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# FUGUE



The University Of Idaho Literary Digest



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## G R A F F I T I

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PERHAPS WRITERS DIFFER from most normal people in having a thirst for acceptance so great that they must become all but masochistic when it comes to rejection. We are thirsty to be drunk, but every glassful that is accepted, it seems, a gallon must be spilt. Soon enough we come to realize that no matter how "good" we think we're getting at it, our work will be rejected far more often than it is accepted. The way most of us get around that is to establish a distance between ourselves and our work: this is me; that is my poem. Reject the poem if you will, but please don't confuse me with my work. If you knew it, you'd really like it. You would never stop drinking. Drink it. Then I won't be so thirsty. It's a paradox.

I knew a poet who saved all his acceptance letters and tacked them to the walls of his office, and I must confess that after all these years of getting into print, I still hoard my acceptance letters in some file cabinet. This same poet also saved all of his rejection slips, but those he consigned to a rather large and anonymous box, through which, I suspect, he did not

often sifts. I never yielded to that sort of self-flagellation, but I did for some years keep a separate file of what I called "ego rejections." These were comprised primarily of close calls at Big Time magazines. Think of them as sippers, not real drinkers.

Of course I began at the top, sending my first poems to the *New Yorker* and *Poetry*. Definitely sippers. I flatter myself that I've had work in some pretty fine publications over the years, some of which are at least as ably edited as those, but I've never placed so much as an epigram in those prestigious ponds. Like most writers, I still have more of my work rejected than accepted, and it still hurts, but it doesn't hurt the way it used to. I've become inured to it the way one's system eventually accommodates questionable drinking water. It's amazing, in fact, how callous I can be as I toss yet another rejection slip in the trash. Are these people never thirsty? But then that water might catch up with me some day. Even the best of accommodations can do little in the face of cholera.

Let this be my seasonal wish for all aspiring writers: drink, drink and be merry! Drink and you will be drunk. But be careful of the water.

— Ron McFarland,  
Fugue Staff Advisor

## FEATURED POET

## RICARDO SÁNCHEZ

Introduction by  
Ron McFarland

THE EVENING OF September 16, 1992, the University of Idaho English Department, in cooperation with the Student Advisory Services Office of Minority Student Programs, the International Programs Office, MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantiel Chicano de Azatlán), and the Ibero-American Student Association, sponsored "El Grito de Dolores: An Outcry of Independence and a Celebration of Life." Events that evening included poetry read by Felipe Duran of Washington State University; Hispanic music by Minerva León, Giovanni Chacon, and Gomar Komaromy of the University of Idaho; Mexican folklorical dancing by María Teresa Sánchez of Pullman; and poetry read by Ricardo Sánchez, who holds a joint appointment in WSU's departments of English and Comparative American Cultures.

Ricardo Sánchez, regarded as one of the "fathers" of Chicano poetry, is an EL Paso native who grew up in the barrios, dropped out of high school and served two prison terms for rob-

bery. It was a prison librarian who introduced him to the world of books, and he has gone on to earn a doctorate from the Union Institute and to publish a dozen books of poems. His work has appeared in more than thirty anthologies, and his manuscripts are now archived at the Stanford University library. In 1986 Sánchez was honored as the only poet from the United States to be invited to the first meeting and reading by poets of the Latin world at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City.

"Órale, Don Cristobal, or Rapine ét Columbine" is a long poem in five parts, which Ricardo Sánchez read before an enthusiastic audience on the night of September 16th. The word "órale" is a Chicano term meaning "wow" or "great." Cristobal Colón is the Spanish for Christopher Columbus. We print this poem for the first time with notes provided by Mr. Sánchez and with his permission. We have attempted to keep annotations to a minimum.

This poem is copyrighted in Ricardo Sánchez's name. No part of it may be reproduced in any form without his express permission.

en marzo  
los cantos  
marchan  
en su grito  
combatiendo  
las maréas  
pre-y-post-  
columbinas.

[In March  
the songpoems  
promenade  
in its outcry  
combatting  
pre-and-post-  
Columbine  
deliria.]

The Palouse, WA  
Pullmania  
3/15/92

**Ricardo Sánchez**  
— ÓRALE, DON CRISTOBAL,  
or RAPINE ÉT COLUMBINE —

- I.  
comatose pueblos  
snore  
through snarling  
memories  
best left lying  
within  
centuries of pillage,  
there is  
no one to take up  
banners  
nor to state unequivocally  
that he/she  
is standard-bearer  
for tarred,  
now feathered Don Cristobal...

## II.

They assail you again,  
smudge your memory,  
give you a power  
you never truly had,  
paint you as genocider,  
cast you as villain,  
claim you introduced  
venereal real-politik<sup>1</sup>  
into Paradise Refound  
(not that Chichimecas  
or Tlaxcaltecas<sup>2</sup>  
would agree,  
when in those days  
tribute did they pay),  
ay, Don Cristobal,  
you are defined  
as Padre de los Chingados<sup>3</sup>  
alongside Doña Marina<sup>4</sup>  
the Indian woman/bitch  
of Octavio Paz's<sup>5</sup> woman-hating  
infirmities & pseudo-machismo...

## III.

what flowers grew  
before Columbus  
was a city  
or a university,  
before a federated  
district  
would exist  
to tax us  
unto societal infirmity?  
what flowery  
yet hollow stem  
arose within rapine  
and pillage  
to bear your name.  
when did democracy  
arrive—if ever  
it did—to ambush  
quetzal birds  
searching for xochitl<sup>6</sup>  
that poetry  
might somehow find  
itself birthing

in the marketstalls  
where dignity is bartered  
daily for a loaf  
of preservative-laden  
condiments  
from Columbia U  
to jazz-o-mania taverns,  
as society still searches  
for spice & latex condoms  
to assuage the pain  
of pillage  
still continuing  
centuries after  
la Niña Isabel<sup>7</sup>  
imbibed una pinta  
of historical rot-gut  
demon rum  
and uttered a rosaried  
tertiary poetics  
to la Santa María, o Holy  
Mary canticles,  
o dominate us, dominatus,  
rapine ét columbine,  
flourishing pillage  
y Madre de Dios outcries  
of Toledo steel  
carving out a people  
merging  
into worlds of mestizos,  
damn right  
you are guilty, Don Cristobal,  
the eyes of a new humanity  
indict you, Don Cristobal,  
the mouths of hundreds  
of millions of new sentient  
human beings in mestizo skins  
utter their existence  
each time they cry out your name,  
yes, Don Cristobal,  
my parents and their parents  
and five hundred years  
of human interaction  
declare you guilty  
of the wondrous yet painful  
merging of emerging peoples



coupling through cultural  
and historic angers and disbeliefs  
and racist diatribes, each voice  
in the Américas finds you guilty  
in a most life-giving manner  
as humanity continues moving  
forward toward even greater  
understanding, merging  
all worlds into an ensalada  
wherein our colors/tastes  
commingle, yes, damn right,  
Don Cristobal Colón, you are  
guilty of frightful, frail  
fancied human limitation  
arriving at ancient worlds  
new to you and reacting  
from a base debasing the new  
while celebrating the known,  
oh, how humanly mundane  
our depravities can be,  
for Toledo steel merely sliced  
with a delicacy  
unmatched by bludgeoning  
obsidian weapons  
disemboweling sacrificial  
jaguar-peoples, leaving  
Xiximekatl<sup>8</sup> entrails  
upon stone and masonry, death  
was a mutual concelebration,  
torturous sacrifice  
was the poetic outcry/canto  
of European & Meso-American,  
the blood of Christ  
merged with la sangre  
Huitzolopochtli<sup>9</sup> drank  
as his war drums sounded

far away  
Moors ululated  
as Granada fell,<sup>10</sup>  
Saracen blades  
saluted Cortesian  
steeds trampling  
wailing Nahuatl  
ocelotl warriors,<sup>11</sup>

each side claiming  
a humanity  
still awaiting  
five hundred years later  
to find a caressive  
meaning, a beauty  
that dignifies existence  
with actions  
more flowery than words...

IV.

I stand, Don Cristobal,  
at the edge  
of my people's historical outcry,  
seeking in our shards  
a meaning  
that can regale  
all who have existed  
with a passionate explication  
to assuage our collective guilt/pain;

I, you, we stand  
upon a land marked  
and ravaged, yet celebrated  
as it celebrates  
five centuries of interaction

begotten children,  
we play at games  
whose rules  
have been transformed  
a countless number  
of times as time became  
corrosive, ill-imaged,  
indiscernible beings  
whose visages/countenances  
continue merging  
to emerge each time  
with a different cast/coloration,

o progeny  
of Quetzalcoátl<sup>12</sup>  
whose serpentine message  
spoke to a humanity  
disdaining sacrifice  
and ritualistic bleeding

of the flowers  
at Tenochtitlan  
and Tlatelolco,<sup>13</sup> ay  
the rays of Tonatiuh<sup>14</sup>  
at the onset of his Fifth Reign<sup>15</sup>  
signalled the arrival  
of the flip-side of the world coin  
as Castillian-Moro<sup>16</sup>  
horsemen rode  
mountain trails  
from Vera Cruz  
up to Popocatepetl<sup>17</sup>  
to peer down  
upon Anáhuac<sup>18</sup>  
as milling Aztek  
aristocrats  
strode  
through Coyoacán  
on festive market days,  
barbarcha de perrito chihuahense<sup>20</sup>  
was rolled in tortillas de maíz<sup>21</sup>  
while Christian noses  
and Moorish sensibilities  
most probably recoiled,  
all the while  
Franciscan Friars conspired  
with Dominican Inquisitors  
to topple Quetzalcoátl  
and supply a Christ of Love  
girded by Spanish harquebuses  
and Hispanic wiles  
wafting on Papal mandates  
and regal ordinances,

oh, rhapsodies  
combining worlds  
where multihued humanity  
still plies its wares  
in market places, daring  
to infuse its colors  
into a humanscape  
where differences  
might unify and not divide  
a progeny of cosmic natures,

we stand, Cristobal Colón,  
at the edge  
where a chanting race  
dances through myriad colorations,  
where black and white and red  
commingle with yellowed pigment  
to create a continent  
where bronze became a human color  
bespeaking universal pain,  
historic misery and struggle,  
yes, we stand, Señor Colón,  
plenipotentiary admiral  
of the mighty ocean-sea, upon  
that sacred land  
where lava burnt the very ground  
that mighty nations might arise  
to hunt with zeal  
each other's progeny,  
we stand upon the threshold  
to see our daughters/sons embark  
toward horizons new  
amidst a sky of stars uncountable,  
humans that we be  
we somehow seek  
a new Cristobal  
to dare to cross  
an oceanic sky, to find  
new sentient life  
that we might coalesce and merge  
and thus emerge  
again, again...

V.

at the periphery of Columbia,  
at the edges where Aztlán<sup>22</sup>  
conjoins its ancient cultures  
with dialectical schemes  
where reason is mechanical  
and passion a distortion,  
at those rough edges  
where English/Spanish  
paradigms wrestle  
and form new societal  
schematiques, only to find  
contortion rearing

hydra-headed ideations, each  
seeking to supplant the other  
as waves of conquering zealots  
smash head-on unto each other's  
need for realization,

500 years of human interaction,  
embroilments bubble  
as histories commingle,  
South to North, all peoples merged  
and emerged into the pain  
of wars within the skins,  
from red to white and black and yellow  
and thence to bronze  
and mestizo clarion calls

in this America  
where natives find themselves  
endangered strangers  
within the lands  
which gave them birth,

Amerika<sup>23</sup> of jazz and turbulence  
rebounding notes  
resounding  
in the harlems of the soul  
we scat and ditty-bop  
and shuck-n-jive,  
all de while we be  
looking for an out  
to sing and shout  
that bluesiness  
of low-down-stingin' life  
and what it be about, oh,  
yes, colorizations  
which speak to music  
blaring  
through glaring  
city streets  
and rural pathways

that Johnny might cash  
it all in and wail  
to countrified be-bop  
jazzed down notes  
despairing  
as Cajun blackened lifestyles  
bemoan much left unsaid, undone,

oh, Tewa eyes<sup>24</sup>  
peering into Dineh<sup>25</sup> universal outcry  
in Chinle, Kayenta, and the Cañon  
del Muerto<sup>26</sup> where skinwalkers  
manifest centuries of culture  
as Kachina dancers<sup>27</sup>  
snake their ways  
to reverberant notes  
roiling centuries of wind  
bouncing off canyon walls  
while humanity chants on  
Black Mesa<sup>28</sup>

tales told  
by Sky City poet Simón Ortiz<sup>29</sup>  
of *Sand Creek* sabers  
gnashing through flesh  
as time gnawed on memory,

it all resounds, Don Cristobal,  
the plastic dance of spastic history  
through visceral time, a serpentine  
undulation of human bodies  
becoming one  
from the carnival of Brazileiro witchery  
to Tarahumara/Yaqui incantations<sup>30</sup>  
running within the frenzy  
of bones being cast  
in East L. A. pachuco enclaves<sup>31</sup>  
where exiled xicanos from El Paso  
pass their fragmented bits  
of historic pain onto  
immigrant hordes  
disembarking  
from lowrider carts  
up from Sonoran outposts  
and Yucateko jungles,<sup>32</sup> oy  
veh, América,  
we sing you  
birthday notes  
within the blues notes  
of Langston<sup>33</sup>  
wanting to also be  
what he had always been,  
a denizen of a land

greater/grander  
than any nation,  
a continental concatenation  
of nations  
South to North/East to West,  
all one mighty land,  
one multihued/polyglottish  
people, cosmicity within  
a song, a poem, the  
passion of the soul  
the cadence of the universe,  
five hundred years  
    of tears & fears  
500 years  
conjoined/concelebrated,  
commemorated  
the still surviving dream  
crafted  
in this century's primal revolution,  
    la Raza C3smica<sup>34</sup>  
has been born  
and Vasconcelos sings  
to an America greater  
than any of its parts,  
  
you, I, we,  
  
500 years of struggle and becoming...

## Notes for

## "Órale, Don Cristobal"

<sup>1</sup>Real-politik: "practical politics" a euphemism for "power politics" or "might-makes-right."

<sup>2</sup>Chichimecas, Tlaxcaltecas: Nahuatl (Uto-Aztecan) peoples, the Chichimecas remaining relatively savage while the Tlaxcaltecas collaborated with Cortéz in overwhelming Montezuma in 1520.

<sup>3</sup>Padre de los Chingados: Sire of the Fucked, a take-off on Octavio Paz and his treatise on the word *chingo*, *chingado*.

<sup>4</sup>Doña Marina: Malinche, a woman given to Hernán Cortéz by the Aztecs.

<sup>5</sup>Octavio Paz: Mexican poet, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990.

<sup>6</sup>Quetzal, Xochitl: a crested green and red bird of Central America; a flower.

<sup>7</sup>Niña Isabel: slighting reference to Queen Isabella of Spain, who supported Columbus' voyage to the New World.

<sup>8</sup>Xiximekatl: coinage by Sánchez of Spanish words for breasts (*chichi*) and sperm (*mecatal*) with a Nahuatl spelling.

<sup>9</sup>La sangre / Huitsolopochtli: the blood drunk by "hummingbird" / the Nahuatl god of war.

<sup>10</sup>Granada: the last Moorish (Moslem) stronghold in Spain, which fell to the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

<sup>11</sup>Ocelotl warriors: Nahuatl warriors less in strength than the jaguar warriors they had once been.

<sup>12</sup>Quetzalcoátl: the feathered serpent, chief god of the Aztecs.

<sup>13</sup>Tenochtitlán, Tlatelolco: twin cities of the Nahuatl peoples in Mexico.

<sup>14</sup>Tonatiuh: the sun.

<sup>15</sup>Fifth Reign: in the Aztec calendar, the epoch of the sun that began when Cortéz landed in Vera Cruz and that will soon end; the new era (Sixth Reign) is to be an age of human-

ization, freedom, and dignity.

<sup>16</sup>Castillian-Moro: the Spanish-Moorish soldiers that invaded the Nahuatl peoples.

<sup>17</sup>Popocatepetl: the volcano that overlooks Mexico City.

<sup>18</sup>Anáhuac: Mexico City.

<sup>19</sup>Coyoacán: a section of Mexico City (the name derives from coyote).

<sup>20</sup>Barbarcha de perrito chihuahuense: barbecue of chihuahua dog, which were raised as a source of meat.

<sup>21</sup>Tortillas de maíz: corn tortillas.

<sup>22</sup>Aztlán: migration area of the Nahuatl peoples in present day United States, the Chicanos, historic homeland.

<sup>23</sup>Amerika: German spelling of America, contrasted with the Spanish spelling with its accent over the "é".

<sup>24</sup>Tewa: the pueblo at San Juan, New Mexico.

<sup>25</sup>Dineh: Navajo.

<sup>26</sup>Chinle, Kayenta, Cañondel Muerto: all towns in the Navajo nation.

<sup>27</sup>Kachina: a benevolent spirit (often an ancestral deity) in Pueblo lore; male dancers wear kachina masks in their dances.

<sup>28</sup>Black Mesa: a Pueblo site in New Mexico.

<sup>29</sup>Simón Ortiz: a poet from Acoma Pueblo ("Sky City") in New Mexico; Sand Creek was the site of a massacre in 1864 of several hundred Cheyenne men, women, and children who had come to surrender.

<sup>30</sup>Tarahumara/Yaqui: Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora.

<sup>31</sup>Pachuco: Chicano natives of El Paso, Texas; the term also refers to their self affirmation movement. Xicanos is a Nahuatl spelling of Chicanos.

<sup>32</sup>Yucateko: Yucatan.

<sup>33</sup>Langston: Langston Hughes (1902-1967), Black poet and leader of the Harlem Renaissance.

<sup>34</sup>La Raza Cósmica: "the cosmic race," a term from José Vasconcelos, philosopher and architect of modern Mexican education.



# MULLER'S TUNNEL

Mark K. Coen

I heard the Stones' "Paint It Black" in '68. Hue was still fresh in our minds, the street fighting, crawling from wall to burnt out building. The flames. The stench. It was our first break of Tet. Everyone was nervous about what would happen next, where we would go, and who would take us there since Muller fragged the Lieutenant.

We tried to warn the LT about Muller. He was skittish, eyes always on the move like a two-year-old seeing the world for the first time. It wasn't just a punk kid new in the country, either. He was in my squad but even I laid off him.

The first sign of trouble between Muller and the Lieutenant came a month before the Tet Offensive. We were outside Da Nang when our pointman found the tunnel.

"Okay Horton. One man. Who's smallest?"

"Muller," I told him. "He's pretty raw, sir. I'll handle it."

"No. I want you to take the rest of Second and see what we flush out."

"Why don't you let Martinez take that and I'll play tunnel rat."

"When I want advice out of you, Sergeant, I'll ask for it."

I hadn't had any trouble with the LT since I'd got my hard stripes and

I wasn't going to risk losing them to protect some punk like Muller.

He wasn't thrilled when I told him.

"No way, man. I ain't going down no stinking gook hole."

"Ain't up to you or me, Private. Lieutenant says down you go, down you go."

"I don't care if he's King God Shit. I ain't going into no fucking hole."

In the end Muller went down the tunnel, his little pig eyes darting back and forth as they lowered him head first into the opening.

I had Second Squad half a klick away when we heard the muffled pops of the forty-five. Seven quick pings, pause. I could feel Muller fumbling for another magazine, the darkness pulling him further beneath the surface than the tunnel could ever take him. Six pings then the brush erupted to our left as if a covey of quail had been spooked from a late summer wheat field.

We could hear Muller screaming at the Lieutenant as we took down two VC. They popped out of their hole just like Br'er Rabbit with no place to run.

I left the squad at the other tunnel entrance and traced my way back to the platoon to give a spot report and see if I could get Muller to stop yelling.

"No way, man. No fucking way. You're out of your fucking mind,

man." He was pacing back and forth like Groucho Marx on acid, waving the empty forty-five through the air like a marching baton, a black stain radiating through his fatigues below his belt.

"We got two," I told the LT. "What's with the kid?"

"You get his ass back in the hole, Sergeant. I want to know what he hit and how many."

"There ain't enough tea in China to get me to ask him to do that, sir. I'll go look."

He didn't argue. His eyes moved in slow imitation of Muller's as he watched the kid pacing, arms moving up and down like a slow moving chickenhawk, the forty-five still flapping in the air.

I found in the tunnel the same thing Muller had—fear, and a double helping at that. I came across the spot he fired from, the brass casings biting into my hands as I crawled through the tunnel. Other than that there was nothing. The tunnel was just a hole between point A and point B.

Muller had shut up by the time I crawled out the far end but he was still pacing, eyes swiveling between the tunnel opening and the Lieutenant.

"Nothing in there. Those two Muller spooked must have been the only ones."

"What about papers? Were there any papers?"

"Nothing. Two gooks and a hole in the ground."

"Get Muller."

"What's up, sir?"

"Get Muller."

I wasn't going to stand there arguing with the man. I walked over to Muller where he was wearing a path into the jungle floor. The veins along his temples were playing a polka against his grey skin.

"Lieutenant wants you."

He paced to the Lieutenant, stopped sharply two feet away and threw him a parade ground salute.

"We're going back in there," he told Muller.

"Sir..."

"You like those stripes, Sergeant?"

I had a squad to look after. The LT had some kind of point to make and he was going to make it whether I said anything or not. I walked away.

I don't remember seeing Muller reload the forty-five. I don't remember if he went in the tunnel before or after the Lieutenant. I don't remember whose body we pulled out first. All I remember is the pings of the gun going off and thinking how dark that hole really was.

I remembered that tunnel as I sipped a warm Pabst Blue Ribbon in the burnt out city of Hue, listening to Mick paint the world black.

He can skip that tunnel.

It's got two good coats. ☐

**William Studebaker**  
**MOONRISE OVER LEADORE, IDAHO**  
**(in memory of Ansel Adams)**

The buildings are soft gray.  
The shadows are where they  
should be. The single street  
mirrors itself, and  
a perfectly composed dog  
trots away  
like a hoodlum, hackles hunched  
after smelling a stranger.

The customers at the Silver Dollar  
Bar & Cafe are arranged  
with their backs to the door.

The waitress is looking down  
as she pours coffee, and Tom "Cat"  
Walker is getting drunker,  
waiting for the full moon  
to rise, something to piss at  
on his way home.

And Mary Florence sits  
at the end of the counter,  
her freshly filed fingernails  
lightly clacking against the counter top.

She is picture perfect  
for fifty, and even better  
looking in moonlight, but she knows  
not everything can be touched-up  
not even in a darkroom—

beneath the Leadore moon.

**William Studebaker**  
**IN SPRING**

if a young apple farmer  
dreamed of you  
he would turn toward you  
under the twisted flannel  
of a handmade quilt  
waking you with his warm  
whispers, whispers  
Lady Chatterley never heard: —

From your nest of comforters  
you would watch a bee  
rub its taste buds  
and walk about enormously  
burning more golden  
on the window pane  
than a bead of pure sunlight.

He would coax you: all this  
slumbering and sluggishness  
when you could be walking  
in the orchard  
where the smell of unmade honey  
stirs beneath the tight lips  
of apple buds.

June E. Foye  
ON READING SYLVIA PLATH

- I. You wade, soul-naked,  
the salt pools of sensation.  
You fish for red-eyed words  
in those black fathoms  
of yourself.  
You talk of waves  
that whiten with drowned faces.  
The future, gull-like,  
beats its ailing wings,  
uncertain of arrival.  
Oh, show me one bright shell!
  
- II. You beach your phrases  
on a landscape  
no more merciful  
than water; everywhere  
you place a foot,  
it finds a thorn.  
You hug the pain--  
a dark persephone  
who seeds your talent,  
provoking it to grow  
impassioned flowers.
  
- III. You prophesy  
the crumbling  
of your personal Troy --  
a faded Ilium  
from which you fled.  
I wonder,  
did you drag your ghosts  
behind you into heaven,  
comfortable with them,  
reluctant to consort  
with laughing angels?

# WATER LIFE

Samuel Blair

The main place we went was the Seattle Center, on Saturdays, where middle-aged couples gathered on the Center Floor of the Food Circus and danced. The music was big band stuff, a little syrupy, a little Guy Lombardo. The lights would hush, the conductor would tap and lift his baton, ironically formal (a balding man with glasses, typically, and a soothing Midwest voice), and the trumpets would blare, loud and sudden after the break, to get things pumped up.

There were young people there, but we were always the youngest: fresh into college, with the shreds of high school still clinging to us, small awkwardnesses and oddities that hadn't fallen loose—that never really would. For we were the unmade kids who had never passed the great test adolescence poses, the one having nothing to do with essay answers or mark-sense forms. We had tried, failed, tried again, failed again, given up, stumbled on.

But we knew how to jitterbug—though for me waltzes and foxtrots were simpler, and the bunny-hop, of course, was a snap: a great long line twisting around the floor, us young 'uns unafraid to kick as high as we could, sometimes snapping so fero-

ciously that we sprawled out sideways and limped back to our table giggling and bruised.

Sometimes it wasn't one table but two joined together, because our number varied: we had a hard core five, several peripherals joining on for the ride, and a few guests we aspired for, who were above us but graciously pretended not to be.

One of these was Richard Lockington. He was not as impressive as his name—short and thin, really, with a skinny voice that became infantile when he laughed—but he had, as we might have described it at the time, an airy freedom we lacked, a cheerful disregard for other people's feelings that seemed, somehow, bright and cruel and lovely as diamonds, contrasted to our muddy middle-class caution.

Now I think I would describe it differently: Richard was rich. But this was during the seventies, when you didn't talk about money the way you do today; so we simply acknowledged a difference, a way he had of flying free circles around us while we clung tenaciously, regretfully to our trembling self-respect.

At the tables, after sipping Cokes and catching our breaths, we'd lean over the sticky red table-cloth to hear each other above the music.

"What are they doing now?"

"Tennessee Waltz."

"That woman isn't so good, is she?"

"I don't really know anything about jazz," I'd say, and then try to inject an intellectual note: "I only really listen to classical music."

"Well, I *like* classical music. . ."

"Last week's singer was better."

"Tina Trouble."

"Tina Terrible."

"Well, I think she was a better singer."

"She was a better singer," Richard agreed, and there was a short silence. "But she still sucked. Hey, Moll, come on."

Moll was strong-shouldered, big-breasted, scared of sex like all of us: "What *are* you suggesting, Richard."

"Come on Moll, let's do it," Richard said. "Let's do it right here on the table-top."

"If you say so. I dunno. All these Coke cans."

"I *was* suggesting, Moll, that we go out and dance."

"Okay. Shucks."

They walked towards the dance floor together, and the rest of us were laughing.

"We should have cleared off the table," said Courtney. "I want to see if her breasts are real."

"Pour our Cokes," I said, "on their naked, writhing forms."

"You *guys*," said April, "I'm still *eating*. I have lasagna to finish, if you don't mind."

"Sorry April," said Courtney.

We were all virgins, and joked lots about sex, as though we were trying, not to cheer ourselves up, but to discover from each other some safe, solid ground, some certainty—for we were, within, all liquid. We had heard that there is such a thing as a core identity, but felt ourselves inside just swirling seas, all alteration, and looked with suspicion at the people around us who walked with the comfortable certainty of those who know the score. We did not know the score. We knew only tides and storms and unexpected calms—and unspoken resentments.

Richard came back with Moll,

who sat next to Courtney: "They've got the lights out there so bright, I'm sweating like a pig."

"Women glow," said Courtney.

April put in, "We sweat."

"Pardon me," Courtney said, frowning a moment and then shortening his mouth into a hyphen. Courtney had, as if in compensation for eyes half-hidden by thick glasses, an endlessly expressive mouth, not wide so much as mobile, that pushed out like a French intellectual's when he was feeling feisty or worried, and, in repose, settled into a slightly angry smile.

"Well, *okay*," said April. Courtney and April were, in theory, lovers, but in fact seemed to be dancers: the shortest in the group, they were also the quickest, in speech as well as in motion, and the best on the dance floor, especially when doing the jitterbug. They were the best gossips too (though hers was harsher than his), and the best singers, and, in general, the best couple; except that they did not seem to be a couple, never holding hands and kissing only formally, at Christmas under the mistletoe for instance. April—blond and pretty, with sharp eyes and a sharp smile—grumbled about this sometimes.

"I was thinking," Moll said, voice rising up as if about to become some sort of complaint (there was always an unvoiced complaint buried under Moll's conversation), we should leave a little early. If we want to catch the beginning of 'To Have and To Have Not.'"

These were the pre-cable days, the last gasp of revival houses and midnight movies on walls at rented gymnasiums. "I'd like to wait until 'In the Mood,'" said Courtney.

"Do they play that every night?" asked, politely, Jane—not a real member of the group, but invited to fill in for Sylvia, who was at the hospital for ankle surgery.

"They tend to save it up," said Courtney. "We may miss it tonight."

Jane nodded, as if understanding that this was very serious information, with an expression of intent concentration on her oval face, chin dipping in towards the neck, brown hair falling straight, mouth in a half-smile — understanding our need to be humored on this point. We all sat back in our chairs and chatted aimlessly, waiting through the next set, and, during the break, sighing because we had to miss "In the Mood," we stood and gathered ourselves and walked off the dance floor, down long brown corridors sticky with chewing gum and dried root-beer, and out into the summer air, the Fun Forest: ferris wheels and Turbochargers and merry-go-rounds all spinning with bright lights and a clash of tinkly tunes competing, and halfway through we began to run, and kept running all the way to the car.

We went to "To Have and To Have Not," and then an all-night ice-cream place, and returned, happily clear-headed (we never drank), in time to see the sky turning pink; and so it went week after week, month after month, year after year.

**R**ichard Lockington had taken two years off between high school and college. Now, after one year at the University of Washington, he'd decided to transfer to NYU. A premature East Coast status glowed around him like a golden nimbus, and everyone moved a little closer to him, to catch some of it.

Flattered, I think, that we took his prospects of future fame more seriously than he did, Richard became a genial host and asked us to his parent's lake-front home a few times, or, once, even invited us to a cabin his parents had bought close to a small lake and a short drive from the ocean. This was impromptu — he suggested it while we were all sipping root-beer floats at Farrell's, and by that evening we were there.

I remember the visit as pleasant,

but with an odd atmosphere of longing: everyone, suddenly, more than dazzled by Richard, had fallen in love with him; and perhaps uncomfortable at the almost random sexual tides lapping up against him, Richard kept us safely landlocked, drily childish: when it was light, we trudged along the beach in bare feet and tossed frisbees close to the trees; when it was dark, we played charades, hearts and spoons (Richard was a violent spoons player, and always won). Before we went to bed, there was an air of tense expectation, while we'd all fall silent and look at the black, glassy windows and hear the tides. Richard would break this up by laughing, "I get the bathroom first!" and lunge out of the room.

When we drove back to Seattle, our spirits seemed pretty high; but it was almost a month before we got together again.

I did see Courtney sometimes for lunch in the Student Union Building. Between soggy french fries, we'd talk about '50s movies, or schoolwork, or say vicious things about the other members of the group.

"April's dating another guy," said Courtney. "I've seen him. He looks like a bladder ball with arms and legs attached."

"No head? She just wants a degrading experience. She'll come back to you."

"Oh, she's never gone away from me. We're still an 'item.' She explained it all to me, and I was staring at her and saying 'Okay.'"

"She says," I muttered cautiously, "that you don't make love."

"Oh, yeah? I'm so glad she feels she can talk about these things with everybody. And thanks, Jay, for sharing."

"Anything to oblige."

We sipped our Cokes a while in silence.

"I think I like these better than Pepsis," I said. "Pepsis are good, though."



"Pepsis are okay. Something in my body doesn't go for all that sugar, though. They've gone a little heavy on the syrups."

"Yeah? Have you tried diet Pepsi?"

"Well, I don't like those so well, actually."

"Yeah? Actually, I'm not sure I do either."

We turned to our Huskyburgers (made from real husky meat), and read our *Dailys* a while, and then Courtney said, "Richard's going to New York next month to live there a year. Before school starts."

"When is this? Next month?"

"October twenty-fifth, United flight 721, nine-forty PM." (Courtney had a perfect memory.)

"Well, that's not so far away, is it? Are we giving him a going away party?"

"He says he's going to be really, really busy this next month, which is understandable, I guess."

"Or not."

"Or not, exactly. But he wants us to drive him to the airport."

"When? The night of the flight?"

"Yes. You're not going to irritate me with questions like that, you know, Jay."

"Well, *that's* a strange thing to say, Courtney. But what about his parents?"

"I know. But he wants it to be just us."

"When my brother and sister went to college, it was a big thing. The whole family went to the airport."

"I guess his parents have a more relaxed attitude or something."

"I guess."

"I wish my parents were more relaxed sometimes."

"No, I know. Tell me about it."

"So write it down, October twenty-fifth, nine-forty PM. I know you'll forget it if you don't write it down."

"We can't all be perfect like you, Courtney."

Courtney paused and nodded,

once, at the simple justice of this, mouth going momentarily small, but added (a little nervous, maybe, at even joke-praise), "And it's a terrible responsibility, Jay." Then we finished our Huskyburgers, and left for afternoon classes.

**R**ichard's parents *were* different from ours, they were younger—the rest of us had Great Depression parents, who carried with them the memory of that time like a portion of their souls sand-blasted; they had all been poor, and now found themselves blinking at the middle-class lives they'd won in a kind of teary-eyed wonder, a happy dream that couldn't possibly last, that was a fantasy-mirror of the visions that had kept them going through the years of disaster and pain.

So we, their children, were also part of their dreams; and felt, I think, a kind of guilt for being, sometimes, less than they'd imagined.

But Richard's parents seemed to operate in a world where guilt did not exist, and could be seen walking through doorways and waving, leaving Richard in airy autonomy. We thought, longingly, that maybe he was nobody's dream but his own—not realizing that rich people have their own dreams, dreams made from special metal alloy, light and hard.

School dribbled along, but I hadn't become interested in my classes, still carrying with me my high school superiority, my unwillingness to imagine that any of it mattered. I had gone through high school without ever really thinking, and was determined to do the same through college. After afternoon sociology, Courtney and I would meet at the University District Pizza Hut, and on Fridays we'd all go to the movies—there was a James Bond series showing at the Neptune—and on Saturdays there was dancing.

There was no last burst of activity for Richard. In fact, he didn't see us

until the night of his flight, when I hopped out and, with Moll, bounced over to the door—April was driving, a snappy red sports car of her dad's—and Richard opened before we knocked, smiling as if he'd been expecting us all his life, as if he'd just turned around in a crowded room. "Here I go!" he said, and then spun about and disappeared into a hallway.

A moment later—after a murmured conversation and a laugh—he returned with two brief suitcases. "I've got more. But that's being mailed."

"Can we carry those?" Moll asked.

"No," Richard said, and laughed, and we all went to the car.

As April tried to steer along the curling Laurelhurst streets, under a black sky and the ghostly shine of street-lamps, Richard guided her: "Turn left here... right at the stop sign... left, no, right..."

"These streets ought to be committed." April's voice, from the dark front seat, sounded annoyed and grown up—a husky note of adulthood slipping under her nasty good cheer.

"Well, let's just find the freeway." Courtney was soft, a little musical, conciliatory.

Richard asked, after a pause, "Isn't Sylvia coming?"

"She's got back surgery."

So we all started saying terrible things about Sylvia.

"The thing that really irritates me is the way she talks," said Moll, who had a pretty aggravating voice of her own sometimes.

But then, so do I: "I'm half inclined to think her diseases are all psychosomatic."

"Remember the time she came down with Spanish Fever?" said April

We turned right onto the freeway ramp, and soon were gliding along the long, twining path, a dark sensual blur of concrete, while the stars and moon slowly rolled overhead and street-lamps whipped by. The cars around us hummed and purred, and the

downtown skyscrapers rolled behind us, depositing us into darker land, grassy hills with clumps of trees and isolated houses, followed by happy bursts—a town, or shopping mall—and then more stretches of darkness. We began carefully shifting right, weaving between big trucks, until we reached the airport exit, and then made the turn and relaxed as we were spun through twists and curves, past a bank's scoreboard-style clock—nine-oh-five—and into the airport parking lot.

After we got out and April locked the door, there was a momentary directionless shuffling, as if we all felt very small and humble in the midst of the huge concrete pillars, and our voices echoing in the cavernous emptiness.

"Let's go," Richard said, bouncing ahead towards the elevators.

He led us along past the files of grimly gleaming cars, and up the elevator, and on to the walkway that arched over traffic, and brought us to the blinking monitors and clean, whispering efficiency of the United terminals. And he led us talking, too, washing away our discomfort with the light pattering rainfall-sound of his voice.

"So my sister Alley was going to join me, but she had a party to go to instead. So I'm telling her, 'That's nice, go play with your little friends,' and she nods. And I say, 'Don't mind me, your brother, who you're never going to see again.' And she nods. She's reading a *Mademoiselle* magazine. If there's one thing I admire, it's family loyalty."

We had stopped under a big TV screen with a rich blue background and blinking white numbers. "Flight 721," said Courtney, not looking.

Moll nodded, professionally, as if in her preparation for her future lawyer life, a clipped seriousness closing a steel shutter between the world and her terror. "Gate G-11."—still, her voice rose at the very end with a suggestion of dread.

We took the escalators to the metal-detectors and the subway. We were the only ones there: the distant hiss of busses and strange metal rattling of luggage racks became a corporeal part of the smooth black airport walls, its life, its breathing, the rush of blood in its hidden arteries. The doors of the robot subway smacked open, and we stepped inside.

"Say, this is empty, except for us," Richard said. "Know what I've always wanted to do in one of these things?" And when the doors shut, he began dancing from one end of the tube to the other, swinging his arms and making lunatic gurgling noises; he did it two or three times, while the train began to move—the dark tracks and walls whooshing by, and pale lights like luminescent fish-eyes at the bottom of the ocean—and after a moment of stiff discomfort, just watching him flail like a dancer on a stick, we joined in, and the train became a small enclave of light in a dark, strange, unsafe world where our childishness hid and danced; and, bouncing up and down past the red cushions and informational posters, glancing nervously at the black windows as if afraid someone would be watching (I imagined, for some reason, a college-aged man with short blond hair and round shoulders inside a t-shirt), I really liked Richard for one of the few times while knowing him, found him admirable.

The subway stopped, and we got out and scampered breathless up the stairs towards his gate. There was no line, and only a few people under the bright blue sign, "G-11." A young woman with a bright smile but tired eyes seeming to droop under their heavy mascara stamped Richard's ticket, and for a moment we all stood under the sign and by the tunnel leading out of the building and down to the airplane.

We all felt constrained to be sentimental, or at least soft, and said good-byes, told each other to write. Richard took two steps back, away from us,

still smiling that bright smile of his that flipped back his hair and hid his eyes, and said, "So, see you!" And spun around and walked away.

We considered hanging around and waiting for the plane to leave. After a minute of trying and failing to see Richard in any of the ghostly yellow windows glowing in the night, we shrugged and headed back for the parking garage.

At the car, however, we lingered with a sense of emotional incompleteness, and circled around the doors, not wanting to open them, feeling ourselves, as usual, cut off from the regular rituals of adolescence, and having to make-up our own.

It was April, of all people, who, spotting the neon orange Nerf ball on the back dashboard, suggested fatalistically, not to give herself pleasure (as if sensing the new, demoralizing adult world that was to send her into madder and madder schemes to marry richer and richer men), "We could play football."

So we decided to play football. We went up to the top level of the parking garage, which was outdoors, and stood a moment uncertainly tapping our feet against the cement. Courtney, we noticed, was rather too well-dressed, in cotton slacks with a neat crease running down the knee, and a good silk shirt; but gallantly spreading his arms as if caught in an invisible spotlight—and he blends, now, into memory, with his future life spent in part-time jobs trying to forward a career as a stand-up comedian—he shrugged this off: "So what are clothes?"

And we played football, sometimes paired-off in teams, other times just throwing the ball. We stayed clear of the railing, afraid that the ball, or, worse, one of us might go sailing over the side, but ran around the vacant center of the lot, dodging between dark cars and sliding on patches of oil. Strangely, this is one of my best college memories—strangely, because it soon degenerated into an orgy of self

destruction, with Moll scraping the skin off her left hand, me bruising both my knees, April getting a cut on her elbow, and Courtney's trousers, by the end, in tatters. It began to rain, too — one of those misty Seattle showers, slow and beneficent, appearing in the halo of the overhead lamps and settling slow as fog. It was only after we were at it for a couple of hours that I noticed that my hair, shirt, shoes, socks were drenched, and that my throat was running.

"Quick pass left," I said to Moll, in our huddle, and splashed up to the line where Courtney was waiting in coverage.

"Hike," Moll said in a voice of doom, and I tossed back the ball (which made a sort-of *splurch* sound), and ran forward (Courtney, very quick, right on me), and then cut sharply left, and so did Courtney, and we collided together with a parked Mustang. Moll threw the ball at us with a laconic shrug, and we stood, checked ourselves for blood, and decided to call it a night.

The car-ride home I remember as slow, soft, tired, with the windows all hazing. The freeway guided us back to Seattle, up to the University District, and the ramp deposited us into ordinary Seattle streets, with fire hydrants and stop signs and empty beer-cans sparkling smashed in the gutters, the prosaic ornaments of home, a patch of dullness surrounded by distant, glittering lights.

Moll started to talk, breaking a silence of a minute or so: "God, I'm really tired. Thanks for knocking me over on that running play, Courtney. Anyone notice that the weather is getting worse? I think I'm going to start a letter to Richard. Did he say if he's a good letter-writer?"

"He says he is," Courtney offered, from the front seat.

"I'd better put it off. I'm in a terrible mood. How about you guys, you all feeling terrible?"

It was one of those questions that's

sort of hard to answer. At last, after a lengthy hush with just the engine sound and a slight splashing as we drove through puddles, I said, "Actually, I'm feeling pretty good."

Moll laughed. "You know what's wrong with you, Jay? You never fall in love with anybody. Are you ever going to fall in love with anybody?"

We pulled up to the curb, and Moll got out. "Well, see you around," she said. "Sorry if I said anything. I'm in a rotten mood."

We smiled sweetly, and the car door popped shut, and we started saying terrible things about her — but without our usual enthusiasm. We were tired. About halfway to my place we fell silent, and when we got there I stepped out, said, "See you soon, bye then," and they smiled sweetly, and the car door popped shut.

The following morning, my sore throat was worse; and then I fell into a cold and fever that kept me in bed for a week, and a semi-invalid for a month.

For that next year we added new members, lost them, kept partying, kept dancing, kept meeting between classes. For the first time ever, I found myself becoming interested in my class-work, and, at the same time, less and less a part of the group. There were the usual Ins and Outs. When Sylvia returned, Moll was pushed, temporarily, Out. For a while I found myself an Out. I concentrated harder on my reading — Keats, I remember — and then I was In again, and then Out, and In — and finally, permanently, Out.

I would bump into people from time to time. The group still kept going, though its horizons were widening. Richard — as Courtney told me once, accidentally met at a book store — did write, but more and more sparingly, and in a paler and paler voice. Then, a few months later, there was a final convulsion of Ins and Outs followed by a conclusion — the only fair

one really—in which everyone was Out.

And so we drifted on and became distinct selves, with distinct personalities, distinct careers, distinct sexualities. We decided who we were.

Except, now that I think about it, I'm not sure I did—for looking on my life since then, I see a series of false starts as I tried to solidify into a person with a tangible set of lusts, ambitions, loves... but the coherence crumbled each time, as something inside me remained, forever liquid. I drift this way and that, like a plant on

an ocean-bottom, and life parades by me like a school of shimmering fish.

And maybe this is why, in my occasional uneasy moods, I think of that time as the one natural period in my life, when no one stood stiff with the sharp edges of self-definition, when we still wavered and danced; when our lives spread out ahead like an endless expansion, each advance making a new line in a pattern that twirled and twined and spun in intricate, infinite circles and swirls; the time when we were all ourselves, and unformed. □

**Teresa A. French**  
**A PREACHER'S PROMISE**

a promise  
 is a sound

words woven  
 as carefully as  
 a spider's web  
 and torn  
       just as easily.

**Scott E. Green**  
**PACING THE SHARKS**

Pacing the sharks  
vast Carib canoes towed  
the reed craft filled  
with Jaguar warriors,  
Eagle Knights.  
They came across the Atlantic  
to bring the Flower War to new lands,  
bring new peoples to the maws  
of the hungry Aztec pantheon.  
The Canaries, the Azores became new gar-  
dens  
of smokey blossoms.  
But then obsidian axes shattered  
against the Toledo steel scimitars  
of Grenada's Caliph.  
And they fled, the champions of hungry gods  
fled,  
harried all the way across the Atlantic,  
back to their land  
back to their vast metropolis of the lake  
back to the Valley of Mexico  
by the dragon ships of the Raven banner  
by the corsairs of the green Crescent banner  
and by any free booters who can smell  
the fall of empires.

**Maria Theresa Maggi**  
**REHEARSAL**

I believe in faithfulness, she said to the starched air. The woman should be faithful to the man. Behind the silent wall of this belief, she waited. Didn't say much. Once in a while, she raised her hand as if in class, but there was no one to call on her, give her permission to speak. So she never finished the thought in her head. If she had finished it, what would it be? This possibility roared around the outside of visibility like an ancient fire, angry and still blazing from burning village after village. Happy to be undomesticated, it roared through and ate all the pictures. But this was getting too abstract even for her. The man has to be faithful to the woman. Try it from his side. He would think, in the silent mental orchard where all possibilities grow without sun or water, that he loves her more than anything. No, that's not what he would think. He would think she will be my wife until the end of time. She will stay with me for the rest of my life. She's good. She's faithful. Then, all of a sudden, she'd think of a zipper on jeans being invisible. The tone is wrong, she would say if someone would just call on her. Stop trying to make it too wry, too detached, that's not the way we are now. We never stop wanting love for always. Husbands and wives calmly waiting for it. Sorting through the newspapers shopping for groceries, brushing their teeth and then turning back the sheets. Waiting. Repeating the same hopes in these motions, but only to themselves. She thinks she might have something. She feels nervous and wants to make a joke, but knows it won't work. So she sits, What comes next? The day he was making her breakfast in a late Auburn fall, the pancakes with apples sputtering in the hot iron skillet, and the strangers outside, who didn't know about the pancakes. There's always people outside, she thinks, and you don't know if they're hungry--just assume everyone is.

**Maria Theresa Maggi**  
**THE APPOINTMENT**

*Sex is sacred*, my mother had said.  
I tried to picture it,  
and could see only how couples  
must have gone to the doctor  
to say *help us do this thing*,  
and he'd help them up  
onto the crinkled white tissue  
stretched across the exam table  
like stiff, tasteless snow.  
I could hear it snap in my head—  
the sound of a rubber band  
being slid up the hollow  
cannister of a Sunday newspaper.  
Then he must have said *put it in*,  
because he had to time it  
and oversee it so the baby  
would get made. I replicated  
the tiny soul in my imagination  
with the crayola crayon wrapped  
in white paper but named *flesh*.  
I tried to understand.  
But since this fist shaping  
was visible only in the mind of God,  
the conceptual warble of arms and legs  
caught me in cold waves  
at the isinglass window, slicing  
its heavy and not quite  
willing prisoners, my parents,  
and all parents, in a tide  
of dulled longing and shadows.



**Barbara J. Petoskey**  
**INFERNO**

Conceived by a jagged, midnight touch  
hotter than the sun's tongue,  
the spark feeds first on scrub clutter  
then thrives on the fallen mighty.

Restless, ravenous,  
the heavy breath  
rumbles from the mountains  
as the flames gulp dry winds.

The stoic firs stand calm  
as reeds in a mill pond. But  
there is no water,  
for summer's Thunder Moon

brought only distant promises.  
In the valley, the shriveled river  
lies palled in blackened needles  
settling like flies.

The fleet and winged alone escape,  
while the lodgepole pine,  
straight as a rope in a barren well,  
awaits the heat that frees

the seed in its stubborn cone.  
When smoky hands rip open clouds,  
the fire yields,  
expiring in a bed of ashes

hopeful as bridal sheets.

# THE GOSPEL BIRD

Rich McAdams

Preacher Green surveyed the roiling mass of sinners clamoring for his favor as the tent's atmosphere reached the fever pitch that delivered transgressors into his hands. He had just passed two sluggish rattlers to Brother Ezekiah who held the reptiles skyward as he shuffled forward, bringing them to the nearest devotees.

Things were going well. The first rows consisted mainly of women tainted with sin, real or imagined. It mattered not to Preacher Green whether their misdeeds were earthly or spiritual. What mattered was that these women were guilt-ridden and fear-fueled, primed to be delivered unto the forgiving graces of God. And that perhaps one of them, in a private ritual, would be cleansed by Preacher Green himself with the soft West Virginia night as the only witness.

The tambourines and guitars pounded synchronously with the pulsations of the tent walls that seemed to breathe like a thing alive. The snakes, having been refrigerated in the propane-powered icebox of Preacher Green's travel trailer still reacted slowly in their somnolent torpor. If they were to bite, it wouldn't be until they had been passed further into the crowd of heated, gyrating bodies.

Preacher Green was about to deliver more slings of guilt and God's vengeance when he spotted a newcomer in the first row. The kerosene lamplight cast just enough shadow beneath her bonnet of flowered lace to allow only a teasing glimpse of a gently curving, ivory skinned neck and a delicate jawline. Holding a wicker basket in the crook of her arm, she'd pushed her way to the fore and now stood immobile, like an island anchored amidst breaking waves. Perhaps it was this congruity or simply the reserved but powerful sensuality he sensed in her that gave him uncharacteristic pause. Or perhaps it was the vague erotic recognition that broke his concentration, forcing him to check his lapse and return to matters at hand.

"You sin! And you sin! And Almighty God is gonna reach right down with his great hand and slap you!"

The preacher punctuated this exhortation by raising his hand overhead and swinging it downward to spear a quaking, accusing finger at a wide-eyed bumpkin who briefly displayed terror before screaming "Save me, Jesus! Save me, Lord!"

Preacher Green continued the call and response pattern by cocking his other arm back, holding his floppy, black Bible like a football and thrusting it forward. He stood with arms outstretched, one hand holding the quivering Book, the other panning the crowd with an incriminating finger.

"I know some of you will fry like possum steaks on a poppin' lard griddle! I know some of you will suffer the tortures of Hell! How many of you are willing to give in to Jesus and let him snatch you from the jaws of Satan?"

This was it; the fervent wave crested. He glared, bug-eyed at the wailing crowd. Two of the women fainted. Brother Ezekiah gently pulled them out of harm's way and lay them prostrate, at Preacher Green's feet. The musicians assaulted their instruments with violent intensity. It was the proper culmination of another evening with Preacher Green's Traveling Pentecostal Holiness Vigil.

A sideways glance told Preacher Green, as he stood with head bowed, chest heaving, that the girl in the bonnet had left. But it didn't matter.

The two women stretched out before him were regaining consciousness as another girl fanned their faces with a Bible. Brother Ezekiah circulated amongst the crowd, his hat held out to receive a steady showering of coins and rumped greenbacks. The people lined up, coming forward to thank Preacher Green, slip bills into his hand, ask a personal blessing, thrust gifts of food into his arms.

**I**n a trimmed-down repeat of the after-sermon scene, this time just outside Preacher Green's trailer, several young women stood before him, chattering nervously. He was patiently weeding this latest crop, culling the more promising fruit while sending away those not in need of the Lord's special cleansing.

The reappearance of the girl in the bonnet interrupted the preacher's harvest. He turned his gaze to her as she approached. Facing him, close now, she removed her bonnet. A cascade of honey-blond curls fell over her shoulders.

"Hello, Preacher," she said.

"Why, praise the Lord, child. You've returned to me, darling..."

"Lilly. I brought you a baked chicken." She held the basket out to him.

"God loves those who do for others, child," Preacher Green said as he took it from her. "I thank you."

"We need to talk," she said.

The preacher gestured toward the other two girls who had remained. They were glaring jealously at Lilly. "Were it not for the needs of these repentant souls, I would assuredly be at your service tonight, my dear Lilly."

The girl remained silent. She dropped her gaze to her hand, which rested lightly on her belly that now, no longer hidden by the bulk of the wicker basket, displayed a disproportionate bulge, unmistakable on her graceful frame.

Preacher Green's eye's widened for an instant before he stepped between Lilly and the two others. He turned to the pair and told them "Come to tomorrow night's meeting. This poor child of God is in great need."

With groans of disappointment, the girls left, shooting squinted glances at Lilly. She watched them depart, her face devoid of expression.

"Come into my humble home, child. Let me deliver unto you the Lord's peace."

He put his arm around Lilly's shoulders and led her into the trailer.

**T**wo hours later, the headlights of Preacher Green's pickup played across his travel trailer as he maneuvered over the field and parked behind the large, circus-like tent. He killed the engine and got out of the truck. The rattling slam of the door echoed off the sycamores at the far side of the dark, silent clearing.

He reached into the truck bed and groped for the handle of a shovel. He found it and carried it to his trailer and, after using it to scrape some of the mud off his shoes, propped it against the outside wall. Briefly brush-

ing at some of the dirt smudges on his pants and shirt, he stepped up and into the trailer.

As he lit a gas lamp and sat at the table, he noticed Lilly's bonnet on the cushion next to him. He picked it up, opened the cupboard below the sink, and stuffed it deeply into a half-filled plastic garbage pail.

Then he washed his hands, opened the small refrigerator, and removed the plastic-wrapped baked chicken. He lifted the plastic and unceremoniously ripped a leg off the cooked bird. After gulping down several lightly chewed mouthfuls, he noticed that he'd laid the bird on his Bible. With greasy fingers, he pulled the Book out from under the chicken, and began to leaf through it, leaving dark, oily fingerprints on the pages.

His vision began to blur as he took

another bite, an instant before an excruciating cramp doubled him over. An involuntary seizure forced his jaw to clamp and lock on the drumstick. He teetered and fell.

**T**welve hours later, Brother Ezekiah, having pounded on the trailer door for several minutes without hearing a response, twisted the knob and pulled the door open. He was greeted with an overpowering stench and Preacher Green staring at him from the floor, his lifeless face stretched into a hideous grin around a slimy, baked chicken leg. He held a Bible to his chest, its open pages bunched and imprisoned within his claw-like, rigor mortisized hands. The gospel bird perched on the table above the cadaver like a rancid tombstone. ☒

**Errol Miller**  
**THE SCAVENGER MAN**

"There will come soft rain  
 and the smell of the ground..."

— Sara Teasdale

Woe to this marriage  
 and that marriage, the "traditional South"  
 buried under a humid atmosphere of loss  
 all the good fat land needs is use  
 look at transitional time and place  
 the gaping limestone quarries of Siluria  
 in the early morning rain of a planned day  
 incidental planned forces lure us  
 delicately into a Southside spider-web  
 of death and decay, a widow's kingdom  
 smelling of peach wine and fly spray  
 far from Greenwich Village, only  
 the lonely live in inertia, preserving  
 their broader view in tattered poems  
 captured in Lake D'Arbonne's brilliant sun  
 overestimated sad stories of last night  
 of the Iceman and the demise  
 of the maidens down at Little Chicago, earth  
 is all there is, a few other haggard brothers  
 crisscrossing America for small change  
 one dark night The Lord will have us  
 in his knapsack, rhyme and reason  
 will be no good, nor paper money  
 powers past our time, enduring  
 little pieces of the puzzle  
 venerable pastimes of the rich and famous  
 who endured in vain, these poetic  
 adventures from real life  
 out of the Good Book and the mouths  
 of senior citizens, magnificent shaggy orators  
 homesteading Oxford's creme-stucco square  
 teaching therapy and ballads of erotic sad cafes  
 before collapsing into that last  
 latent mystery: earth  
 is all there is, sweet nectar-water  
 locked in the breast of red clay  
 formal historical odysseys  
 of all the comings, all the goings  
 the tall green corn of Illinois  
 and the symbolic vaporous silence  
 of Southern pine glistening  
 in stoic rebirth.

# THE TICKLES

C. Torr Nelson

**N**obody knew where Sam Tickles came from, just that he was in Greensburg now and most of the people there wished he wasn't. He and his wife had bought the small, flat-roofed house opposite the hardware store where he took over as owner after old Tommy Silvers died.

Mr. Tickles was no ordinary looking man. He shaved his head completely bald right out of the blue when he turned thirty-eight three years ago. It was shiny with no visible stubble, but instead had two strange grooves and a curious line reaching from the base of his skull all the way up and over to his one thick eyebrow that stretched over both eyes and served to mark the line between where his head ended and his face began. And that regal, if not a little malformed, crown had a peculiar way of appearing rounder or flatter depending on how close you stood to him.

He was a big man and a friendly sort, though too touchy-feely for most; he was the type of guy who always rested his thick hand on your shoulder, or slapped you on the back, or clasped your hand emotionally in a quiet moment, even if there wasn't one. Anthony Bartly, the town dentist, claimed—and more importantly, be-

lieved—he got the chills every time he shook hands with Mr. Tickles at church.

Whenever Mr. Tickles met someone new, he'd bellow, "Sam Tickles is the name," then follow it with a low chuckle that pricked your ears and made your toes throb. And then, thrusting his hand at you like it had rejected him, he'd blurt, "My friends call me Sammy," which was followed by another chuckle, this time higher in his throat, one that affected your knees. Nobody called him Sammy, though. Few in fact called him Sam, and most just didn't call, opting instead to take their hardware needs seventy miles south to Lowell—an even smaller town than Greensburg, which itself barely served to sustain six hundred people. Greensburg was a loose town that way, able to stretch its borders away from any obstacle instead of around it.

It could be said, possibly, that Mr. Tickles was a good person. But that quality was lost behind the continuous, thunder-like, hollow laugh that accompanied every third or fourth syllable out of his mouth. Most people wouldn't have minded the laugh itself if it wasn't for its frequency and the awkward places it was forced into. It wasn't because it was the kind of laughter that sounded stupid, like that of the large woman inevitably sitting across the room from you in your favorite restaurant, the one everybody

stares at while forcing down a now cold spoonful of potato soup. No, Mr. Tickles' laughter was the kind that made you feel awkward, leaving you uneasy and unsure whether to join in or run and protect your children.

On the other hand Martha Tickles, his wife, was one of those people who everyone clings to like a long lost golden retriever that was left in California on vacation but somehow found its way home. Even the mayor's wife broke out her dusty baking pans, most of which she'd never seen, let alone used before, to bake a welcome cake. It turned out to be more like a welcome doorstep or wheel chock, or something as equally tasty, and sat on Martha's kitchen window sill for weeks without a sign of mold. Mold, it seems, like humans, has its own set of instincts for self-preservation.

Compared to her husband, Martha was simple-looking. Her hands were soft, but her fingers nimble, and her straight, sandy hair constantly fought to hide her warm, dark brown eyes. Her clothes matched her personality, unassuming and careful, while her voice was hardly more than a whisper. And everyone called her Marty.

She joined the local women's club, or rather she was recruited. The club was called The Women of Greensburg, about as original as this group of ladies could get, yet serving to identify them in case anyone forgot who or what they were. Nobody in town, including the women, knew exactly what the club's purpose was, but no one seemed to care. Marty fit in as well as possible, though she never contributed much to their meetings, preferring to just sit back in the corner next to the coffee machine and observe. Eventually, because of her choice of seats, she came to be known as "The Maker of the Coffee," and was officially awarded that titled in an elaborate ceremony that had been used for years to name people to offices in the club. Eleanore Thackens had

introduced the naming ceremony after seeing something similar to it late at night on the PBS channel. Once, Marty almost lost her office when a few of the ladies complained about how dirty the coffee pot always was, with wavy rings of old coffee on its sides and small grains stuck in the crevices on the bottom of the glass. But their call for an impeachment failed because most agreed she made a darn fine pot of coffee—and because nobody else wanted the glamorous job, nor the responsibilities of the title.

The Tickles hardware store was situated between the Greensburg General Store—which sold everything from ant farms to charts of the zodiac—and a small building that bowed forward like its current leaser, a strange woman everyone called Miss Socks but couldn't explain why. Mr. Tickles renamed the hardware store Tickles' Tools and everybody thought he was mighty presumptuous for doing so. They couldn't see anything wrong with the old name, even if it was the name of the dead owner scratched above the door.

Mr. Tickles' store was unlike your average hardware store. It was always clean, and the minute you walked in you were caught off guard by the lemon-fresh smell haunting every bolt, every nut you took home with you. Every tool had its place and the whole inventory was alphabetized and spotless. Even the sandpaper seemed to shine like Mr. Tickles' bald head, though no one could figure out quite how. And it wasn't his wife who did the cleaning. She really didn't involve herself much in the business, except when he took lunch breaks—which was curiously the exact time that anybody needing anything from the store happened to show up. No, it was Tickles himself who shined everything, who stacked and ordered the paint cans and the nails, who counted and recounted the stock five times a day, mostly because he had nothing else to do.

One day, Mr. Tickle was reaching up to a high shelf to replace a bracket for a shower rod that someone had decided not to buy, when he felt a sharp, freezing pain in his left arm that tingled all the way up to his closely trimmed fingernails. He stepped back from the shelves, cleared his throat, then turned towards the front counter. Again he felt the pain and lost his breath for a moment. This time he let loose a quiet, wide-eyed, rasping chuckle, high, almost piercing, and one that would probably have affected your dog more than your toes. He smiled and reached for the phone. He felt the pain again and the smile vanished the way you always pictured it would when your mother or father told you to wipe that smile off of your face. Looking at the small table where the coffee and donuts were set up, right next to the hammer display, he tried to laugh again and then collapsed.

Marty found him lying on the floor four hours later when she came looking for him because he was late for dinner.

Eleven months after Sam's funeral, Mrs. Tickle was still one of The Women of Greensburg, though she didn't sit in the back anymore. She was even on the main committee in charge of new recruits and establishing new amendments to their twelve page constitution. Even so, she was still The Maker of The Coffee, and the cups, the spoons, and the pot were never cleaner. She even started bringing pastries that she had made to the meetings.

The store was as clean as ever, and the wrenches still had that well-polished gleam. And when you passed by the front door you could hear Mrs. Tickle holding on to a customer with a shrill little laugh that either made the hair on your arms or your neck stand up depending on whether she

was stating a fact or asking a question. She never looked happier and she never seemed to want to be more involved in the community, even though the store was doing poor business again after a few months of higher numbers, and even though The Women of Greensburg reduced their meetings from twice a week to once a month. Only now were the people of the town able to see why Mrs. Tickle had married Sam. Only now was there that recognizable laugh, and that same habit of touching everyone. And the people of Greensburg found themselves forgetting when and why they had started calling her Mrs. Tickle again, instead of Marty. □



## SHORT STORY

## THE POINT OF IT ALL

Michael A. Arnzen

I'm a writer.

Like you, I hate writer stories—they're cliché, a novice rationalization of the old standby advice: the abused "write only about what you know" platitude, that even I myself have given to budding young wannabes. And if there's anything I know from experience, it's that a tale about a writer is cliché, worn, and borrrrinnng. Such fiction is as terribly self-indulgent and pathetically autobiographical as a fifth grade love poem that doesn't even try to rhyme. After all, it's the story that matters, not the person who wrote it, right?

But this story is about me, and every word is true. So I, metawriter me, am going to tell you my tale as thoroughly as I can, getting down every detail. It must be told. This is not fiction, you must believe me. You must. I'm trying to warn you. I can be wordy at times (in fact, many critics have accused me of liking to listen to myself talk!), so please accept my apology in advance. Narrative is the best means I have of sending you this warning. It is the only way that I can make sense of it all—for both you and myself. Don't worry... the end will come sooner than you think (it always does), so please bear with me.

That said, listen.

You've read my books and short stories. You probably know that I'm exhausted with genre tales—if you're a close reader, then you've noticed by now that most of my books are so painfully similar that you could shuffle the titles randomly and not notice a difference. All the covers look the same, like self-procreating clones. All the ideas are the same. All the stories are the same. Don't ask me why people even bother still buying them, but they do (I'm sure they read *The Enquirer* just as faithfully, too), and now I'm living the dream-life that millions of imbeciles think brand names live.

Right.

I'm lonely. I've had writer's block for so long you'd think it was the name of my neighborhood. I'm a recluse and a rebel. I've gone through more relationships with women than your favorite soap opera star. My only "significant other" is either my bank account or my bookshelf, you tell me which. And I'm lucky, I guess, because I've got so much money nowadays that I could use hundred dollar bills for typing paper (I'm sure you've seen how thick my last few potboilers have been, haven't you? We thicken with age... ) and still make a profit of five digits minimum, sans royalties.

But enough. You know who I am. I, unfortunately, don't anymore.

After my third attempt at a serious relationship (love is still more dangerous than sex, even in this day and

age, believe me), I decided to blow my latest mega-advance on an escape into a foreign country, rather than the usual escape into a woman's tender, money-grubbing arms. The romance might still be there, I figured, if I toured Europe. So would the lack of communication. It didn't matter: I just wanted to get away from my own life. My agent booked me a three country trip by bus—a windowpane visit of Spain, France, and Germany. I maintained hopes that it might give my imagination a much-needed jumpstart, and perhaps, liberate me to write "true literature" (whatever that is) like Hemingway and Fitzgerald had done. They call it "expatriation." I was hoping for expatriation (look it up, and you'll know what I mean).

Mister Genre with a capital G, turn literate? What a joke! Oh well, Europe was romantic and so was I.

The bus ride was a three-day binge, and no European muse tongued my ear in France (ugly country, don't go unless you drink plenty of wine), nor Spain (beautiful, beautiful topless beaches). No magical inspiration. No ideas. Nothing.

Until Germany.

Deutschland, the largest of the three countries, was a full day tour. I was hoping to find story ideas, and I did. The rich Bavarian countryside is what you might expect it to be: full of Gothic architecture, anachronisms in function, ancient cultural meccas. It amazed me because I thought it was much like a reflection of the stereotypical and ignorant descriptions of Europe I had written in my own Gothic tales: ancient grey, moldy stone arches, cracked brick stairways, shutters on every window, chipping plaster as if painted to be that way, and greenish vines. All this swept by through the bus window as we burned across the autobahn, and I couldn't wait to stop to check it out, to touch wood, so to speak. The drive, though, was too quick, like watching one of my novel adaptations on fast forward. Fog

was everywhere—so much fog—gray and thick as a bad odor. I even saw a castle once, if you can believe that. It reminded me of Disney. But all was rustic-looking, foggy in its atmosphere as if constantly reforming itself in darkness. It was the very definition of Gothic itself.

Now, I don't mean to bastardize the whole scene—it was real, and as beautiful as you'd imagine the Old Country to be. So poetically real and humble in its utilitarianism that I now find myself actually believing in my own description of the place in my fictions, as if I intuitively knew what Germany would be like before I had ever seen it.

Naturally, I saw myself, too, in the facades of those centuries-old houses and huts, and thus, felt that a story was in order. I broke out my trusty spiral notebook and began to write whatever entered my mind—longhand, I always write these things by hand and in pencil; I wouldn't touch a laptop if you paid me (technology scares me... yes, even me). Soon, I found myself forgetting the scenery of reality and escaping into the settings in my mind, buried deep in the archaic prose of the first chapter of a werewolf tale.

Inspiration had struck.

And then the bus stopped to make a pick-up, exiting the smooth, speed-warn surface of the autobahn and tumbling into a small German city with cobblestone so rocky you'd think the tires would puncture. We stopped in front of a pub of sorts—in actuality, it was a makeshift bus station. I looked around the bus as several passengers disembarked. German busses are as funny as their occupants: they're so damned clean you'd think you were in an office building on Fifth Avenue, even though everyone aboard constantly eats, smokes, drinks beer, and sends spittle flying through the air when they speak their funky, consonant-ridden language. Germans are inherently tidy people. They take care

of themselves, making sure they leave no embarrassing traces of their existence behind them. No messes, no waste. Even the kids clean up after themselves; no one wants to risk being shamed. They are very strict and very, very proud.

The bus driver announced that the next stop was a city called Wurzburg. Several lanky teenagers clamored aboard the bus, all smoking at too young an age, and acting up as all post-pubescent will no matter what the country. Oddly, they all seemed to wear Americanesque clothing (imitation Levis, vinyl jackets) or smoke Americanesque tobacco (one brand was called Phillip Morris which looked like a pack of Pall Mall, another was Marlboro in a strange package that was red, white, and blue). But these homages to my homeland did not make me homesick, longing for my return. In fact, the sight of American products made me uncomfortable, denying my escape from commercialism and mediocrity.

One of the kids (the one you need to know about—pay attention) separated from the crowd and joined me in the back of the boxy German bus. The seats in the back are connected together like a sofa, so there was plenty of elbow room. Still, she sat close-by, like a relative might do. I remember wondering if she was trying to look for protection from the other kids by sitting by me.

No matter. Remember what she wore: a red ski vest and a black frilly scarf; blue jeans that were too tight hugged her legs and groin. Remember her face: blue eyes like teardrops encircled by owl-rings and topped with heavy black eyebrows like two big scabs; thin pink lips that had a stranglehold on her smile; brown hair—almost black—stippled down around her skull as if drawn on with charcoal. (That's all I can remember, her visage gets more and more sketchy as time goes by).

The bus—a huge, wintergreen

gum-colored Mercedes, if you can picture that—purred back to life and returned to the autobahn. The odd-looking girl next to me (she was not affiliated with the other teens, I soon deduced) slipped off her red vest and black scarf. The weather was fairly warm, so I thought it was odd that she dressed as such, and I found myself stealing glances at her, curious as to what she concealed beneath her various accoutrements. She was young, and my eyes burned—I must admit, I felt a tad bit like a pedophile gawking at her.

What she hid under her vest was a black leather bag. I stared at it, curious. It looked like one of those mini-purses that are so popular in the States. The girl tried to ignore my persistent gaze, but it was obvious that she was feeling the heat of my presence. All business, she occupied herself by propping the black bag on her lap and sharply zipping it open. The sound of the zipper was thick, like the kind found on a body bag (forgive my morbidity, it's a bad habit...).

The leather pouch was brimming with pencils. Like a hundred of them, all bright yellow. I could smell the wood. She withdrew one of them. I noticed the logo in silver letters: MADE IN THE USA. It looked as out of place in the girl's hands as I felt, sitting beside her.

Then she pulled out a large, curved knife.

My heart jumped up to my throat and lodged into my voice box, nearly choking me. The blade was rusty, curved like the hip-shot of a sultry woman: erotic and deadly. I thought for a second that I should shout for help, but realized that I didn't know how to ask for help in German. I was definitely frightened.

The knife was keenly sharpened. But the pencils in her leather bag weren't.

I made the connection. Concealing my embarrassing terror with a joke, I asked: "What's the matter?"

Never heard of a pencil sharpener before?"

She twisted her body, leaning back from me. "Was?" she replied, blatantly not understanding. Her eyes looked sad, almost hopeless. The sort of look you wouldn't expect on such a young, innocent face. As if she was returning from a funeral, on her way back to an empty home. Anyway, she certainly didn't look like she was in the mood for conversation. Most Germans weren't anyway, especially with Americans.

She figured it out. "Oh, you're English, no?"

"Yes," I replied. Her voice was smooth. I relaxed, wondering how red my ears were. They definitely felt hot. "American, actually."

She gently crossed the pencil over the knife, as if to whittle. "I learned English in school. I'm very good. Ask me anything."

"What's your name?"

"Klothilde. You can call me Hilde, though, ja?"

"Naturally." I told her my name. Then added, "One more question."

"Ja?" Her eyes were glued to her pencils.

"Do you always carry a large knife around with you, Hilde?"

She giggled. It was cute. "No, this is to carve my pencils. I carve for friends." She began to cut into the tip of the wood.

I thought about that for a second: I carve for friends. It sounded like a line from a slasher book I wrote in my early years. But then I realized she must have merely confused the word "carve" with the word "sharpen," and was possibly the resident pencil sharpener at her school.

I was wrong on both counts. She actually did carve pencils—whittling the long sticks of wood into miniature sculptures. I do not use that word "sculpture" lightly. I watched her strip the paint off the yellow pencil in her hand, planing it like skin, stripping it down to the bare wood. Then she

carefully held the blade of her carving knife between her fingers to chip and shave the wood, chiseling out the basic lines of a human figure: a ridge down the lower end divided two legs; above that, two parallel lines created arms that tapered down around a belt of sorts; a gouge on each side resulted in the cheekbones of a face—the head, apparently, capped by the pink eraser, like those silly caps that British guards wear. She was an expert woodworker. I was quite impressed.

She ignored me as she got caught up in her work, paring away on the face of the sculpture. Hilde—like most Germans—would rather work than talk.

It was intriguing, sure, but I had my werewolf tale to get back to. I reread what I had previously written. It was crap. Overly romantic, pulpish.

Angrily, I peered out the bus window, watching the blur of fast cars passing us on the autobahn. It still amazes me how fast Europeans drive. Every schoolboy in America dreams of such things, and here they treat it like it's nothing. It was almost frightening to think of how nonchalantly they drive at racetrack speeds. Even our humble bus was zooming; it was like being on a carnival ride in a way, scary to not be in control of it all. A Porsche passed us in a black streak, as if to prove it to me.

My mind drifted to the cars in America, the Porsches and hot rods that some of my rich friends worship. I've never been big on automobiles, but of one my snobbish buddies has a car you could die for. He almost has died for it. All his money, all his time, all of his life is poured into that shining black status symbol he drives. He'll probably be buried in it, if it doesn't bury him first. If he only knew how fast he could drive it here, in Germany....

Hilde tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and she handed me the carved pencil she had been working on. The detail was much more complex than I

would ever had imagined: the face had bulging, cratered cheeks; thick-rimmed glasses encaged eyeballs ready to burst; its mouth was a fat-lipped hole filled with crooked teeth. It looked like Teddy Roosevelt with his head squashed in a vice. It was grotesque, but effective. Like a tiny, one-man totem pole.

And she had done it so fast, quick as the cars on the autobahn. I considered how amazingly swift the act of creation itself is: God created the universe in a mere seven days, a child gestates for nine months after a two-second conception, my last book took just three weeks to throw together... and now this German girl had created a damned masterpiece of art in just two minutes or so. Out of a pencil, no less.

"You like?" Hilde asked innocently. "It is my teacher, Herr Tomas."

"Hmm... I'd hate to meet the guy." I ran my fingertips over the amazing pencil carving, reading the depressions like braille. It was smooth, without splinters.

"I make him ugly because he is very... how do you say? Mean? I do not like him much. He give me bad grades."

"He must teach math, right?"

"Ja! How do you know this?" Her face was one big smile of surprise. As if I was suddenly "in her league" or something.

"All math teachers are ugly."

We both laughed. I began to hand her back the pencil, when the bus suddenly lurched forward, the driver stepping just a bit too forcefully on the brakes. Hilde's creation slipped out of my hands and onto the floor. I bent forward to pick it up, and as I lifted my grip I simultaneously stepped on the rolling pencil. In short: I broke the damned thing in half.

I expected Hilde to scream at me or to start crying, and I blushed ashamedly as I handed her the splintered slivers of wood.

She was not angry. She was not sad. She was frightened, looking over

at me with wide black eyes, the corners almost splitting the pink of her tear ducts. For a moment—just a millisecond—I thought she might stab me with that vicious carving knife clutched in her right hand.

And then I noticed that she wasn't looking at me at all, but out the bus window. I turned and saw what had captured her attention, and I, too, became a little bit scared.

The black Porsche that I had seen pass us moments before had crashed into the concrete median, its sleek design crunched into a horrible hunk of twisted metal, shattered fiberglass and plastic. The car had crumpled like paper. The windshield was gone, and in its place was the driver's body, thrown forward and twisted over the hood, stiff as a doll. His neck was broken, his head impossibly wrenched to one side. And if that wasn't bad enough, the dead man was facing us accusingly, his eyeglasses shattered and bloody.

And then I recognized that face. Teddy Roosevelt. Herr Tomas, the ugly math teacher, turned uglier by the forces of nature.

As my body went numb, the bus slowly stole away from the scene, speeding up to join the rest of the traffic. I could not stop looking out of the window, not because I wanted to see more of the accident (I'm not that morbid), but because I could not, I would not turn to face the little girl.

I tried to convince myself that it was not Hilde's math teacher whose dead face was somehow twisted to reproach us. It couldn't possibly be him, at that precise time, at that precise place, driving on the autobahn. It was too coincidental, too perfect... like a convenient plot twist in one of my formulaic tales. And as I mentally compared the two disgusting faces, I soon realized that I was correct. I was still sane. My imagination had just gotten the best of me; it was not Herr Tomas, it was not. It was just a close, vague likeness. There are lotsa Teddy

Roosevelt lookalikes out there. Right?

But something far worse was going on here. I had connected the two incidents: the breaking of Hilde's carved pencil had simultaneously occurred with the car accident. No, it caused the accident. There was a causal relationship. I know it sounds corny (I, of all people, should know), but the pencil carving had acted like a stiff voodoo doll made of wood. No pins, just splinters—like the splinters of bone that I could still see if I closed my eyes.

I turned and looked cautiously at the girl. I won't tell you what thoughts were in my mind, thoughts of sorcery and witchcraft, impossible notions of supernatural creation and the magic hands of a runaway Gypsy girl. The typical thoughts of a genre writer in an unknown land.

Hilde furiously began another pencil, impervious to my evil eye, my furtive glance. I watched as she worked the blade of the carving knife with her smooth fingers, digging out small chips of wood. Sawdust was sprinkling to the floor as she drove the very tip of the blade into where the eyes would be, drilling out holes. It was as if she were trying to correct the car accident, to undo what had occurred.

She was so caught up in her sculpting that she was slicing into her fingers, drawing painfully thin lines of blood. She did not notice. Hilde was like an obsessive artist, pouring her heart into the shaping of the pencil's wood, bringing out its features perfectly. Her eyebrows were furled in a tight knot of concentration, girlish sweat had beaded in the crinkles of her nose. She looked as though she were making love to the wood. I imagined her as an adult, gouging up a man's body with that curved knife, forcing her lover's flesh into the shapes she desired and needed. I wondered what sort of woman she would be when she had grown, what sort of wife or mother.

Mother. The idea hit me. Breaking the pencil had killed someone. Would making a new statuette cause a new life to come into being? Was a child being born this very minute, a soul taking on the random genetic programming of a human body, a body not unlike the one she was forming from the cells of wood in her hands? Or was the man who just died in the car accident reincarnating into an object—the shaped shaft of a pencil?

It was a hopeful, impossible tirade of thought. My mind was racing with the possibilities, like trying to tag a happy ending on one of my worthless pieces of fiction.

Imagination or not, my wonder was endless.

Hilde's hand suddenly slipped, barely missing her leg, but neatly decapitating the carved pencil. The eraser landed on the floor with a horrid *plunk*. I sharply sucked in a lungful of breath—I won't tell you what I expected.

"Why do people have to die?" she shouted to no one in particular (she must have been asking me... she was speaking English). "Why does everything have to break?" She dropped the knife onto the floor, as if it were too heavy for her to bear anymore. It rattled against the broken splinters of wood rolling under our seat, a dead echo of her pain.

I didn't have an answer. Believe me, I would have told her anything, but I was speechless. She was so young, much too young to even be thinking such unanswerable questions.

"Ach, was soll's?" she screamed, and several passengers looked back at us snobbishly. It was a statement she had made, more than a question. But it was loud. A loud sigh. I'm not sure what it means—it sounded like how someone on the verge of suicide might say "What's the point of it all?"

She balled herself up on the bus seat. I could hear her sniffles as she covered up her tears. I did not try to touch her, I did not try to help her, I

just sat silently beside her, uncomfortable.

As a writer of so many Gothic tales, tales that so casually involve death, I must admit here and now that I never truly wondered about its many mysteries until that precise moment. Life and death were mere devices to me, the devices of fiction—not real, quantifiable things. I remained silent for the rest of the trip to Würzburg, considering the possibilities, wondering why things did break, why people did die.

And for the first time, I wished I was back in America, writing some boring, run of the mill Gothic.

The bus slowed as it exited the autobahn, and I felt the relaxing feeling of a ride coming to its end. The city was modern, but underpinned by that same Gothic fogginess and architecture amid the tall silver buildings and storefront businesses. We reached the bus station in a matter of minutes, and it was the most crowded area I had seen on the trip so far, since Paris. And still, it was clean. I, however, felt dirty in comparison.

Hilde didn't say a word to me as she zipped up her black leather bag of pencils, wrapped herself back into the ski vest and scarf, and stood to leave the bus. I sat still, stunned by it all. Hilde did not look at me. I could feel her guilt, though, as if I'd witnessed something dreadfully embarrassing. She crowded up to the front of the aisle and disembarked with the rest of the people, a face in the crowd.

All but two people got off the bus. Me—I did not want to be near Hilde, I would wait till the bus left for its last leg of the tour—and an old man three seats up. His head was cocked to one side on his shoulder. If he was asleep or not, I could not tell. I was much too scared to check him. The bright yellow raincoat he wore—the color of new pencils—did not help matters much.

The bus soon crowded with teenagers, again Americanesque in their

wardrobes, and the bus lumbered its way through downtown Würzburg, heading back to the fearful autobahn.

As I looked out the window, I saw Hilde. It was fate, of course. I wish I hadn't looked.

She was on a street corner, slightly bent over a trashcan, letting her tears run into it. And she was breaking every pencil in her bag, crisply, cleanly, one by one, snapping each neatly in half over the aluminum edge of the can.

And I saw the people around her, the citizens of Würzburg: toppling to the sidewalk, one by one... I had to write this now. Immediately after getting over the shock of what happened. To warn you; to make sure that I got every single detail down before forgetting them (details are very, very important, you must never forget that). No doubt you found this story in my notebook, along with a snippet of a dreadfully bad werewolf tale, near a strange pile of sawdust in the back of the bus.

I am a writer, an old-fashioned author of Gothics, who still writes everything in longhand, and is spoiled rich by mediocrity. I have told you: this is not fiction. Believe it.

You know all this.

What you do not know is that I found my pencil on the seat beside me after leaving Würzburg. It was carved, sculptured, intricately detailed... a perfect representation down to the tiny red mole on my nose and my oversized shoes. A perfect reflection of me.

It was all that I could write with.

And now I'm almost down to the eraser.

God, I hope you can read English. God, I hope so. ☞

**L. Eirish**

**BEFORE THE DARKNESS**

I followed your steps through green cedar and pine,  
Over wet earth, moss, and logs in decay,  
The gray November sky seeping through the trees,  
And winter creeping at our heels.

I stopped to listen to what these silent woods might betray,  
The mist of my breath escaping softly through my lips,  
And the cold clapping about my face.

Off in the distance I imagined I heard  
The half whispered words of water;  
Murmuring, gurgling, splashing along,  
And carried lightly upon the wind.

Sitting down next to an ancient pine,  
My mind drifts on to where you might be.  
Somewhere off deep in the woods,  
Looking over your shoulder, listening for me.

Pensive minutes turned to hours  
With the whirl of a bird,  
And the crunch of a leaf resounding through the trees,  
Sent ever-so subtle word, of you to me.

And there in those most hallowed of woods,  
Gently swaying in time with my beating heart,  
I held back my breath and reflected upon you,  
Before the darkness I did impart.



## DEPARTMENT

## GUIDELINES

For  
Submissions  
to *FUGUE*

☞ *FUGUE* is a digest of multi-genre fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Issues are published at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters at the University of Idaho. Each issue contains vignettes, poetry, stories and commentary chosen to satisfy a wide variety of tastes in literary entertainment. The magazine is staffed entirely by English and English Education majors—undergraduate and graduate—presently attending the University, and this issue has been funded by the ASUI and the support from local merchants. A single issue of *Fugue* is only \$3.00 retail, USA funds.

☞ **Submissions:** Proper manuscript format and submission practices apply to all works sent to *Fugue*, without exception. Include the following on all manuscripts: name, address, phone number, *word count* (fiction) or *line count* (poetry), proper headers, title & byline. Manuscripts must be typed with one-inch margins on all sides, double-spaced (poetry may be single-spaced), with title and page

number in the upper right corner of each page. Include a #10 SASE with your submission for a response. Make a copy of the manuscript for yourself—the manuscript will not be returned. Submissions should be delivered to: *Fugue* c/o University of Idaho, English Dept., Brink Hall Rm. 200, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Response time is usually no less than six weeks. No simultaneous or reprint submissions. You are welcome to include a copy of your submission on disk in IBM format with your manuscript, but you must include a disk mailer with appropriate return postage if you wish the disk returned upon response.

☞ **Editorial Process:** Each submission is read by several staff members who make a recommendation, then pass it on to the executive editor and staff advisor for final decisions. All readings are done "blind." Staff readers will not be aware of the identity of the creator. *Fugue* is looking for a wide range of genres—Mainstream, Experimental, Fantasy, Mystery/Suspense, Metafiction, Historical, Science Fiction, Magical Realism, Horror, Fantasy, Western, Cultural, Regional, Speculative, etc. *Fugue* is a showcase for all types of *entertaining* literature. In some cases, we may contact a contributor for a re-write, clarification of text, or notification of necessary editorial changes.

☞ **Stories:** These must be complete and concluded, with good char-

acterization and plotting. You must make the reader *feel* without resorting to standard cliché tricks. Endings should have a foundation in the plot and not simply pop out of nowhere. Experimental fiction is acceptable, but we do not cater to an elite readership—the story must be comprehensible and enjoyable for anyone. Average word count is 3000 words, but we consider any length up to 10,000. Book excerpts, chapters, and serializations will not be considered. Payment is ¼¢ per word; minimum pay of \$5.

▣ **Novelettes:** Any story with a length of 7500 words or more. We are twice as critical in this category of literature as for any of the others, since such a piece would reduce the number of works published in an issue. The greater length must be justified by superior content. Payment is ¼¢ per word; minimum pay of \$5.

▣ **Vignettes:** Many of today's published *short-short* stories are actually vignettes—stylishly rendered scenes/events that emphasize imagery and impression over plot—these are sometimes also referred to as “sudden fiction.” A mood of “endlessness”—scene carries forward/backward beyond the text—should be maintained. This is perhaps the most difficult type of fiction to write and still maintain as engaging for the reader. Maximum word count is approximately 1000 words. Payment is ¼¢ per word; minimum pay of \$5.

▣ **Poems:** The modern standard is “free verse,” but we would like to see a wide range of other forms as well, including successful hybrids of traditional and modern formats. We consider all premise and non-premise themes without restriction, from the serious to the utterly whimsical. Payment is 5¢/line plus 2¢ per word; minimum pay of \$5.

▣ **Non-fiction:** We are looking for well-constructed commentary, articles, essays, reviews, etc., written in a comprehensible style aimed at readers, not at peers/writers. All ar-

ticles, essays, and commentary must relate to *contemporary* works, authors, issues, or to a generally well-known topic. Note: we are not particularly interested in works which merely establish a forum for personal socio-political views. All topics must have a relevance to the general public. The maximum word count is 1000 words, but longer works may be considered if exceptional. Payment is ¼¢ per word; minimum pay of \$5.

▣ **Fugue Staff Submissions:** The staff is allowed to submit work for publication in the magazine. Such submissions will be read “blind,” as for any submission, with readers chosen by the executive editor. No special consideration will be given to any submission by a staff member of *Fugue*. This is guaranteed by the Executive Editor.

▣ **Final Note:** If you have further questions, write to: Exec. Ed., *Fugue*, University of Idaho, English Dept., Brink Hall, Rm. 200, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Include a #10 SASE if you wish a response. All queries will be answered within two weeks. If necessary, for resolving a problem or answering a question not covered herein, you may contact the Executive or Managing Ed. locally by phone. Do not call about the status of your submission—no information concerning the status of any submission will be distributed under any circumstances, except via SASE delivered directly to the contributor after the submission has been fully reviewed by the staff.

▣ **FUGUE** was established in 1989 by Leiloni Reed, J.C. Hendee, Barb Hendee, and Prof. Ron McFarland as an outlet/forum for writers and as an instrument for students to obtain some experience with editing and publishing.

Inquiries into assisting in, and helping to support, the continuation of this project are heartily encouraged. You may address your interests care of the Executive Editor or Prof. Ron McFarland at the magazine address.



