields that flowed into valleys and forests. Saw the timothy blowing full of grasshoppers and life. He rose.

At the edge of the forest, near an oak tree, he dug two beds, side by side. In the late afternoon's failing light, he laid down his mother and father, wrapped in white lace, next to one another and covered them in cool earth as the day self-destructed. Tears.

He did not stay out with the stars that night. He shut the windows in the house and slept. Two sunrises passed before he woke again. Life returned to normal, as much as it could. Jonas would spend his days in the tall grass, watching the sky, dreaming, living in the light of the sunrise. The land settled back into itself. Forests began to grow in the fields in the valley where there were once only fields. The neighbors would talk, as would the people in the town. They could not understand how Jonas could let the land die like it was, how it could sit idle and waste away. They grew angry and jealous. For Jonas, work disappeared and his life became dreams.

But the people of the town could not stand this. They watched the land grow over, the pastures sprout trees, whose roots would take

years to destroy, to relieve the tangled mess of what, to them, appeared laziness. They talked.

"The land is being overrun. Jonas' dreaming must stop."

"His revelry only makes work for others. We stand to lose acres of rich soil."

"We must stop Jonas." And so they tried.

They gathered in the square one evening in July, hundreds of them, angry at Jonas and his laziness. Jealous for themselves. The hundreds marched towards the hill, where Jonas lay in the tall grass. They screamed for answers, making noise as they do. As they approached, their noise grew louder. Jonas remained in the tall grass, aware of them but paying no attention. When the hundreds arrived, but could not find him they agreed to spread out and their silhouettes searched the grass amid the majestic colours of the sunset. One man stumbled across Jonas, and screamed for the others. The hundreds swarmed the spot on the hill where Jonas, now standing, remained silent.

One man of the hundreds silenced the rest and began to speak. "What do you intend to accomplish, wasting your life? You have already destroyed your mother and father. They worked all of their days for you spent their lives in your service, bled so that you could live. And now how do you honour them? By squandering your days and allowing their land, their home to destroy itself. Do you think nothing of honour?"

But Jonas was silent. Another man spoke.

"What have you done for the future? You do not associate with others and when you die, there will be no one to mourn you, you will have no sons to repair the damage that you have caused. Do you expect us to give you honour when you die when you have done nothing honourable in your life? Are we to be left to fix your mess?"

But Jonas was silent. The hundreds grew angry and now there was only yelling. They lost themselves in emotion. The hundreds fumed and surged. It seemed that they would burst but one man, in robes of purple

and gold flew forward, and yelled for calm amidst the mess. He stood atop the hill, next to Jonas and began to address the hundreds. He and Jonas were but shadows, the light disappearing behind them. Yet the two could clearly make out the faces of each one of the hundreds.

The robed man spoke.

"Are we to crucify this man for his actions? Are we to repay his sin with our own? Are we to shed his blood to satiate our own anger? Can you not see that we are no different from him? We are all united by our sins. We cannot presume to destroy our own anger by forcing this man's life. We must acknowledge and accept our collective supplication, we must agree that we are all nothing beneath this heaven and pray for our own salvation. We must work to help this man acknowledge his own sins, and help him learn to pray for his forgiveness and salvation."

The robed man turned to Jonas.

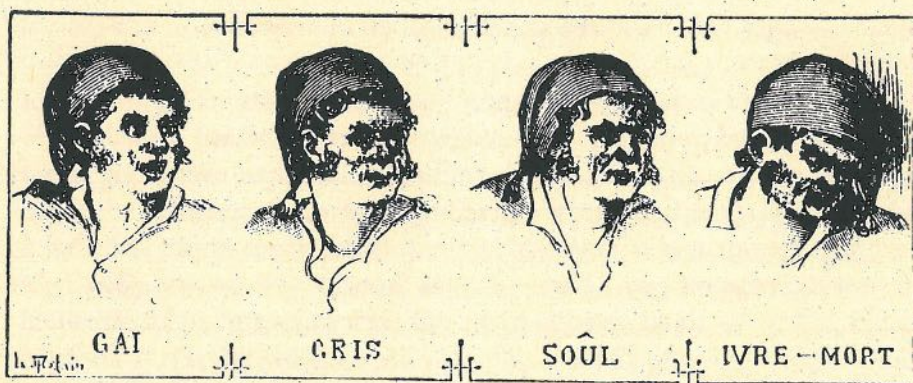
"I would like to love you. I would like to give you this so that your heart can be filled with my love and you can feel love and you can change." The robed man offered his hand to Jonas.

But Jonas was silent. The hundreds waited, anticipating acceptance. Some prayed. Others watched with awe, the two mere reflections on the hill, painted even darker on the background of the last shreds of light. He did not accept the robed man's hands. Jonas spoke.

"I don't know how to respond to your accusations for to do so I would be forced to pass my own judgements and I cannot do that. I do know of love though. I know of love that is more than everything about which you all speak for your love presumes to make excuses for what you feel you cannot understand. Your love stems from anger and that I cannot accept as my own. I know of love though." He paused. The light faded and so he could scarcely make out their faces and so he remained but a shadow to them. "I have spent my life studying the sky. I know of the stars. They are separate. Separated by more than we could ever hope

to understand. Yet they are together in the same sky. I have held these stars in my hand and I have loved them. I know of the light—of the daylight that creates and destroys itself everyday in our eyes. I know that the light is one thing and it encompasses all. I have felt this light inside of me all of the time—for it exists all the time in reality, night and day—and I have loved it too. I know love and I know these things and I am not sure exactly what to make of them—I cannot decide which one is more real.” He paused again, looked at the hundreds of tiny shadows before him. “Perhaps they are both real. It is possible that there is more than one path to... to where I stand today. I have felt all these things inside of myself,” the final tattered pieces of the daylight disappeared and the stars came on so that the hundreds seemed to disappear, bathed in darkness and Jonas was all that could be seen atop the hill. “And I know that they are all more real than you.”

The robed man smiled and the light enveloped Jonas. Everything went white and thousands of tiny little lights swam around his head. He grabbed at them like fireflies and held them in his hand.



8 hours with a clock by Keith Ebsary

the clock is a strange organism. most other creatures betray themselves through shameful weakness, but not the clock. it betrays only perfection; it is pure, entire. it doesn't sit on its haunches and salivate in the afternoon sun; it doesn't run down pedestrians in two-ton death traps or memorize television commercials to serve as amusing (though highly instructive) segues to stern parental lectures on the necessity of remaining quiet in the grocery store. no, the clock is inviolable: it is a perfect form.

in the natural world, each organism rarely escapes the lower functions of its nature. the proudest lion looks foolish fornicating incessantly; the bulky athlete is a creature more sweat than man whose quality of beauty declines in proportion to the quantity of his perspiration. even the splendid peacock, notwithstanding his pretensions to the contrary, is far from beautiful; he is an effeminate dandy, a foppish and vain bird whose worthlessness cannot be redeemed even by his participation in a good stew. and just suppose one is caught snoring or drooling. perhaps one is seen, god forbid, excreting? and we should not forget of course the vile habits of nose-picking and genital-scratching, as well as flatulence and the usual varieties of pestilent infestation. this vileness is universal and cannot be helped; existence is by nature filthy. given this, one cannot help but realize that each organism is plagued by a litany of faults. it is thus that the dirty facts of existence debase even the most noble of creatures. were it not against the general order of things, i would go so far as to suggest that each creature penitently embrace the shame that must form the basis for most of its actions. but that is a matter best left to our esteemed psychologists. after all, a bit of shame is a stimulating thing.

the clock is beyond shame and beyond error and that is the source of its fascination. that it is an organism cannot be doubted. it occupies

space; its components move; it self-regulates, and in regulating the mechanism of time participates in and acquires time's higher consciousness. really, what is time but a quantification of past, present and future consciousness? though it lacks an individual consciousness which is the defining hallmark of most existing organisms, the clock's participation in the consciousness of time protects it from any diminution of status. there is obviously no purpose higher than the regulation of time. time is the principle which permits the creation and conclusion of life, the principle to which all past and future existence is indebted. what sort of love therefore can be purer than the love of the very idea which permits love? there is nothing better than that. it's sacred and closer to religion than most people realize. not everyone participates in the divine; we need religion and all its icons, dancing monks and self flagellation to stare into that murky lower intestine of god. religion is the divine's greatest tool, just as the clock is time's greatest asset. but even god is watching the clock.

all things must watch the clock and i am no different. i like to think, however, that i differ in my understanding of the queer organism. i devote more time than is probably good for me to studying the mystery of clock, and consider it my guiding passion. i lose sleep watching my clocks tick away in the darkness, and i salute the morning by strapping on my wristwatch. in spite of this preoccupation, i am an ordinary man. i am employed, i have a place of residence and the usual modern conveniences. i exercise, i do not smoke or eat meat and i permit myself only the odd restorative glass of wine. altogether, i am a sober individual of a pensive and disciplined temperament.

it came about one day that i was not needed at work and so found myself in an unaccustomed to position of liberty. after reading the morning journal, showering and indulging in a leisurely breakfast, i began to consider the possibilities for my surprise day of rest. there was shopping to be done, bills to be paid and an interesting note from my neighbour demanding the surrender of my soul that needed attending to.

given the rather absurd nature of this communication, i wondered whether my neighbour was speaking metaphorically. perhaps this was a polite way of requesting the use of my lawnmower? i recalled, however, that i did not own a lawnmower as i did not own a lawn, believing them to be somehow unsanitary. the square in front of my house that should have been a lush patch of grass was in fact a tastefully arranged pattern of gravel and set flagstone. furthermore, i recalled that my neighbour was partially disabled and so had difficulty operating machinery that required the use of both legs. unless he had been recently enlightened by the miracle of modern prosthetics, i seriously doubted my neighbour's capacity to mow his own lawn. i therefore drafted a rough note detailing the extent of my neighbour's mental collapse and was on the verge of delivering it to him when i reconsidered. it was entirely within the realm of possibility that his brief message contained a metaphorical significance far beyond my comprehension. what if the metaphorical implications of my neighbour's note were metaphysical rather than literal? what if he was speaking indirectly of the origins of life instead of a wretched lawnmower?

"really," i thought, "i do not wish to offend such a talented man."

feeling that i would be cheapened by responding inappropriately to his letter, i decided to accept my neighbour's parameters; i would let his note serve as a vehicle for higher understanding. i assumed that my neighbour's letter was an affirmation of his intellectual position; for the sake of open dialogue, i responded in the negative in a brief, but pregnant note:

"NO YOU MAY NOT USE MY LAWNMOWER."

satisfied with my rebuttal, i walked over to my neighbour's house, note in hand.

"here is your damned lawnmower, you wretched effete!" i thought as i placed the note in his mailbox. the lid creaked when i opened it and i heard a faint rustling inside the house. i looked in through the living room window and saw my neighbour gently rocking in his chair.

"he is waiting," i thought. "his life is the sum-total of the minute he has spent waiting."

he looked as if he had been there forever, rocking and waiting in that chair. waiting for youth to once again stretch his limbs; waiting for his dead Mary-Anne; waiting for memory to collapse into itself. he was waiting for more time. i backed away from the window, stricken with the sense of shame that comes only from secretly observing people in their quiet moments of self-disclosure. without giving any notice that he had been aware of me watching him, my neighbour smiled faintly and tapped the face of his watch.

i keep only three clocks in my house. one is a slightly rotted grandfather clock, a family heirloom that has been relieved of its timekeeping duties on account of age and deterioration. another is an inexpensive wristwatch whose purpose is purely functional. the final clock, if we ignore those tacky abominations attached to the microwave and stove, is a relic from my childhood; it was in fact the source of one of my earliest memories.

from infancy, i was not an exceptional child. like most children, i occupied the horrid space young life finds itself in. endowed with will though lacking the necessary attributes of strength and coordination, i had no choice but to endure the hellish indignity of new life. between recollections of bed-wetting, diaper-soiling and the legions of babbling adult faces, i remembered nothing save a sense of grey space that could best be described as a vague hissing inside my head. like the constant mess in my diapers, my mind was a jumbled concoction of unformed synapses and stifled will. i lived in a chaotic world to which i had not yet grown accustomed.

by virtue of his participation in chaos, an infant is essentially liquid; that is, his impressions lack solidity. parents coo and mewl like wounded dogs, their faces contorted in a series of horrific grimaces that only love

and sincere intentions excuse. unless the parent suffers from a paralysis of the facial muscles which, all things considered, is a far better option than full mobility, the infant understands nothing but the flitting of his parents' eyes and the babbling of their lips: he realizes that his parents are monsters. tears stream down his face and the tiny hands contract into fists. not knowing any better, his parents mistake the look of terror in his eyes for hunger; the poor child is directly force-fed another wretched bottle in an endless series of bottles or else offered his mother's rubbery tit. later, in the middle of the night when he is truly hungry, the darling husband admonishes his wife for wanting to capitulate to the demands of her insomniac and pampered son. the pampered and hungry son lies therefore in a comforting bath of his own excreta, and in his infantile way curses the day of his birth. i personally consider it a miracle that infants come to recognize and even love their parents. i can only conclude that love within families may very well be in the blood after all.

were i ever to be blessed with children, i would serve as a centre for my child's burgeoning mind. they would not be force fed, or left to lie in chilled pools of urine, nor would i babble like an horrific, second-rate comedian to the detriment of my child's mind. no, i would refuse all this. (as an aside, i have often thought that new parents fancy themselves comedians and seize childbirth as an opportunity to display their hitherto untapped comedic repertoire). i would not speak or move when near my children and so doing, imprint upon them a single and lasting image of their parent. i would be nearly still, my face and body frozen for the purpose of education. though we would later have to avoid all museums for fear that my children would mistake the displays for their strangely immobile father and cling to them desperately, i am willing to forego some cultural instruction in favour of proper parenting techniques. when my children are old enough to distinguish their father from other statues, i would seize them as only a parent can and press my children to my chest so that they could hear the stable, monotonous tick of the heart within it.

a bond such as that could not be broken; we could not help but understand each other in a way that would preclude all future capacity for parental condescension. no longer should i be father and they simply my spawn; let us be equals. in that way should my children be properly instructed.

in response to the most obvious objection, i must dispute the importance of conversation in the development of a child's mind. to my way of thinking, the young mind is chaotic and therefore requires its opposite, order and pattern, to create itself. normal conversation does nothing constructive in this regard; it is a jumbled mess of superlatives and mumbled idiocies that only increase the child's general confusion. for the parent to use speech as the main method of instruction when speech itself is flawed, is utter lunacy. one might as well bid the child bend glass with his mind! given the impossibility of speech, (and also, of glass bending) i must emphasize the peculiar beauty of my method. let my children wring, therefore, what instruction they can from the beat of a heart and the tick of a clock; they are options infinitely more valuable than a moving tongue. and when it becomes necessary, let the schools finally teach my children language; i am not a linguist.

i have stated previously that my childhood ended with the discovery of solid form. this was not altogether true. more directly put, my childhood ended when i realized the operation of time in the operation of the clock. of my earliest infancy, i recall only the changing of diapers and the tugging of mammaries. as my mind matured, my impressions of my surroundings increased in substance; i became aware of connections. for instance, i realized that my mother intended to feed me when she removed her shirt. i realized that my father intended to change me when he entered the room whistling one of Mozart's arias, with a special glint in his eyes that meant unmistakably that i had a dirty bottom. gradually, as more brain cells appeared, i was able to recognize cause and effect in

action beyond the boundaries of my body and its interests. a dim understanding of the actions of my parents then began to develop in my mind. before changing me, i noticed that my father would glance at an object on his wrist, then at a larger version of that object hanging on the wall and finally at a similar object which stood on my dresser. his changing of me appeared to be contingent on the status of that mysterious object. i also noticed that my mother was bound by this shape. before filling my mouth with her breast, my mother would likewise refer to the same objects and make a perfunctory remark about "schedule". it was only after months of insistent finger-pointing that my parents made their own connections about the source of my curiosity and subsequently rewarded me with the name of that object to which they apparently deferred: "clock".

i was astounded. i had realized "clock". i had been provided with the name of a force which regulated my parents and hence, the universe. i could not conceive of anything more powerful than my parents; for all purposes, they were the universe. and yet, i had just witnessed the suiting of my parents' behaviour to the demands of "clock". it was inconceivable! my infancy as it was could no longer continue; i was initiated. i stared with new wonder at the object which stood, and still stands on my dresser and realized that i was born to be a grateful slave. i lay back in my crib and felt the liquid tendrils of infancy retreat from my mind. though not yet old enough to walk, i had already realized the operation of the most basic of time's realities. i politely relieved myself in my diaper and then turned on my side to contemplate my new master.

the clock itself was nothing extravagant. it was only a toy constructed of blue and yellow plastic with a white face and hands that did not even tell proper time. to appeal perhaps to the comic sensibilities of the infant, the clock's face was broken by two red eyes set above a leering mouth. the main trick of this clock and the source of its comedy consisted of a button located on the top edge of the face that when pressed caused

the eyes to blink as though in delayed agreement with the "bon mot" already put forward by the permanently smiling mouth. if my parents ever entertained notions of their little jonnie becoming a rich and successful businessman, their plans were thwarted inalterably as soon as the magic button on the clock was pressed and my resolve to ascend the corporate ladder disappeared in gales of rapturous laughter. my parents naturally remarked that i was an exceptionally cheerful child; my smile never seemed forced and my eyes always sparkled. i never had the heart to introduce them to the clock and reveal my secret. someone had to pay the bills.

the layout of my house is such that the front door is separated from the kitchen by a short flight of stairs. the kitchen is well-lit by a large window which permits me an undisturbed view of the street. when i sit at the kitchen table to consume a nourishing breakfast or dinner, i have no choice but to watch the often perplexing workings of my street. just as filling your mouth in front of a television set while soaking up its latest drivel is perhaps the best soporific known to man, as well as the best stimulant to appetite, so too is my kitchen a place of mindless peace and compulsive eating. each passing car seen through the window is a reminder to lift the spoon; each barking dog is a reminder to swallow. it would not be unreasonable to suggest that my kitchen was designed for the medically obese or the compulsive eater. thankfully, i do not fall into either category. when i am not hungry, i avoid my kitchen for fear that i should be caught in its clutches and suddenly find myself helplessly consuming tin after tin of unheated soup.

i walked into the kitchen on my unexpected day of leisure and opened the cupboard nearest the door to remove the kettle. i intended to make a pot of tea. as i removed the kettle from the cupboard, i noticed a white envelope on the door mat. my neighbour had responded. i descended the short flight of stairs to the door and eagerly picked up the

note.

"shall our dialogue continue?" i wondered. "does this note contain a rebuttal of my previous position?"

i tore open the note, my mind ablaze with hypotheses and arguments. i was not to be disappointed. the note read:

"YOU ARE UTTERLY MAD."

i was astounded.

"o worthy man! o worthy man!" i silently exclaimed.

there was no way around this latest communication. clearly, i was engaged in dialogue with genius; my response would have to be perfect. i found pen and paper and sat down at the kitchen table to construct a suitably brilliant response. my first draft was utter rubbish. i completely missed the parameters of the dialogue and risked insulting such an obviously sensitive mind. the second draft was slightly improved, though i failed to grasp the significance of my insanity in relation to our previous discussion and so this draft also found its way to the rubbish heap. finally, after many successive attempts, i realized that we were engaged in a discussion of the real, with my alleged madness functioning as my neighbour's most pertinent example. the solution then became fully apparent: i would have to introduce my neighbour to the clock.

"let him find a way around that witty retort!" i thought merrily.

i tore into the bedroom where the clock stood on the dresser and gently grabbed it. it felt warm in my hands. my heart began pounding and my hands shook. when i looked in the full-length mirror attached to the wall near the dresser, i noticed my eyes were bloodshot and glazed. i gave a snicker and trotted back to the kitchen. perhaps my neighbour was right after all.

once in the kitchen, i set the clock down on the counter and began banging on the kitchen window. the glass shook in its frame as i pounded it with my open fist, hoping to attract the attention of my sensitive neighbour. the clock jerked across the counter with each blow; the dishes

rattled in the cupboards as their deranged owner beat and swore his way into a frenzy. seeing that my neighbour was not responding, i opened the window and began howling.

“COME OUT HERR PROFESSOR! COME OUT TO YOUR MASTER!”

i hung my head out the window and began bellowing old war slogans in a desperate attempt to get his attention as i slapped the aluminum side of my house.

“EIN VOLK, EIN REICH, PROFESSOR! V IS FOR VICTORY!”

a small, bald head appeared in the kitchen window opposite me. i abruptly ceased my antics and motioned for him to continue watching. i turned towards the counter and was about to pick up the clock when its eyes suddenly blinked. i looked down at my sides; my hands hadn't left them. my tongue rolled crazily in my mouth; sweat poured down my forehead and garbled, confused words sprang from my lips.

“SEE THAT PROFESSOR!...IT TALKS!...IT BLINKS!”

my neighbour drew back a few feet from his window. in my frantic state, i grabbed the clock firmly and set it on the window ledge. i was about to point it out to my neighbour when it blinked again. i gave a gentle laugh. i realized then that i had completely overstepped the boundaries of sanity. i began laughing harder; this was truly funny. tears welled up in my eyes and then dripped onto the ground as i slung myself over the window ledge in an utter paroxysm of mirth. i pointed hysterically at the clock as it continued blinking and laughed even harder when through my tears i saw the poor man reach once more for pen and paper.

i hung over the window ledge in total hysteria. my body shook with laughter; my breathing was ragged and my skin was flushed. each time i raised my head to try to explain to my neighbour why i was laughing, i saw the clock's eyes blink demonically and i collapsed again in endless mirth. i continued laughing. i have been laughing ever since.



The Gestalt Bunnies

by Keith Ebsary

I had never known fear until I met the Gestalt bunnies. I think they were psychotherapists of some kind but I am not too sure. I know they had degrees and nice leather couches inside their offices, and that was good enough for me. I am a simple man who is easily impressed. I watched them as they talked. They talked about Freud a lot and even mentioned Jung once or twice. I think it was their favourite subject. They made me sit on their couch and showed me pictures for hours at a time. I felt uncomfortable a good deal but did not say anything.

Their noses twitched a lot. I asked them if they ate their shit during the winter (I heard rabbits did this on occasion) and they responded politely:

“Only when absolutely necessary.”

I thought that was a fair answer. I like to give people a chance. I am also a fair man. Then they asked me to sit down on the couch. I drank a glass of water. They asked me about my mother and then showed me pictures of things that didn't look like much at all. I said the inkblots looked like love, or chocolate, or, when the urge struck me, war. I saw guns and tanks, and sometimes I saw books or spacemen. There were even a few sexual pictures. The bunnies were very interested in the sexual pictures. They wrote a lot in their notebooks when I made dirty comments, so I made more comments of this kind. It was fun to talk dirty to the bunnies, and I just wanted to help them in their studies. I almost wanted to lie when I didn't see anything dirty but I never did.

Later on, they let me have a break. They saw I was getting tired and needed to rest for a bit. I went outside and bought some lunch. I ate my lunch and felt a bit better: I thought it would be a good idea to show the bunnies how much I had learned so I walked into a store and bought some paper and some ink. In the parking lot of their clinic I poured a bit

of black ink onto a piece of paper and then folded it in half. They would be so proud of me. I had made a picture and I wanted them to see it. I walked back into the clinic and sat down on the couch again.

"Excuse me." I said. "I want to show you much I've learned."

The bunnies cocked their ears and looked at me. They seemed to be waiting for me so I pulled out my new picture to show them.

"Do you like my picture?" I asked them.

The first bunny made a squeaking noise and his ears began flapping wildly. The second bunny hopped nimbly up on his desk and began to cry, one foot thumping on the heavy wood of the desk. They seemed very distressed by what they had seen or imagined. I didn't feel very good about that.

"Maybe I showed you the wrong side of the picture." I told them, and flipped the picture over. The first bunny began screaming, and shit all over the floor. He grabbed one of his ears between his long front teeth and began gnawing on it. In an instant, his ear was torn to pieces and his white coat was covered with blood. The second bunny ripped off his nose with his paws, and smashed his head against the desk. He walked over to the second bunny and bit his leg off. There was a lot of blood and I was very frightened watching all of this. I backed away from the couch and left the little examining room. I heard them crying inside and the sound was horrible. I walked quickly down the stairs and shut the door behind me. Once outside, I stopped at a convenience store to buy a chocolate bar and a soft drink, because that is what people do on their days off.

Coffee and other diversions by Amy Milne-Smith

She walked over to his table carrying two cups of coffee, lots of sugar. Smiling, he took his and she settled into her chair. This was a familiar place. He loved the exposed brick walls, and the chalkboard drawings. He loved the chairs you never stopped sinking in to. Caught up in his thoughts he hadn't noticed that she was staring at him.

"Do you love me?"

He was not expecting that. Of all casual conversation starters this seemed rather abrupt. He was at a loss as to what to say.

"We've been here two minutes. What kind of a question is that?" He looked at her with real annoyance. This was not the conversation he wanted.

"No, I don't mean it the way you think. I mean right now, among all of the thoughts you have, is one of them that you love me?" She looked at him with real expectation. She had to bite her lip to constrain her excitement.

"Honestly? You won't take this to mean too much?" He paused and searched her face for meaning.

"Honestly. Humour me." She looked at him like a child on Christmas morning, just waiting until she was given the word to tear into the presents. Before really thinking about it, he spoke.

"No. I was thinking about whether or not you've changed your hair, what exactly you would call the color of that mug, if I'd have enough money to get a muffin, and debating whether or not the coffee is too hot to drink. Why?"

Behind them, there was the faint clinking of silverware.

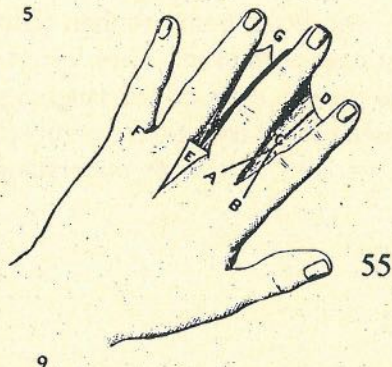
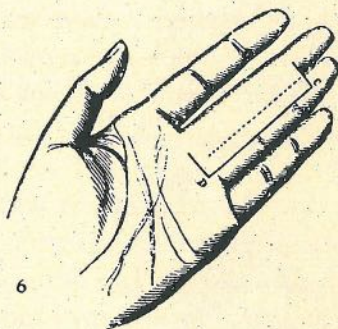
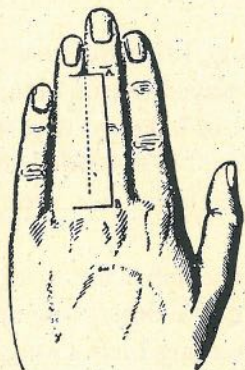
"So that's it then. . .that's life isn't it? Millions of random thoughts and actions that don't really mean anything. Occasional moments of struggle and discovery lost in the sheer banality of the everyday, and

nothing ever really--"

He put his hand on hers, gently, and she stopped herself. They sat in silence, letting their coffee cool. She looked at him with intensity, then seemingly grew bored, and looked away. She was looking for something - in him, in her, in the far too trendy coffee bar. In disgust with them all, her face took on a pained expression.

"I do love you though." He said it casually, without thought or premeditation. And it was true. She almost smiled, but couldn't.

They sat in silence while they both tried to figure out what had happened. At other tables people were laughing. Someone was speaking animatedly in German. Someone else was about to dive into a giant piece of chocolate cake. The waitress had to run to the back for some exotic tea. But at one table by the window two people sat alone. Their coffee sat forgotten and they stared out the window into the falling snow.



Circus Life

by Amy Milne-Smith

I was driving down the highway in the middle of nowhere. Suddenly a tiny town sprung up from the desert. I slowed down and saw a sign for a traveling circus. Swinging from a rusted out post it read:

"The most cruel freaks of nature!" (Of course it had an exclamation point. These sorts of things always do.) Human suffering laid out in the bitter light of day for all to see. I pulled over in the dust for lack of anything better to do.

But the circus was gone. I hadn't been able to see from the road, but a torn bit of paper clinging to the post said they'd done their last show yesterday. Disappointed, and drained of any desire to move, I walked up the little hill beside my tired-looking car and stretched out my legs in the parched earth. No use trying to look for shade - I'd left anything miles back. So in the brilliant sun I sat.

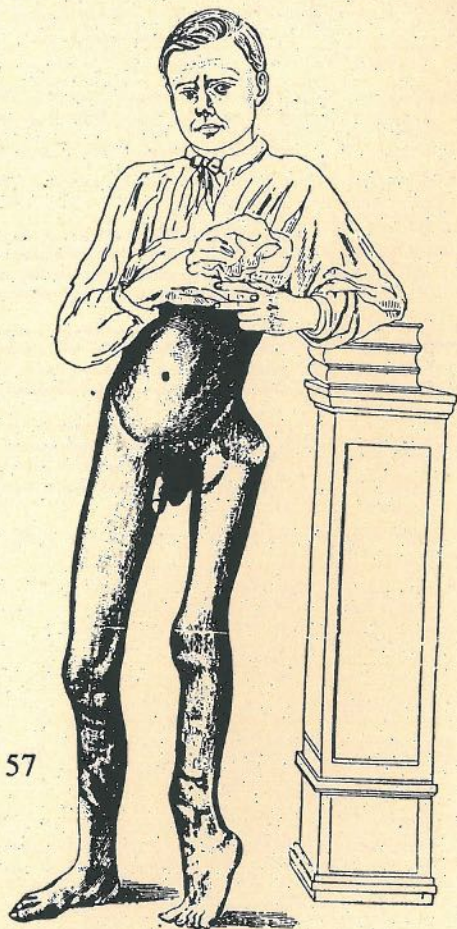
As I laid there half awake and half dreaming, I became aware of a familiar sound. Somewhere a piano was being played out of tune, kids were laughing and old women were reminiscing about long-ago days when they were young and beautiful. It felt like home. It reminded me of summer days and lemonade. And for just a moment, in the hot afternoon sun, lying in the dust. . . I thought I was home.

But I opened my eyes. A white expanse filled my head as I realised that I wasn't home. I was sitting alone in the desert listening to circus freaks on their day off, and home was something I left a long time ago. I sat up and tried to stop my head from spinning. When my eyes cleared, I saw something. Siamese twin boys, no more than eight years old, were playing baseball with a fat man in the sun. They teetered, two as one. One little head has his face to the sun, eyes closed, laughing. This was the joy of childhood; this was what I was trying to remember. That little boy felt the joy of being alive, and didn't yet understand how

different he was. He was just a boy swinging a bat.

The other boy had seen me. This face was not so innocent. He stood defiant, his eyes burning into mine. His eyes told me to go - I was not welcome. He understood the boundary between himself and the outside world. Overcome, I had to look away. I quickly rushed back to my car and got in. I quickly started the car and let the fan blow hot air on my face.

That boy had looked at me and knew I didn't belong. And I suppose he was right. If they couldn't be a part of my world, what right did I have to be a part of theirs. But I longed for that little boy's laughter, I long still for his smile. I started up the car and drove as quickly as I could back to civilization. I couldn't even remember why I'd stopped in the first place.



27. PETER EMBERLEY

My name 'tis Pe - ter Em - ber - ley, as
 you may un - der - stand. I was - born on Prince Ed - ward's
 Is - land near by the o - cean strand. In
 eigh - teen hun - dred and eigh - ty - four when the
 flo - wers were a bril - liant hue, I left my na - tive
 coun - ter - ie my for - tune to pur - sue.

1. My name 'tis Peter Emberley, as you may understand.
 I was born on Prince Edward's Island near by the ocean strand.
 In eighteen hundred and eighty-four when the flowers were a brilliant hue,
 I left my native counterie my fortune to pursue.
2. I landed in New Brunswick in a lumbering counterie,
 I hired to work in the lumber woods on the Sou-West Miramichi,
 I hired to work in the lumber woods where they cut the tall spruce down,
 While loading teams with yarded logs I received a deadly wound.
3. There's danger on the ocean where the waves roll mountains high,
 There's danger on the battlefield where the angry bullets fly,
 There's danger in the lumber woods, for death lurks sullen there,
 And I have fell a victim into that monstrous snare.

