



# COLLAGE

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MTSU's Journal for the Creative Arts

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# The Gift of Sacred Geometry

*Mitzi M. Cross*

Leo tripped over his shoe  
laces and stumbling, sailed  
into a stack of old canvases.  
Scrolls of sketches rolled off the  
shelf and under his feet like marbles.  
He slipped, hitting his head on the foot  
of a mortar statue and fell backwards.  
The ceiling started spinning shapes  
and spheres, the likes of which  
he'd seen only in theory. Formulas  
of ancient heritage, taught only in  
Mystery Schools, dimensions of a sacred  
geometry whose knowledge was spoken only  
by Pythagoras.

Leo was never the same. His sleep was  
wrecked by nightmares of an initiation  
chamber hidden under the pyramid  
of the sphinx. He climbed ivory spiral  
stairs laid out in the Fibonacci sequence.  
He soared over the valleys, like a phoenix  
without fire. In his waking dreams,  
he learned how to transform shapes,  
in his mind's eye, like a kaleidoscope;  
circles to cylinders, squares to cubes.  
Star tetrahedrons collapsed around  
everything, even the cadavers he stole  
from the graveyard. The universe  
revealed itself to him, in his study of  
anatomy, sketching men with wings  
and wooden machines that could fly.  
he revealed in a swell of broken whispers,  
the secrets of his dreams, only to Mona,  
who harbored them in the shadows  
of her eyes.



"Untitled"

*Alicia Moore*

## **Piano Song For Beginners**

*Kelly Pate*

There was a liar who roved  
There was a driver who cried while he drove  
Put his head in the glove compartment  
like a gas stove.  
There was a library that fell  
book by book from the shelf  
The ghosts in its aisles in cobweb skirts  
had faces like windows in Hell.  
There was a sub-silent boom  
There was a winged woman last night in my room  
She'd escaped from the cage of a lonely old lady  
and it was cold outside of the womb.

# Argus

*Charles M. Johnson*

“How would one escape the notice  
of that which never sets?”  
—Heraclitus

Desire is  
the blood-shot sun  
and the albino moon:  
while one eye sleeps,  
the other is awake.

# Today's Brilliance

*Maya Nitis*

Above the noise of silly talk, of blenders, of brewers  
her voice carries a flag.  
The pink and dark green flag of skinny youth.  
Pink fragile for desire to embrace the rainbow  
of penises and penises, vaginas and vaginas.  
Dark green the thought of AIDS, the fear of it  
the puss of it, the death of it.  
They are also the colors of her clothes,  
long dirty army green shorts  
and a short tight pink slip.  
As she carries the heavy flag, she can still laugh  
and make the songs our own.

I have seen her, the most lowering and lifting  
With whom I would trade everything. Talent is a sort of heroin.  
My head is filled with someone else's brilliance,  
whose brilliant words overcrowd my intellect.  
She embodies whom I desire, what I envy and where I belong.

Yet her lips have a special relationship with the microphone.  
I am jealous of it.  
It is too hot in her mouth.  
I saw her tongue almost jump out.  
If she didn't need it, I'd steal it.  
A souvenir to prove I was there, I saw her carry our flag.



"November"

*Brad Adler*

# Toronto

*Jennifer Steinfeldt*

Last Night Was Like Toronto  
the mist-or-just-cold-fog  
cupping the ground  
pinning the trees to themselves  
the tree that has hands  
the tree that has a profile  
each streetlight has its own cloud  
packaged in toronto-air-dew

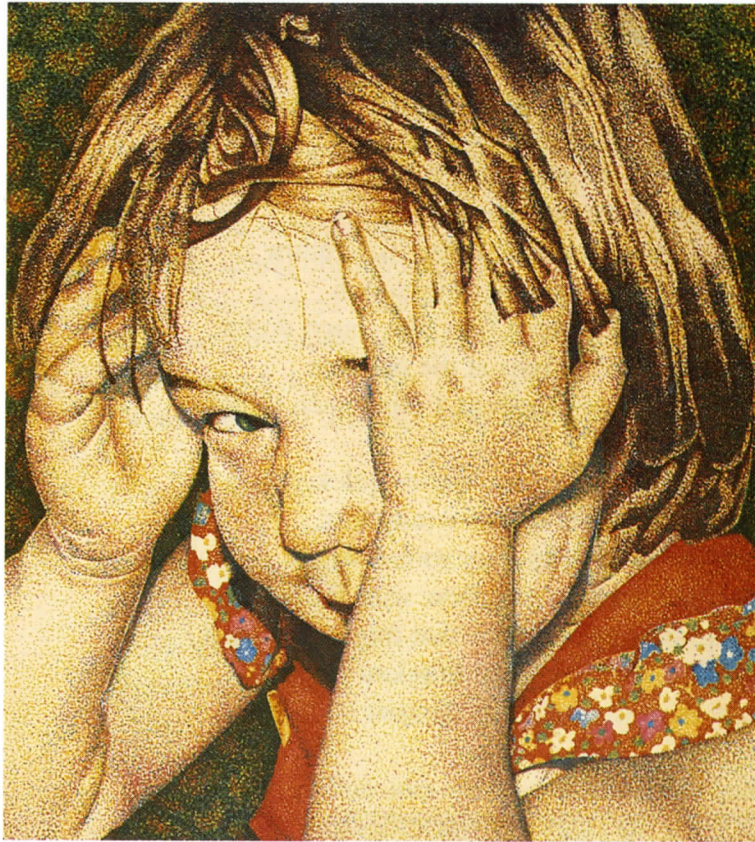
so that was last night

Today The Firs Slouch;  
the other's head blown back and forth  
the wind leaving it like a hangman.



"Unsafe at Any Speed"

*Jonathan Trundle*



"Self Portrait"

*Marissa Calvin*

## **in a glance**

*Sean Mooney*

She is slumbering  
in the foam kiss,  
the lily eyed  
trace,  
of a composed dreamer  
and in a glance  
i can touch her soul,  
and know that  
this... this must be  
how Beauty feels



# The Hurdlers

Julie Nastri

They rush through the world on the heels of punctuation marks as newspapers document the history that poses gaps between lovers. They glimpse mood & tense like yellow sweat stains in casual conversation and ball up frustrated fists like rough drafts, emitting cynical sighs at the paradox of grammatical gender and other such things.

They flip through dictionaries quicker than newspapers skate across windy lots. They dwell in temporary rooms where boxes and baskets overflow with flashcards of scribbled expressions that might merit wit or gain a lover on some drunken evening when they sit cradled in another longitude.

They catch the tails of the cats and dogs that fall from the skies of some cities and swing through the planet's veins in pursuit of the minutes that hide in other cities, permitting extra syllables. They beg the fingers of some cities to touch their synaptic clefts, to teach them the sleep that gnaws holes into days. They travel to other cities, alphabets in pocket, ripe to invent words. They dance their ways through some cities with the hope of brushing up against the *Duende*. The cities leave them with cold sheets, their scents riding the first winds to the next bus stop.

They flap their tongues to the tunes of tens of countries and collect words, as if by stacking them to infinity they will weigh down a drawbridge.

They race through time zones and hurdle language, guarding sweaty batons for the face of Probability as if it will smile on them and toss them the change to make some phonecall. They entertain this notion and shiver like dependent clauses.



In jet-lagged daydreams, the voice on  
the other end of a phone resurrects  
a city slain by myth and rattles off  
the words drowned in salivation:  
some unpublished paragraph of history,  
or some journal entry of a lover  
born at the wrong time,  
or some secret chronicle of the  
love affair between antonyms,  
or some translation of a gut feeling.  
In jet-lagged daydreams, they write  
themselves into such documents.

In reality, some  
inch by inch blurb  
on page A6 of the  
local section of a  
sterile *Daily Globe*  
awaits their arrival.



"untitled"

Steven Wingfield



"Guardian Angel"

*Darci Stebbins*

## **Margarita**

*Liliana Humphries*

Tu nombre como una flor,  
tus sueños ya guardados...  
Quizás viviendo muerta,  
entre los ángeles de Dios.  
Y que has dejado atrás?  
Tu esencia de flor entre el dolor,  
tu dulce recuerdo, tu voz, y tu sonrisa...  
Por que? Por que?  
Me pregunto y no hay respuesta,  
tan solo el vacío llena mi vida sin tu presencia  
y tu infancia esfumada me desgarró el alma.  
Y te has ido, te has marchado, y no te veré mas...  
Tu nombre como una flor ha quedado, Margarita,  
guardado con este intenso dolor...

# Impressions of Monte Albán

*Charles M. Johnson*

Filling her pale gown  
the pregnant moon grows full  
while a singing crowd enchants the winds  
to practice their midwifery  
as we once had our nightly rites  
to the goddess of un-born hopes.

So that even now,  
as I count these constellations  
fathered by the sun,  
I wonder how our dreams  
could prove so barren.



"Stream of Consciousness"

*Brad Adler*

# The Psychology of Nails

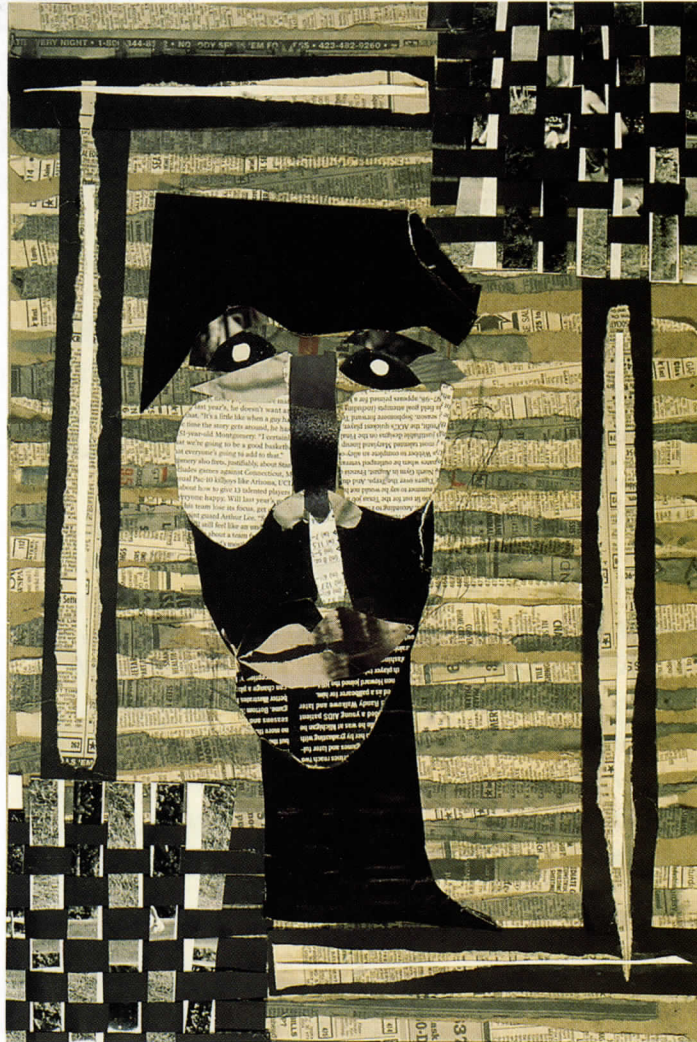
Mitzi M. Cross

For my fingernail  
paraphernalia  
I use a Plano  
tackle box.  
Slips, slots and  
secret compartments  
open up from the center  
like an accordion.  
On one side are the exotic  
chocolates of Coca bean,  
Iced mocha and The Toast  
of New York. The women  
who chose these burn  
through their lives  
like a wick in a candle,  
breath is the flame. These  
women enjoy change, the  
danger of an affair and most  
have buried skeletons under  
their beds. Hand after hand,  
finger to finger, like a robot,  
I paint the pinky first and work  
my way around to thumb.

On the other side are my delicates;  
Mostly Mauve, portfolio Pink,  
Rose Rendezvous are all subtle  
shades for fair, lily white southern  
belles who wish to accentuate their  
femininity. They tie bows on their  
little girls' hair before they send them  
away to the Christian school. They lay  
husbands in missionary only and always  
change the sheets immediately after.  
These women are afraid of fire and  
touching.

File to finger, soaking hands to soften  
skin, trimming cuticles, buffing the dull  
surface to a temporary shine with a three-  
way buffer. I soak feet in eucalyptus; sand  
feet with pale, pink pumice. In a tiny  
compartment, underneath my chocolates  
the Radiation Reds reside. Bold Bordeaux  
is the color of fury. Tasmanian Red  
compliments a salty suntan. I slough dead  
skin cells into the water as they confess  
their latest sin. The women that choose  
the Reds savor the danger in driving  
fast. When they were young they hid  
in closets with a phone cord straying  
from them; their breath broken by  
the whisper of throttling fingers.  
These women grew up to wear gloves.  
They bite their nails and hide them  
under acrylic; ashamed of their  
insatiabilities. These women  
burn quick, like firecrackers. If  
you get too close you get burned.

Clips of artificial nails are scattered  
on the bottom of my Plano like  
confetti. The smell of acetone and  
acrylic singe through the air as my  
last client hands me a check. Looking  
down at her hands, "you always help  
me remember that I'm beautiful," she says,  
stuffing black gloves in her purse.



"Untitled"

Rebecca Parker

## Formal Introduction

*James Wesley Cobb*

I am boiled in red paint  
And covered in dust  
From Arizona

I'm the man you come to  
When your feelings are dry,

I've got the motives  
To encapsulate your soul,

And I use my methods  
To haunt your bones.

# The Wet Dream Bargain

Julie Natri

*Our bodies are fossils bearing an ancient curse: I sweat and bleed by genetics and you, by duty. On behalf of my gender:*

We writhe on wet bedsheets and trickle, grasping helplessly for wool to absorb this crimson moisture, begging for the distraction that you possess on the other side of town as you lay in bed and some façade of a woman tickles your somnolent body.

*If you've ever been tempted by this shell of mine to wonder what my sheets look like, I'll have you know: they are not like yours, which at times have been imprinted with souvenirs from sweet, sweat stained sleep. My sheets are branded by interrupted dreams. While you retrieved your souvenirs, I was squirming awkwardly in my bed on the other side of town.*

*I will train an army of robbers to steal wet dreams.*

Rendered sleepless, we recall a fairy tale That ignited the first craving in humans to chase happy endings. We conjure moans from the depths of our bowels in memory of a myth that justifies the crust between our legs by attributing it to leftover drool from some ancient sin.

We beg for sleep, bending our bodies into fetal poses. Raging tears such as the cursed weep burst forth in spurts from flooded eyes as our bodies quiver with sobs of sleepless pain. We surrender our curves to tubs of warm water and endure something like a fist of super-long sausage fingers with sharp nails, contracting and expanding within our tiny abdomens.

It is as if somebody stabbed some universal mother at a forty-five degree angle through the small of her back with a three-foot dagger whose tip peeked out from between her legs as she sprung the original leak. We have inherited the scar of our Predecessor. We have inherited the leak, so far, with little success at adaptation--this leak that would deem us clocks, were there some apocalyptic power outage lasting months.

It feels as if some monster whose weight knows no limit has straddled us piggyback and gripped those parts of us that hide behind cute bellybuttons like the handlebars of an unruly motorbike. It feels like reverting to infancy, awakening with a diaper sloshing with shit.

We stumble sweaty from stunning dreams that never recur to wipe the bane of womanhood from our inner thighs.

Casually and cyclically we withstand small tragedies to conceal the fact that we sometimes forget our sex: stained panties boast our presence at the laundromat; premature and urgent flight from nights of indulgence finds us forking over cash at the mini-mart; dresses that once complimented our femininity become ruined and retired at the hand of Genetics.

There are grocery store shelves and pamphlets in doctors' offices that advertise crutches for our leaning. Why should we lean when, like you, we've been permitted to keep sufficient legs?



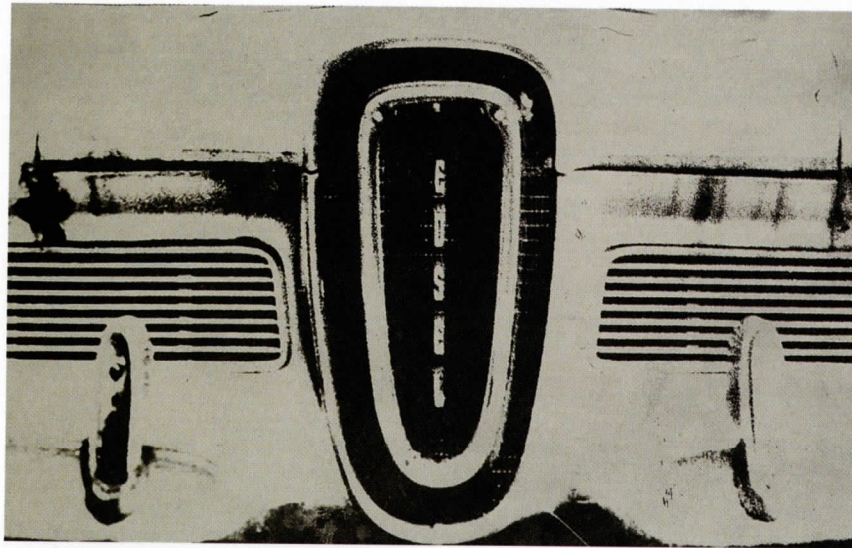


As for cures, there is rolling around in  
heterosexual bliss and confusion,  
then waddling around with a womb that tempts  
our torsos to slouch for ten months as we  
gain weight and learn that leaking is confined  
neither by source nor composition. There  
is the gravity tug at our skin and  
Time, the coquette, flashing winks of mercy  
at bodies that have ceased a confident  
stride.

Such cures teach us moans and bellows of new  
tones and pitches.

*In my country today, volition  
determines when a man will sacrifice  
blood. On behalf of my gender: We bleed.  
Our bodies are fossils bearing an ancient  
curse. The finer subtleties of the curse  
grace the dreams and tempt the senses of men.*

*It was not I in your dream, nor you who  
let my image cradle and caress you,  
catalyzing that fantastic squirt between  
your legs; it was a stale curse manifesting  
itself. My body tempts you, and torments me.  
I do not resent you; I offer a plea.  
Turn over those images of my body  
that sometimes kiss you good-night. In return,  
you can have my body. Agree, and I  
will rest steady-headed in my haven  
of soiled sheets. Otherwise I will raise an  
army equalling forty-times my gender,  
specially trained with skills of  
wet-dream thievery.*



"Untitled"

*Jonathan Trundle*

## **That Poem I Wrote on a Street Corner in Barcelona, With a Man Behind Me**

*Kati Hermsdorfer*

The broken glass, all shimmery in the streetlight  
Crack and break, but continue to glisten  
A silver blood moon is out, clear like a nightlight  
With the five Spanish stars in the haze of the sky  
Are they real clouds with rain  
You just never know  
And the wind brings the scent of a far-away plain  
And another tiny question -simple- where to go  
So just relax and ease your way  
Quiet down the street  
And maybe in some distant land  
With the same fucking stars  
Then your questions and your turmoil, like molding clay  
Will change with agility into who you are  
And in another night time  
In another life time  
All the glories will be sweet  
And all the many distances will be so far  
So very far away  
So very far indeed

# Los Niños Pobres de mi País

*Liliana Humphreys*

Los niños pobres de mi país nacen al mundo entre sabanas rotas,  
y un poco de cuidado.

Su primer llanto será eterno y existen muchas posibilidades  
de que el sufrimiento los acompañara hasta el acabar de sus vidas.

Los niños pobres de mi país vivirán solo rodeados de velas,  
las cuales iluminaran sus primeros días.

Su madre trabajara arduamente para poder alimentarlos  
aunque sea con tortillas, frijoles, chile y agua contaminada.

Los niños pobres de mi país... ¿Adonde están? ¿Adonde van?

Se les mira por las calles cuando comienzan a caminar

Vendiendo dulces, pidiendo pan...

Los niños pobres de mi país están en mi mente y no se van...



"Mellifluent"

*Grant Fletcher*



"Untitled"

*Caroline Bobo*

## **Starry Sky**

*Mitzi M. Cross*

He dipped his brush  
in the thick midnight  
of wet, divine sky  
dreams, of mouthfuls  
or silver dust.

Locked in that box,  
that room,  
left to connect the dots  
of his life, of his sky.  
White canvas,  
walls splattered  
with cerulean and blood.

He cut the voices  
out of the stars  
with one swift stroke  
across canvas white sheets  
that blinded him, leaving  
him deaf in that starry sky.



# virginia's vigil

*Jennifer Steinfeldt*

“pale people dancing to  
sheek streets  
miming something empty  
glass bodies like an  
hourglass  
always on the side which  
can never be full”

the black holes in her face  
slowly widen  
horizontally  
as she gazes at them  
perhaps she sees the wind  
the smooth pebbles scratching her toes,  
the spine of a lone tree,  
her mother.  
i must remember with thoughts like these that  
she is dead.

my eyes poke out from their  
own swollen sockets  
only they are alive and well still  
the wind pants low  
the rocks, rough;  
the tree reaches, each vertebrae  
cracking slowly  
a mellow murmur outside  
battles  
but i understand what was  
once  
inside both of us.



"Untitled"

*Alicia Moore*

### **Haiku, Gregorian**

*Athanasius Issa*

I  
Laetetur terra:  
Esurientes implevit—  
Christus natus est.

II  
Caeli laetentur:  
Lapis revolutus est—  
Surrexit Christus.

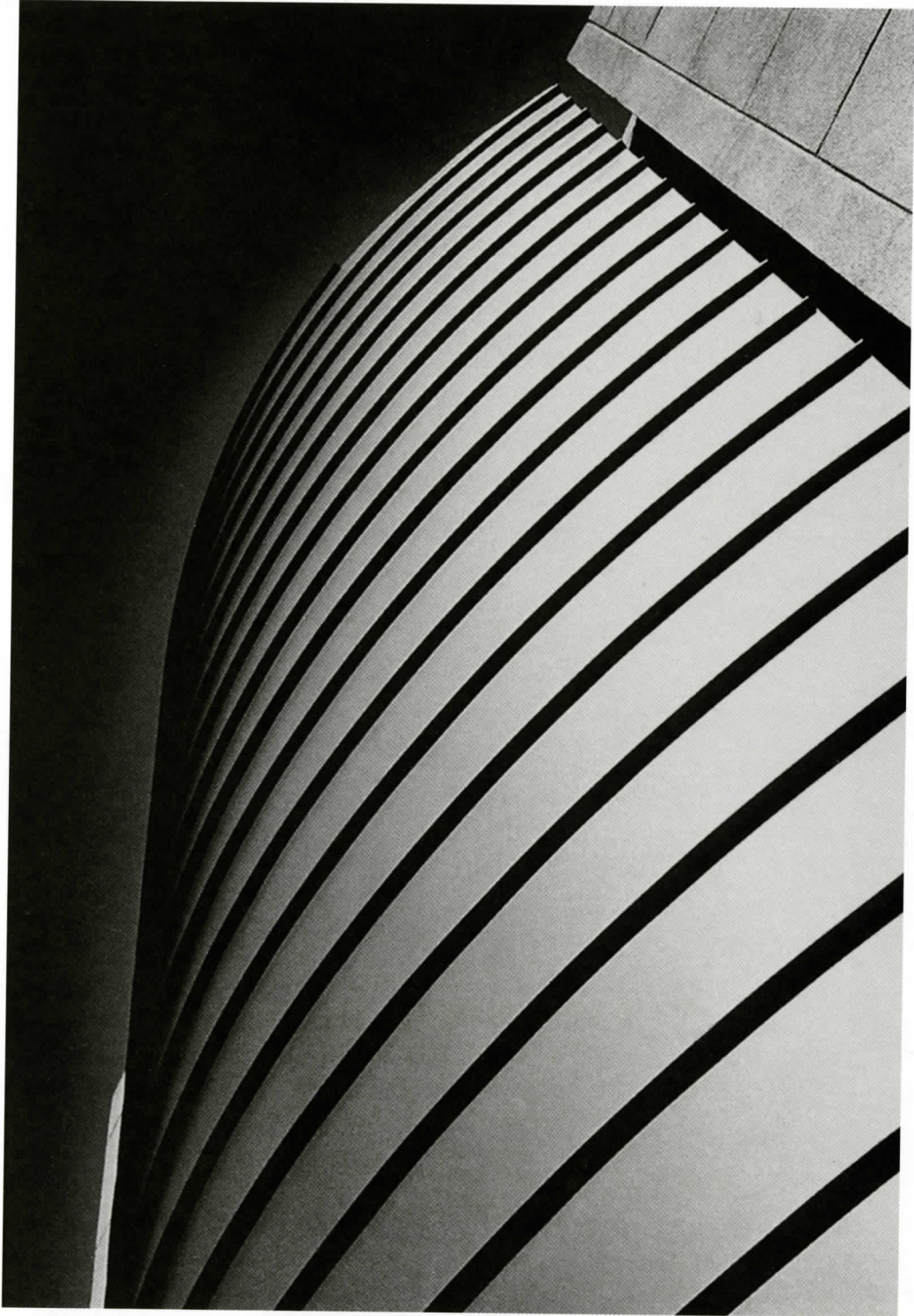
## **A Literary Manifesto Exhorting the Academy to Transformation**

**(a fragment)**

“The midwife of Reason assists  
Imagination in the birth of creation  
and the afterbirth of rules.  
But Imagination without Reason  
would miscarry because creativity  
without imagination is as barren  
as Reason without Imagination is sterile.”

When a literary critic dies, such as Harold Bloom, his work like an autumn leaf dries up and blows away—while the tree, which is the work of men and women like Coleridge and Sappho, remains. But in our modern age, it appears that most writers are paralyzed and somehow frightened out of their creative response to this world of privation, excess, and unending emotional vicissitude. They look to what has been done, and the voice of doubt whispers in the silence of hesitation: “How can I equal, much less surpass, this?” When this question is asked, the death certificate of creative confidence is signed. Anxiety over measuring up to the accomplishments of one’s literary relatives paralyzes the creative impulse. Consequently, we have become a society of editors, annotators, and critics—instead of creators who add to the treasure our cultural heritage. We rob ourselves and the future of our own cultural heritage by not having the courage to cultivate and expand its holdings. Moreover, the sinecures of university positions for ‘established writers’ and the literary demimonde only foster a sterile sanatorium, existing in a perpetual state of contrived health: free from the influences—the vicissitudes—of sickness and convalescence necessary for creativity. Heraclitus writes, “One must realize that war is common, and justice strife, and that all things come to be through strife and are so ordained.” The dole of the university post straightens the crooked roads of genius.

*Charles M. Johnson*



"Morphean Diminuendo"

*Grant Fletcher*



# addicts

*Kevin M. Simmonds*

i've seen the devil's ridicule coiled tight  
in a corner,  
sweating with wrong prayers  
arching its back in black cat language  
saying

psst psst

calling you over for nothing  
just to talk about war  
or rumors of war

about an x rated childhood,  
the silent mobile above the crib  
swinging  
to the rhythm of

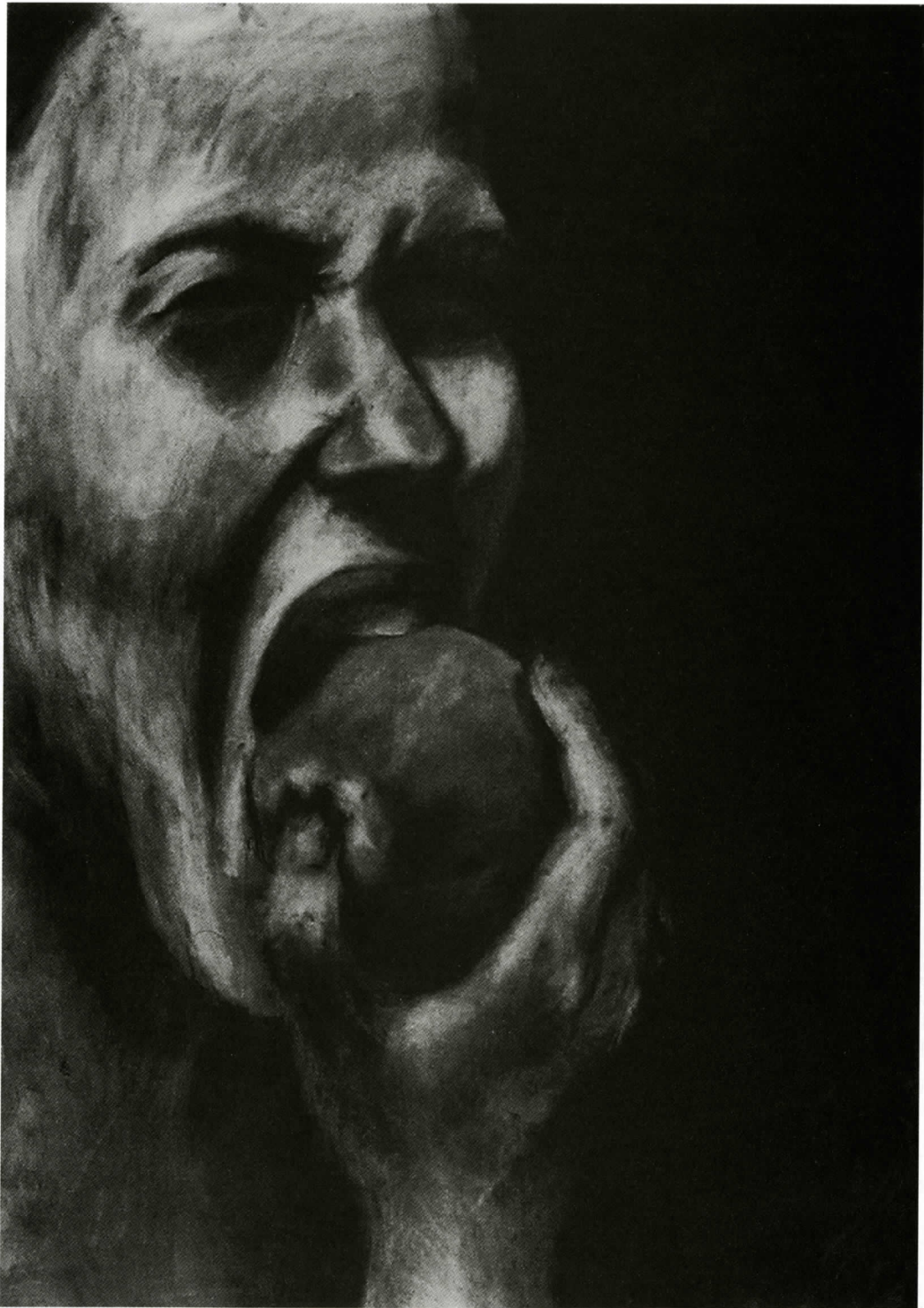
daddy here

and daddy there  
and daddy everywhere



"Midi et Minuit"

*Mary Hopper*



"Stretch"

K.C. Stout

The 99th Proceedings of the Consequentialist Society, Lost: A Work in one Broad Movement; Which is to say, Five Studies for a Parturition: A Gemshead of Spontaneity and Contrivance; To Define and Combat the Balkanization of Popular Consciousness, this No Less a Cause of War Among its Own Remaining Members

transcribed by Joshua Liner  
(dedicated to lotus slot)

At seven past an atom's blast we happened on a winery, which seemed weak enough to take the trick and well enough to need it. We entered the house like bats and cancer in accord with our regular custom. Its softer conscious parts we extracted with torches and rakes, sent running through the wood like inky bugs asearch for someplace light and random. Our siege had, as always, the single aim to hollow out a space for the authentic application of human freedom. As such it was met by that mixed and alien sense which attends men of radical morality: we had the floor and stood it with grounds, but the walls which defined it were not our own. (Without power there is rightness, says a German rebel, but its employment can be no more than honorary.)

The interior was kept intact as much as possible, as this was our culture too and we're no creationists ex-nihilo, much less death-wishers; we sought the concrete junction of the given and the made-monodualists to the finish, to speak (as one must) of metaphysics. In quickest time our nerves were cooled; authorities were long from the periphery. We supped on prepositions and the blood of our brothers, which flew freely from the taps til we were drunk like ticks.

"Fuck the aegis! I bleed history and virtue! Drink, drink, as others on all sides and by the same do drown!"-Thus came the rousting-call of Dr. Angoran English. He was trained an engineer prior to the purge of dialectics, though in this respect not so unlike the rest of us. (Aside from this he makes for the neatest biographical treatment.)

In sober hours the doctor lived a ticked and hesitating man, with thumbs raw from nervous pickings. He seemed to persist, speaking in the abstract, a few stout pints below maximal function, which condition was rarely an issue;

his normal social manner was of loud and dramatic formality. He was pretentious and ego-centric here, but more endearingly than contentiously so.

He spent those interim and hiding years in the split company of manuscripts and of various private and squirrelish utensils more long than they were wide. With both, his use was furied and productive, and commissioned by forces (he felt) outside his control: he co-authored bad books under various florid pseudonyms (it was rumoured he had one-hundred names, all of them simple symbols) on subjects too gross and manifold to fit a type. A half-lifetime of knockabout and instrumental literary survey had left him more form than manly content, but he was no queer dichotomist.

His lonely spillings sold well enough, in this age as in every, to buy the modest fuel for our proceedings. He remained the rhetorician of the group, a real machine for aphorisms. He'd have cried had we refused to let him do the opening invocations, but it so happened we thought this the best anyway: despite his fondness for autobiography, whatever he said was, at worst, delivered at so high a degree of abstraction as to lend itself (with some working over) to general appropriation and resonance.

The soliloquy rolled on with heavy portent, conveying more than onlookers would know. "With golden throat of John Chrysostom and steel balls of Galileo the tin Whitman spells out the lunch of tomorrow. 'Eat, eat,' says he of feral smile and poking constituent. But not, as never, without Charity, twin whore who mindsn't company. 'The issue,' proceedeth he, 'is as Isaac's; I search for sacrificial ram to find my own self wrapped shiny-pink in the bushes. The difference, I say, is in that I dread the balk check of the Lord: I wish to plunge the knife in my breast,

sugar dipped as only I (feel that) I know. (It is no secret I have never tested well.)”

Jimmy Maodivina was an efficacious member, a real nuts-going-to-bolts fellow whose hands saw further than men's eyes. He spent his youth under the blackboot of a tyrannical father and was always itching for a scrap; but his rage was never misdirected in a particular case and always followed from syllogistic reasoning. He remained a model of violence and discretion.

In walked a bentsome youth, the sort with no eyes for political bulletins. Jimmy held him to the floor while we fed his better interest. Said our own, “Everyone knows that alternative children are liberals, and the majority which doesn't can't be salvaged minus a kick in the wholeass. If you are above politics then we'll have to rope you down to earth. It won't be hard: you are weak and sick and your half is all nerveless head (good thing you live from the hip). The downward movement, I'm afraid, lacks all spice and tingle-twangish viscera (you'll wet yourself for other reasons) but should be loud enough to keep your interest. As such, the reunion of your soulish parts won't be fun, but I feel it's my motherfucking Christian duty to do it, rebel sun that I am. I justify this, as all my manoeuvres, by appeal to its consequential fecundity, over any mere mysticloudy correspondence--but here I repeat myself. The process marks a contract in our mutual interest, as all the Best and Never are: you'll lose a bit of face but will have less to shave; and the rest of us, we escape the rape of devils in the deal.”

“Blast your stickied hands! They crawl upon me of their own accords and you each have four, or may as well have,” croaked our ill-rooted intutorite in response, with utter nonconstraint. We noticed that every time we poked him (we see lots of his kind, but never up close) the impression stayed for a bit. This was scary but normal enough. He proceeded to quote John Locke and popular broadsheets (which came to the same thing--it's clear they are mutual borrowers), so we thought to let him go for the good of the group. (We'd all heard that drap so many times before, through no damned fault or sollicitation of our own.)

“These kids today,” woed Jimmy. “They think they're metaphysicians. They'd have to be, to talk as they do. Herein rests the key to this alien youth: these walking paradoxi, so like their fathers--they plant hedges for a living. On the one hand they seek cover from all constraining identifications--a strange liberty indeed which frees the self of all which might serve to grant its content and thingly delimitation. On the other, when pressed with arguments for just such a particular content--which is to say, with moral mandates of whatever sort--they are the first in line, cups-open, for appeal to some fixed human essence which is free (or something else) in just this sense. A nonexistent, and thus not-unfree self, versus one which is determined from outside to resist outside determinations: both moods reduce to one, but both have different ways of doing nothing. Take the former...”

“Yes!,” broke jesus-spit-mary Wineglass, “Take them nowhere but away. As inaction is their watchword, they'll not be much missed. Damn their spineless play of signifiers, all the worse for its infinitude; were that I myself lacked a subject to endure such cockeyed deletion. And for the other pole: What *of* defensive appeals to human nature? (A favorite, this, of stinky beaurocrats, who have sat so long their ankles swell and purplify; they forget how to stand, but have apish arms to defend their tittish mother at all risks against the march of social-possibility). Here we have a problem with location: what is this entity “nature,” and what have we seen of it?: Every master on a substance-hunt has come back lean and hungried, and his modern children are faring no fatter.”

“And to further say that our human nature cannot be changed is to beg double nickels on this questionable dime. (This concerns not the location of our object but its meaning--as all questions do, our critics agree.) For even were this object at hand, why should we obey a “nature” when it cease to serve the rest of our human parts? Dismiss that preemptive and whimsical landlord, I demand, and let the residents grind his bones for the baking!”

Jesus-spit-mary Wineglass was our remonstrant ascetic. He had been a Jew, then a

Christian, then process theologian in the old country but had since renounced such stuff and danger for the predictable comfort of professional skepticism. (He was, I think, the only full-time atheist (or agnostic, depending on which conception of God was at issue) any of us knew of.) It was no staid dispassion for him. He had all the passions now, and the vices to pump them up. They flew a broad spectrum; he would display them with near cartoonish abandon, but always without pretense and at the appropriate times. (He was not wholly purged of his Jewishness; he fancied the Kabbalist whim that Christ was now and for always boiling in his own pisses and shits--so much so as to replicate the process daily in tiny plastic memento.)

He had an anecdote of a parable he liked to recount, and managed once more to work it in: "Old Jews used to tell me the story of a boy who didn't shoplift while surrounded by itching policemen. 'The question--' said they, 'Is the boy moral or not?' 'No,' said I, 'as he clearly hadn't the choice to steal.' 'Then how can be we,' they concluded, 'with a punitive god breathing daggers to our backs til we shake to the balls and piss to fight fires?' Tracing out the logic of their ruminations, I have come to condemn the whole morality of the Western world."

"Hear, Hear," chimed Black-Angus Black, a recent member to the group, its youngest and a quick learner. "Mr. Nietzsche, that heavyfisted moose, was right about some things. I have at some nights dreamt that my masterswork should be nothing but to rid the world if his proliferate misreadings, and awoke to find me well with the idea. (Perhaps when I get the time.) Truly, he made nothing intelligible but all things good."

Then entered a woman, full and enveloping but not attractive. She looked up when addressing us, as though we floated above our heads. "I envy the six of you"--we were only five--"who have life by the balls and resources to spare. But I am a woman more mannish than you--just ask your friends who were here last week. I've done the do-do and hopped to the bop and am quite beside myself that I have to set foot in this place again." She spoke to us in the deferent vernacular of the lower folk--it translates

being composed principally of gestures and odours--as though we were important men. I found parts of her talk literally incoherent; I felt she must have confused us for others and told her as much. 'Yes yes yes yes yes yes yess--but it doesn't matter; you're all the same. And I'll tell you what to do if you just tell me how--and that goes for the rest of us, for whom I can only feel I speak.'

All of this was prelude to her slow escalation of a shaky mobile stair, the kind used to stock the highest wineshelves but which now led nowhere in particular. This ascent was attended by various contrived gyrations of the lendiful and coy sort one does only when asked. But her own dance was all lead and indecorum. (There was, moreover, nothing to her movements which attempted the conventional native style, strung with its vague mytho-symbolological nuance, which frankly leaves room for improvisation without rendering the lot anarchic and abstruse.) This was all the worse for lacking the appropriate music; and perhaps that was most of the problem. She quit her clumsy seduction without finishing (though I'm unsure how I knew this), detecting no reaction on our parts. (Later that week we saw her doing the same trick for others on the obelisk centerpiece of a fountain.)

"I hate these women anarchists," noted Black-Angus in her absence. "They'll flute the shafts of cretins for a sixpence but wouldn't ride the bus for free, and might nip a man of my stature on the shins for suggesting ever they do. Some are bomb throwing turks in the low tunnels of their hearts, but suffer from a general dropsy (which is, of course, a function of resolve) and would spill the lively fireworks at their feet. God knows I'd not want to pick up the bits, but I'd do it sooner do it than sell the soul I've got. It is truly the *end* of ideology," snickered he, making a double play on words the sort for which he had a very local fame.

"But I have more pity than anger; these women will never become kings, and even if they did, it wouldn't serve them well. (In our system, even the kings remain kinged; our enemy has no face, but laughs at us like an unseen jackal.) The luckier may get jobs with the beurocracy, to live

with longful eyes and cumbersome feet.”

“Yes, damn the beaurocrats as they damn us,” echoed the Prof. Nigel Wurstoff, a grateful Deweyan with no time for normal pleasures. He was a captain of renegade philosophy who pondered little else nor cared to. (For such a stuffed head, he let remarkably little escape from his mouth; he could scarce speak in public but from notes, which he had been taking hitherto; but he could write to shame us all.) “And damn to Hegel, that happy civilian, who thankfully lies smoking in no old heas, but dances in some new: beaurocrats are the fat porkers of Belasquez. These men would fuck their mothers for nickels and dimes and borrow them back for a homeward cab. Such women alone would overlook their impotence; their system, on the other count, swells like a sausage to infinity. Moreover, it is by its nature so do. Specialization is a harpy which breeds more of itself: this, dear learners, is Moses and the prophets. (Our subject is in this defining feature not unlike the academic disciplines: as the canon grows, men cannot run from its one end to the next, but fix a hut on untilled land and farm its tiny environs. This presents no serious trouble, as ideas require no literal space; but it is not this way with beaurocracy and its many concrete and vampirish analogues.)”

Black-Angus: “But I have heard it said by others that beaurocracy swells by definition only; perhaps something very much like beaurocracy might be erected of which swelling would be no part.”

The Professor: “This, indeed, would cease to be beaurocracy, but only for ceasing to beat with its own heart. Your sayers commit a new fallacy of composition. Beaurocracy-true is no monolithic thing, but persists indeed as parts to a whole. Its heart is itself, make no mistake, but bleeds to the bursting-point and soon defies its quarters. The quarters must adjust themselves, with growing pains to hobble a horse, but this motion too belongs to the thing. The entity, then, I define causally: it is itself and yet is not, receiving the action of another, which it also incorporates. Witherdicked positivists have vertical eyes and cannot see the broad concept of development. (Our Teacher was different, and has schooled us well: we are no bar-barians, but should fight by

their likes, striking when backs are turned; we must strangle the system in its infantile crib, and sow its mother’s hole with salt.)”

“Your speech is well taken,” responded Black-Angus, “and reminds me of a personal problem I’ve been having: I am, in fact, awash in structures. I crawl with the damned buggers and can’t tell you how hard I’ve scrubbed to peel them off me. I feel angry, wet and stupid in their company, as fingered by bearded uncles breathing fire and trauma. ‘They’re only in my head’-but as soon as I say this the falsity of the statement is evident. The reverse is wrong as well; ideology crosses the inner/outer divide and leaves the bridge up for others to pass. Derrida was right: knowledge is for cutting, as college is for nutting. I know the lesson now: you don’t wash structures, you shoot them. Explode them like a motherfucking carnival egg. In the mean I am resigned to my parasites, but never indifferent.”

The professor summed but needn’t have. “All relations are internal-but this is no mere description. Acknowledge this fact and you will *ipso facto* change for the better. This is, of course, the goddamned point. I would say more, but I have a sneaking intuition Mr. Wineglass’s thoughts were leading to something just along those lines....”

“Ah...yes! We were speaking before the interruption of our friends the human-naturalists. I digressed a bit--not totally, I hope you can see--but meant to return to them. For surely I miss the meaning of these men. (Their lips mumble, still crusty with the milk of their mothers). If the point is indeed that human nature can never be altered, what then is the worry? The very charge of such a violation devours itself and shits in residuum the truth of its negation: ‘Stop violating nature!’, these atomists must tell us, ‘--for such is impossible to do!’ (If our robust and constrictive designs are truly impracticable or bad, better they to permit them be unleashed and stand as their own refutation.)”

“One might respond, of course, that a change in nature *can be attempted*, even done for awhile, but is a project ultimately doomed to the ashes.” This moment Jesus-spit-mary Wineglass took to insert some religiousque ruminations, from which on such occasions he could scarce

refrain: "An act of defying human nature is, by definition, not unlike a miracle, this being itself a defiance of nature-proper; these miracles are impossible, say I, because nature equals just *whatever is*: an act of 'supernature' would amount in fact to just a thing of nature we didn't before think possible, but which now stands gleaming as its own inexorable argument. By analogy, it would seem that human nature is, without remainder, just what humans do, and thus this action stands as reason for its own self."

"But perhaps our covert Mediaevalists wish to cast the shameful case of nature-defiance as a matter of moral, and not metaphysical, possibility: which is to say, it is perhaps possible to sin against our natures-even with practical and long-term success-but never permissible or good. But then, just how is defined this natural standard against which we mayn't sin? The answer: why, by just those things which have been done by persons in the past. An actual, contingent behavior of men is taken as the golden child of measure simply because it exists; but this is impotent to legislate the behaviours of future men, as these latter behaviors too exist, and by the precedent rule should thus be as golden. There is no outside standard for endowing authority to the one child over the other; the first behaviors can be considered the privileged ones only if they are defined from the start as so privileged. But of course whether we should accept this is the thing at issue...."

We settled ourselves, as our man was hitting his thunder and might go on for some time. "This is not unlike the trouble facing the Christians of my former rank: the question may be less Whether there be a God? than What difference this should make? For *why do what God desires?* The Christian arguments (as are all the humanist works) are systematic, bearing a more-than-rough correspondence to the classical Divine attributiae: some say that the *benevolence* of god (a joke which I'll kick with my hobbled leg, if I see it round here making serious faces) compels we do what He desires; but how do we know Him to be good, and thus a worthy judge of what we ought to do? Perhaps because He is Himself, and this godly self is good by definition. But this merely assumes 'doing what God desires' equiva-

lent to 'goodness' or 'what we should do,' and does not argue for it. On the other hand, if there is some outside standard of the good to which God Himself ascribes, why mayn't we just ascribe likewise and leave Your Holy Hind-Ass out of the blasted equation? Leaving this, we could only know God to be good by observing His behavior (a high-winded concept!) as matched against an outside standard of the good; but why waste time watching two variables when only the second--that is, *What is good* (which is to say, *What we should do?*)--is the goal of the process? If we ourselves can see what is good, let us do it and have no more of authoritative morality. If we cannot, we have a sickness for which God will serve no remedy."

"Some add that we should listen to God for his *all-knowingness*. But this invites the same circularity as before, as when it comes to moral matters 'knowing-what-is-good' is but a compartment of 'being-good' and is thus subsumed under the same argument. In both cases, we can conclude God to possess the given trait only because we assume this to be so from the beginning. (So we see Scholastic architects of divine-mathematical perfection were all too fond of the circle: it became their chief method of argument, and comes back to bite their inheritors on their lop-sided balls.)"

Jesus-spit-mary Wineglass paused to inhale deeply and to seat himself. (Theology, that dismal unscience, always wore him out.) "Finally, dear patients, I needn't say much to convince you of the error which has befallen those who say that we should obey God for his *omnipotence*: this sheer and Thrasymachan power worship is a lie from Satan's fartish hole, and doesn't square with the ordinary moral pronouncements we wish to endorse: we don't call the strongest the best, but can only hope that the best will become strongest. Perhaps God's power of retribution should scare us into His obedience-but that won't make our action good, only pragmatic. (Those of our number would agree that what is good is indeed so because it is pragmatic, but this doesn't make whatever is pragmatic good.) And this forgets that a part of what God wants, those bloody sacrificials tell me, is true-sincerity of obedience-and if He can truly 'do anything,' then

by shits, He can surely see though *my* thin acting.”

“But to tie your own digressive ends to circleship, jesus...,” prompted Black-Angus in serious jest.

“Ah, yes. Herein lies the point: For our twin-men, one un-natured, one eternally so the same, share an insight which needs answering; for both see the self as a ground for proper and significant behaviour. In this light I might make my point that both have different ways of doing nothing.”

“The first of these are indeed decentered *posts* laid out beyond the Modern way, to which folly my bruised and truth-seeking shins sing throbbing testimony. These men, so progressive in their liberality, are seen with the lights on to be stuffed and retrograde Cartesians, feeling that if they, looking within, find no eternal and necessary innards then they must shake off their flim-flam shells and speak no more of action. The others seek a natural self for similar reasons, and think they find it; but theirs is a feudal tyrant against whom we are hopeless to revolt.”

“In this way both groups err on two sides

of a three-sided chance. In truth, our order has solved this Platonic riddle of the Many-into-the-One, finding the solution in its own grouply structure: there is no substance but what we make it, ‘we’ being here the not-inconsequential operative; and its obligation stems not from its making, but that we make it *well*. Indeed, the ways of this *We* are not necessary, but relative to our timely interests and needs; but neither does the *We* act with one moral consciousness. Rather, this responsibility falls to the shoulders-let us hope they are broad enough for the task-of its each and single member, and for them the standards appear as so necessarily given by the group. Hence, freedom and obligation come together in just the feel-good quantities and proportions.”

Our heads were fat by now, rung with wine and dialogue; the authorities were immanent. We exited the place with clipped and muted step, feeling, despite the danger (and partly as its function) confirmed that we, with the Paulish gospeler, were “members one of another.” Behind this sense was a more implicit welcome of the night-sky, now the colour of negation and possibility.



“Untitled”

Alicia Moore



### Editorial Policy

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