

The Giltweasel  
Premiere Issue!

# The Giltweasel

U.S. \$2.00



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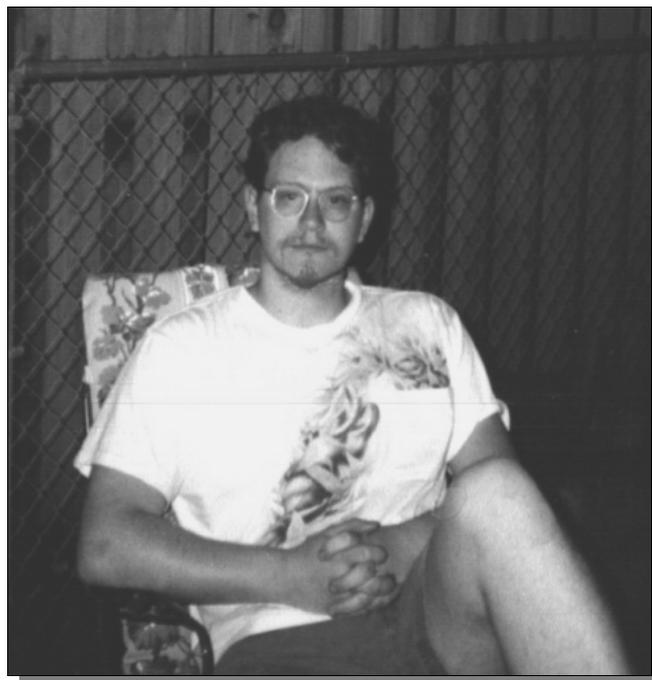
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(16)

Greetings all new and old readers. This issue of The Giltweasel marks the new volume and a new format for print. As editor I strive to find fresh, new, and innovative writers to publish. This professionally printed format is one way I'm attempting to do the just honor these writers and their works deserve. While the poems and articles in this volume might not appeal to all, it is hoped that most people will find something they like. I believe that the quality of material is the most important factor in determining the success of both the writers and this magazine. To that end (quality) I have begun the process of funding a contest to award the best and brightest works which appear throughout the year. This is not a play for favoritism or bribery, but a genuine quest for that which is the best. I will personally award \$1000 to the best poem I feel I've printed this year, and there will be another \$1000 total awarded to assorted other articles. The details for these contests can be found on page 23.

In addition to the contests, I'm attempting to distribute this magazine nationally. To accomplish that, I've gathered the addresses for several public, private, and college and university libraries around the United States. These addresses will receive at least three issues of The Giltweasel complimentary with the option for a library discounted subscription. This first month I have over 500 addresses on my recipients list which I am expanding daily. If any reader would like to encourage a local library to attain a subscription, I have included a form inside the back cover which will streamline that process. Individuals may also receive a subscription with this form, which is encouraged, as the magazine can continue only with reader support. Reader support. A touchy subject. As this magazine has neither official tax-exempt nor non-profit status I cannot offer an easy tax break nor a promise of committee control. What I do offer is a pledge that all funds received will be directed solely to the betterment of the magazine and the establishment of more awards and prizes. What I'm getting at, is that this magazine needs your help to continue. It needs your financial support, and your artistic support. I intend to provide a forum with a large potential audience to new and lesser known artists. If this goal seems lofty or unrealistic, it is only so because individuals are limiting the possibilities with their minds. Forgive the hyperbole, but I prefer to dream with my actions. I can only act so much, however, before the force of my actions are ground to a halt. Because of this I explicitly ask that everyone who is capable lend some form of a hand to make this project a success in everyone's eyes. To this point the magazine



has had a very basic and humble cast of support members, all of them deserving the utmost regards for their offerings. It would be foolish of me to attempt to list everyone, but I must openly thank my wife and family for their encouragement; the owners and staff of Tribune Publishing for their technical assistance; and all the writers who are published in this issue and in all of The Giltweasels of the past who have made me realize that good poetry begins with real people and not with those with existing fame and fortune. If this issue turns out to be the first and only installment, I have to say that I will be disappointed, but glad for the experience. I've been taught a lot by all those who have participated in this project and my life. Thanks to everyone, and please feel free to send me any letters of suggestion, encouragement, or admonition.

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Any queries will be forwarded to the artists for their perusal.

A sample copy will be delivered to any U.S. domestic address free of  
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# The Giltweasel

*“with a world full of fellows like this,  
who needs parsley for garnish?”*

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# Eight Poems by Tony R. Nemmer

Photo ©1996 Matt Schneider

## a high sonoran lullaby

I shall retreat into the desert  
finally and for good  
with a sprig of oleander  
and a quart of rum  
and a single sharp edge  
concealed on my person

the blooming of the creosote bushes  
shall signal, the sweat-sucking  
desert sonoran sun shall go,  
the sentinel saguaros shall point the way  
a slight concave upward  
with mountains and stars beyond

somewhere in the bigness that is Arizona  
I shall choose a spot, just right  
shielded from the night-glow of the cities  
beneath a screw-bean mesquite  
I shall build a cairn of milky quartz,  
shed what's little left of my empathy  
and sleep

*Tony is an overgrown Beach Boy fanatic. His poetry stems from scenery of the desert Southwest where he lives in Arizona with a ferret named Frettchen, and an avid desire to be Brian Wilson. These poems and more are featured in a chapbook titled "A High Sonoran Lullaby." He bops around IRC with the tastefilled nickname Teratogen. He is also identified as Ramantic, Frettchen, and Silmaril.*



## the broken windbell

(for Paolo Soleri)

lying upended in a pile of sherds  
the broken windbell caught my eye  
not fired in the kiln like the rest  
but cast aside for another day

perhaps there was a crack in the clay  
or a flaw in the impressions  
that set it apart from the others  
I really couldn't say

why it was rejected  
yet to me it seemed good enough  
a masterpiece drawn of the earth  
so much so that I selected

the broken windbell for my own  
with nary another thought  
or even a look around  
I picked it up and took it home

grand avenue

I'm leaving the red heart of Phoenix  
at forty five degrees to life  
the windows are down  
a june bug crawls across the dash  
Brian Wilson soars on the radio  
an outbound freight accompanies

through the little towns  
that star the Arizona night  
the White Tanks are passing on my left  
the train tracks following on the right  
the overpasses and underpasses  
have the roller coaster feel  
of moebius strips... I'm getting sleepy  
where am I? tractor trailers  
in front of me, a false dawn behind  
if I am lucky I will make Las Vegas by  
sunrise  
and I won't lie

zero point

a street corner a gasoline station-cum-convenience market  
the cold wind blows the god-forsaken apartment buildings rise  
the dark-twilight-gray clouds roil overhead so tired  
you can't even think just stand there and let it  
happen

the next day, I sang Pet Sounds in the sun  
became best friends with Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony  
bought three (3) copies of the Karajan Dresden recording  
of Wagner's Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg  
(one for me, one for my little brother Tommy,  
and one for posterity) and felt like I was at the center of it  
all

dandelions

in a field of dandelions  
with a robin and some starlings  
that's where I'll lay you, my darling  
I'll kiss you to wake your scent  
cup your breasts through the calico  
then lift your long dress  
tongue your sweet center again and again  
and when you acquiesce  
I will turn you over, lift your lovely ass  
and weigh you deeply against the grass

and after, we can walk for a while,  
naked, hand in hand, like gods of the field  
for a while, and when we tire of that  
we can kneel and send the dandelion seeds  
floating away on the wind

nothin' about nothin'

he never told me, never taught me  
nothin' about nothin'  
but when, finally, on his death bed  
delerious from the chemotherapy  
and the pain killers, he imagined  
that his house, his home, was on fire  
jumped up and ran down  
the hospital corridor  
trailing tubes and iv bottles  
(they had to restrain him)  
well, then, you know, I think  
he finally said something

a virgin of the White Tanks

in the foothills of the White Tank mountains  
there is a hidden canyon and a shrine  
at the head of the canyon, a grotto  
with a likeness of the virgin mary  
near her feet, from a cut of whitish rock  
water springs forth, miraculous water  
through the olive trees and the salt cedars  
the ghosts of the Pima-Maricopas  
bring rusted cans and history primers  
and grey-green tilapias caught from the  
end puddles of irrigation ditches  
to lay at her feet. they come to worship  
and to drink, this is their place and hers, but  
we shall not find it: the climb is too steep

wait for dawn

evening mist  
risen in the trees  
thick in the hollows  
and along the run  
everything is still:  
the stars are out

fragrance of starlight  
in her hair  
breasts gently rising, falling  
fallen asleep  
between a nocturne  
and a prayer

in the small hours  
the mist is blown away  
everything is clear  
I kiss her gently  
she smiles  
but does not wake

do not wake her  
lie silently  
trace the signatures  
of the trees  
dark against the stars  
and wait for dawn

# A Short Story

by

# Brian T. Hossfeld

*Brian is in a neck and neck battle with the University of Missouri to get his B.S. degree in Biochemistry. Should his side lose he plans to take up writing professionally, as it is currently just a hobby. Good Luck to the University. Brian is known as Reason on IRC.*

## Indifference

"How many woods could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" my research partner suddenly asked of the dead rat under his microscope. The Great American Pharmaceuticals logo on the back of his lab coat stretched a little as he hunched down a little more over his work.

"Dammit, Jim! How many times have I told you? It's 'how much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood'! If you're going to talk to the rats, at least get it right!" I said, grinning over at him.

Jim had this habit of talking to whatever it was he was dissecting. I read somewhere once, that "talking to oneself is the first sign of impending mental collapse". Jim didn't seem on the verge of insanity, but who could tell?

"Don't worry, I haven't cracked yet." Jim answered, intent on his rat. We had been through this discussion a thousand times before, and he knew exactly what I was thinking. And he knew that I knew that he knew. "When I get an answer...then you can start to worry."

He glanced up from his 'scope, just to make sure I wasn't about to throw anything at him, which sometimes happened. There were no handy plastic cups within reach, so he was safe, this time. I looked down, into the large glass case where one of the rats was currently at work. As far as pressing a lever, and getting an electrical shock to the brain that stimulated the pleasure centers could be called work. There was another lever, right next to the first, which would deliver a pellet of rat food. I had yet to see a rat press the food lever, after discovering the pleasure lever right next to it.

"Hey, Ferd...could you grab me a Coke?"

"Dammit, Jim! I'm a scientist, not a gopher!" I yelled at him, jokingly. I had ground that joke into the ground long ago, but I just couldn't seem to stop myself from repeating it. Jim showed no sign of annoyance. I guess he's used to it by now.

Leaning over the cluttered lab bench between us, I handed him a Coke from the refrigerator.

Jim leaned back in his chair, turning to face me. The chair groaned in complaint, as Jim's bulk threatened to collapse it. Jim sat back up in a hurry, remembering the cheap equipment the company supplied us with.

"You'd think, with all the money they're gonna make off of this drug, we could get some decent chairs."

"Drug, what drug? I thought we just cut up rats for fun!" I had joined Great American Pharmaceuticals, or GAP, hoping to get on the team that searched for AIDS cures. I hadn't made the cut, and they stuck me down here with Jim, analyzing rat brains.

Jim apparently felt like taking a break. He said, "You ever feel sorry for all these rats, Ferd?" His brown eyes had that concerned, compassionate look in them, now, that they got whenever Jim felt philosophical.

"Yeah, you know I do. Poor rats. Spend their lives, pressing a lever, living in electrical ecstasy."

"You know what I mean. Look at them. Lying in their own shit, slowly starving to death, too dumb to go get some food every once in a while. It's just not right." Jim often got these feelings, and I did, too, but it didn't make the job go any faster to dwell on them.

"It pays the mortgage, Jim. And, just think, someday some old guy will not have to feel his arthritis so much, thanks to us and these rats." We were looking for an endorphin-analog in the rat brain, which hopefully will be a powerful painkiller in humans, without the side effects of morphine.

"What about the control rats, though, Ferd? They don't do a damn thing. Just sit around, living their little lives in their little cages, and then boom! We stick a needle in 'em and they die. Adios. Finito. The Big Enchilada in the Sky. It's like we are The Rat God, or something." Jim had a propensity for colorful phrasing.

"What can you do, though, Jim? It's either this or delivering pizza. You want to deliver pizza?"

"I hear it pays better..." Jim grumbled, turning back to his microscope.

I let it drop with that. Sometimes Jim would go on and on, about the "indignity" and "oppression" we subject the rats to, all in the name of science. I agree with him, generally, but it still seems like a good cause, to me. Maybe someday I'll have arthritis, and what's a few rats here or there if I can make the pain go away? Jim made me wonder, though, about the rats. Which would I rather be, the ones who starve from self-neglect, living in a fog of ecstasy, or the ones who lead a healthy life, but die in the end, anyway.

I lounged around by my desk, pretending to be typing up reports, until lunch rolled around. Jim and I used to go up to the cafeteria, but lately we'd just been bringing lunches from home, and eating in the lab. "Hey, Jim, lunch time."

Jim pushed back from the 'scope, and eagerly snagged his lunch from the fridge. I pulled mine from my desk, and looked across my desk at Jim. He had already started on his food.

"Hey, turn on the radio, will ya?" Jim asked around a chunk of sandwich.

I flipped it on, and bent to concentrate on my food.

The radio guy bleated out a story about a bank robbery in Irvine, only a few blocks down the street from the lab. Apparently, the robbers had threatened to kill everyone inside if they didn't get money. One of the robbers had a bunch of dynamite strapped to his body. Makes you wonder how much they want that money.

A brief story about the nuclear threat in Iraq came on. Jim had brought in a research article for me to read once, about how rats could withstand about a hundred times the radiation that a human could. The article said the rats could be practically

living like nothing was wrong. The so, or why humans were so sensitive like things that validated the rats' mankind's superiority over them.

Jim and I were still absorbed in our lunch, preferring to get the meal out done with the day's work sooner, and

The next story came on, LA getting firebombed by some people.

My wife, Jennifer, had died been working in a free clinic, as a demanding all of the Morphine and pharmacy. They were waving around. They didn't carry any guns. not ducked under a table fast enough, slow, certain death. The druggies had shot and killed as they ran out the were the police going to risk maniacs.

I remember my wife, as she came home that day, a few hours late. She had tears in her eyes, and had asked me just to hold her. I had held her, watching over the years as her long, brown hair fell out, as her sparkling brown eyes had slowly turned to flat, dull globes, the happiness and vigor sucked out of them by the sickness. I had held her up until the moment she died, her soft breathing slowly ceasing altogether. I had held her close, trying to keep her warm, to give her some of my life, as her body slowly got colder. The tears welling in my eyes, but refusing to fall. There was no justice, there was no revenge. There was nothing that could be done.

"Hey, uh, Ferd...Have a Coke, man, are you feeling okay?" Jim was looking at me, full of concern, and offering me a cold Coke.

"Thanks, Jim. Sorry...I was just..."

"I know, man. It's OK. I know. Let me turn this damn thing off." He clicked off the radio, opened the Coke, and held it out to me. I had been working in the rat lab with Jim, already having been moved out of the AIDS research unit, when Jennifer finally passed away. He had been there for me, then, and knew what it was like for me, still, after the years had tried to soften the memories.

"Hey, listen, Ferd. You've been kind of glum these past few days. Why don't you take the rest of the day off? Go get Maggie out of school, and go fishing with her, or something? I can cover for you. You're just waiting for those results, aren't you? I can handle that for you."

Maggie was my daughter, 8 years old, now. She had her mother's beautiful smile, the same long brown hair, and the same sparkling, merry brown eyes. "Yeah. Thanks, Jim, I think I will. You sure you don't mind?"

"I don't mind at all, Ferd, you know that. If you want, give me a call tonight, we can watch the game or something on TV, OK?" Jim was a good friend.

*Maggie was the fisherman in the family, I just sat on the bank and watched, as she patiently reeled the line, and cast it out, and reeled it in again*

glowing in the dark, and go on biologists had no clue why this was to radiation damage. Jim seemed to existence, or made us question

lunches. We didn't talk much during of the way quickly, so we can get go home.

something about an AIDS clinic in religious group, killing seventeen

of AIDS a few years ago. She had nurse, when some wackos came in, lithium and Valium in the syringes full of HIV-tainted blood My wife had gotten in the way, had and they had injected her with the gotten what they wanted, but were back door by the police. No way apprehending AIDS-wielding

"OK, maybe." I had been feeling a little down lately, maybe some time with my daughter would snap me out of this funk. I got up, cleaned up my desk a little, shuffling papers into piles, and strode out of the lab, leaving the hapless rats behind.

Upstairs, I walked out into the midday sun, which was shining brightly, a gentle breeze rustling the trees. A perfect day. A good day to Maggie. I got into over to her school. her go, knowing and not wanting to really. Not that I Maggie hallway, face lighting up when she saw me. I held out my arms to her, and she rushed into them, nearly bowling me over.

*He lived near the orange orchards, and the smell was sickeningly sweet. Jim said you got used to it, after a while.*

day, a beautiful go fishing with the car, and drove The principle let the family history, get involved, could blame him. rushed into the

"Hiya, princess! Do you want to go fishing with daddy?"

"Yay! Let's go!" Her bright eyes shining up at me.

Maggie was a bundle of energy, her usual self, skipping along beside me on the way to the car. We stopped off at the house, just long enough to pick up some poles and the tackle box, and hurried on to the lake.

"Can we catch one for Mommy? She always liked fish, you know."

"Sure, pumpkin! Just be sure to throw it back, that way she'll know its for her."

"OK"

Maggie was the fisherman in the family, I just sat on the bank and watched, as she patiently reeled the line, and cast it out, and reeled it in again. Within the hour, she had caught two fish, and had released them both back into the lake, taking great care not to harm them. She was a rambunctious little eight-year-old, but was exceedingly kind to any animals she ran across.

Maggie was the greatest treasure in the world. It was like a little spark of Jennifer ran around with her, reminding me of my lively, energetic wife. Maggie helped to dispel the sad images of her mother, when she was nearing the end.

"Watcha thinkin', daddy?" she asked me, leaping into my lap. I noticed that the sun was beginning to sink into the waters of the lake.

"Just what a lovely child I have, and how lucky we are to have each other, peanut."

"I love you, daddy."

"I love you, too." Maggie had taken her mother's death pretty hard, but had rebounded well. There was still a note of sadness to her, of maturity, but all in all, she was a resilient little girl.

We hopped back into the car, and I drove her to her grandmother's. Jennifer's parents were still a little shaken up, and I think it did them good to spoil little Maggie every so often. She spent every Wednesday night with them, for three years, now.

The woman on the radio was telling us all about the CIA's plan to take over the world using exotic biological weapons. Carried by seagulls, no less. I reached over and clicked it off.

Jenny's parents met me in the driveway.

"How are you, Ferd?" Gwen, Jenny's mother, asked me.

"I'm fine, Gwen, thanks. How are you guys doing?"

"We're ok. Looks like you two did a little fishing?" she said, eyeing the poles sticking out of the car's windows.

"Yes, grandma! I caught two huge fish! They were this big!" Maggy chimed in, stretching her hands as far apart as they could get.

"Ha, ha! I think they were more like this big!" I laughed, stretching my arms as wide as they'd go.

I looked down at Maggie. "Good night, sweetheart, I'll see you tomorrow!"

"Bye, daddy!" she exclaimed, reaching up for a hug.

I left after shaking grandpa's hand, giving grandma a quick hug, and kissing Maggie good night. It was always a little awkward around them, after Jenny's death.

I hopped in the car, and decided to head over to Jim's place. He lived with his wife, but she was on a business trip to New York. She'd be flying back tomorrow, and I figured Jim and I could both use the company.

Pulling up to a stoplight, I switched on the radio, flipping through the stations. Something on the news about renewed tensions in the Middle East, some new strain of rice in China that will solve the world's hunger problems. A new brand of cologne drove women crazy, while at the same time managing to persuade insects to leave you alone. The light changed, and I drove off. The President came on the radio, berating Iraq again for its nuclear-arms facility, promising swift action by the US if they didn't disarm their warheads. He was interrupted by a commercial for "Sweet-Tooth Ice Cream", now 50% less fat and 25% better tasting. I switched the radio

back off as I pulled into Jim's driveway. He lived near the orange orchards, and the smell was sickeningly sweet. Jim said you got used to it, after a while.

Jim and I passed the evening and the night away, halfheartedly drinking some beers, watching the football game on TV. Conversation was sparse, but it was good just to have the company. We shook hands on the front porch, as I was leaving for home.

"Good night, Jim. Thanks for covering for me at work, today."

"No problem, Ferd. You think you're going to be there tomorrow?"

"Sure thing. I feel good as new."

"Maggie at her grandparents'?"

"Yep, same as usual."

"All right, then, see you in the morning."

Getting into my car, I looked up at Jim, standing on his porch waving goodbye to me. I waved back, gave him a quick smile, and backed the car out into the street.

I kept the radio off on the way home, not wanting to be bothered with the world's burdens. I wasn't looking forward to work tomorrow, either, but the insurance companies had claimed something about a clause in Jenny's life insurance, which meant they didn't have to pay. The lawyers were bickering about it, but I had to work in the meantime to pay the bills. Not to mention Maggie's college. She was a bright girl, but tuition was astronomical these days. It was never too soon to start saving, despite the fairly decent salary GAP paid me to probe into the chemistry of rats.

I motored the few miles back to the house, hardly paying attention to the road. I had shut off the incessant radio, but I still had a weary, tired feeling towards the world. Were we so much better than the rats, after all?

The night passed, and I awoke and went through the morning ritual, listening to the lonely sound of my feet shuffling around on the hardwood floors. I decided to give grandma a call, before Maggie went off to school.

"Hi, Gwen. How was Maggie last night?"

"Oh, she was a perfect angel, as usual, Ferdinand. You just have the most beautiful and well-behaved girl I've ever seen!"

"Thanks, Gwen, can I talk to her?"

"Sure...here you go"

"Hi, daddy!"

"Hi, sweetheart! How are you? You didn't give grandma and grandpa too much trouble did you?"

"No, daddy!" Maggie giggled. Her giggle could chase hurricanes away.

"Did you do your homework?"

"Yes, daddy!" more giggling. I smiled to myself, wondering what I did to deserve my daughter.

"I've got to run, pumpkin, but I'll pick you up from school, OK? Meet you by the flagpole, just like usual?"

"OK, daddy. I love you!"

"Goodbye, sweetheart, I love you, too! Can you put grandma back on?"

"OK, daddy..."

"Ferdinand?" Gwen's voice, again.

"Thanks for watching Maggie last night. I'll pick her up after school today, OK?"

"OK. It's no trouble, you know. If you want us to watch her other nights, you just let us know, OK?"

"Of course, Gwen. Thanks again! I'll talk to you later."

"Goodbye."

I hung up the phone, and set off for the GAP building.

Jim had beaten me in that morning, I noticed, as I parked next to his car. He usually did, when his wife was out of town.

"Morning, Jim", I said, putting on my lab coat. I settled into my chair, accepting the coffee Jim held out to me.

"Morning, Ferd. You listen to the radio on the way in? Those damn Iraqis are threatening to use their nukes on England, now, if they don't pull their troops out. They say they are doing God's will, and they will not hesitate to unleash 'God's purifying fire upon the Earth' if the Brits don't get out of their way. Supposedly, they have ICBM's that can reach the US, you know." The big nuclear missiles had been shown on TV a few nights before, on a documentary about the USSR.

"Yeah, I heard that a couple of days ago. You think they really have them?" The same documentary had theorized that the Russians had sold some of their missiles to the highest bidder during the arms-reduction talks.

"Sure. Once you get the uranium for the bomb, building a rocket to put them on is no sweat."

I sipped at my coffee, succeeding only in burning my tongue. "Coffee's still hot, I see. Just get here?"

"Yeah, I called Madge this morning, to make sure everything was OK with her. Remember, I'm taking off at 3 to pick her up at the airport."

"Sure thing, Jim. I won't let any dead rats sneak away on you." I said, grinning at him over the coffee mug.

"Ha, ha, very funny. Oh, that reminds me. The lab won't have that sample analyzed until tonight. They had some excuse, but I forget what it was."

"That's OK. What do I expect? A bunch of dead rats are not exactly top priority, after all."

Jim and I quickly settled into our daily routine, which was basically him busily looking at dead rat brains, and me trying to look busy. There's not much to do when the lab's got your samples.

"You mind not tapping that pencil like that?" Jim asked.

"What? Oh, sorry." I guess I'd been staring at the wall, tapping my pencil on my desk.

"You know, if you want something to do, you can always go clean up the rat droppings."

"Thanks, boss. Just because I'm a lowly chemist, doesn't mean I like to clean up rat-doo, you know."

"Just think about them...they have to live in it."

Reluctantly, I went over to the rat cage, where the pleasure-crazed rat was pressing his lever every few seconds. He was looking really weak, today.

"I think this one's about had it. He's not looking too good, over here."

"Yeah, he's been at it about 4 days. Usually they are dead by day three. Has the food-lever scored any hits?"

"Nope, he hasn't eaten anything. Must just be a sturdy rat. I still can't believe they'd do this to themselves. I mean...how hard is it to just reach over and tap for some food? Wouldn't even hardly have to interrupt himself. Surely mother nature wouldn't make rats so stupid."

"Maybe mother nature doesn't care if they're stupid or not, Jim."

"What, have you been reading your copy of 'Cynics Weekly' again, Ferd?" Jim liked to joke about my imaginary magazine subscription.

"I ever tell you about Joe, my college buddy?" Jim was looking at me strangely.

"Nope. What's that have to do with rats? Don't go changing the subject on me. I'm making a legitimate attempt to avoid cleaning this fellow's cage."

"Yeah, I can see that. Just bear with me, though. I had this friend, once, in college. He was studying to be a veterinarian, so we had a lot of classes together. Anyway, one day he goes to one of those college church meetings, you know? The kind they always have where they try to recruit new people?" Jim glanced up at me, to make sure I was paying attention.

"He went to one of those meetings, and decided he wanted to be a Christian. He had never been really religious before, you understand, but he decided he had seen God's word, and wanted to spread the faith to the 'poor non-believers' around him. His words. Well, he spent so much time with the church, he went from an 'A' student to a 'B' student, which wasn't so bad, and he was so happy with what he was doing, I figure it was worth it. We didn't hang out much, anymore, as I've never been really religious, and he kept trying to convert me. Then one day, he's crossing the street to go to a church meeting, and SMACK he is run over and killed by a car. Driver was wired on PCP, according to the cops."

I looked at Jim dubiously. "Really?"

"Really. I was walking to class, and saw it happen. Right then and there, I decided that even if there is a God, there's no way he gives a damn about us one way or the other. No way would any sort of decent god let that sort of thing happen. I've heard all the religious retorts to that sort of thing, but I'm not buying it. Nonsense. That guy was a friend of mine, and he had devoted his life to his God, and then BOOM he's dead. Not very loving, in my book."

"Wow, Jim. I had no idea. I'm sorry you had to see that."

"Don't worry about it, man. But my point is, he was so wrapped up in his religion, doing what made him happy, he didn't bother to look before crossing the street. Couldn't see the forest for the trees, if you like. Poor Joe thought nothing bad could happen to him, now that he'd found God. I guarantee that rat's thinking along the same lines. 'Oh, man, this feels so good. I am set! Nothing bad's gonna happen to me, now.' And he keeps on thinking that, while his body wastes away, and then one day he's dead."

Jim seemed pretty riled up about this 'God' issue, which he'd never really mentioned before. "Jim, that story has nothing to do with this rat. What's eating you? Something happen on the phone with your wife?"

Jim sighed. "No, its not that. I was just thinking, last night, after you left, about what we do to these rats. Is it ethical? You know, I'm not religious, but I still have to wonder. We are humans, we're supposed to be better than these little guys. We should watch out for them, you know? Kind of like big brothers, or something. I

don't know. I guess it's been bugging me for years now, and I just had to get it off of my chest. I used to tell myself that because I was an atheist, it was OK, but I think that was just an excuse. Just because there's no God, at least that I believe in, doesn't mean we can go ape-wild and run amok, doing what we please."

"Jeez, Jim, how many beers did you have last night? I had no idea you sat up nights wondering about this stuff. Jenny always believed in God, and I try to teach Maggie to believe, but as for me, I can't really say. I guess I kinda lost my faith. But even if there is a God up there judging us, I think we ought to judge ourselves. I should have just cleaned the rat cage, and kept quiet." I said, trying to laugh a little.

Jim looked a little pained at this, so I quickly said, "I'm sorry, Jim, I'm just joking. I didn't know you were so worked up about it. What do you think you're going to do?"

"I don't know, Ferd. I can't just up and leave this. I mean, it's for a good cause, isn't it? It's not like we torture the little guys. They die a painless death. I just sometimes wonder, 'who are we to say we're so much more important than these rats, we can just kill them off to suit our own needs?' you know?"

"I know what you're saying, Jim. Sometimes I wonder about that myself. But on the other hand, these rats have a better life than, say, a rat in the gutter somewhere."

"Don't patronize me, Ferd."

"I'm not, Jim! Think about it. They are here, safe, well-fed...well the control rats, anyway, and the other rats are too busy feeling good to worry about food. We put them to sleep nicely, they don't feel a thing. I can see your point, though. I guess its just something each person needs to decide for themselves."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. There's not really that much I can do about it, anyway, is there?"

\* \* \*

Jim perked his head up as a low wailing sound penetrated to our basement lab. "Is that the hurricane siren?"

"I don't know, we'd better head upstairs, though, and see what's up. It's probably some new 'motivational siren' GAP has thought up." I grinned at him.

We trotted up the stairs, moving in that halfhearted fire-drill fashion. Everybody was outside, so we pushed out the front doors.

We were just in time to see the vapor trail coming in over LA, 20 miles to the north. It seemed like time had stopped, as the realization clicked in everyone, watching the tell-tale wake of the nuclear missile slowly descend. Someone had brought out a radio, and the announcer was frantically telling everyone to get inside, get underground, it was World War Three.

"God help us." someone said, desperately, hopelessly pleading.

Jenny had always told me that when my time came, to walk into the light, and God would take care of me.

I turned to Jim, thinking of Maggie at school, of Jenny, of everything, and saw that bright white light reflected in his eyes. The last thing I remember thinking of, oddly, were the rats downstairs, living their lives. I wondered what they'd do when all the humans were gone. I wondered if they'd even notice. I saw an image, then, of mother nature shaking her head sadly. The light engulfed us, and vanished just as quickly, leaving only darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Controller looked up from the holographic projection of the Earth, absorbing the last of the information into his consciousness.

"Species 178-b failed again. Self-extinction shortly after the development of nuclear capability." The Controller did not speak English, of course. Didn't even speak at all, for that matter. "Better get another planet ready for them", he sighed, looking over at his colleague.

"Not even your 'God' ploy saved them, huh?" his colleague asked.

"No. Not even that worked. Are there any suitable candidate planets available?" The Controller asked sharply. Another failure.

"I've had one ready to go since they started nuclear testing." The Controller glanced over with a hard look. "Just in case, of course."

"Just in case. Right." The Controller grumbled. His support for this species was dwindling fast. They just kept on killing themselves, no matter what he did to help them.

"Maybe this time, I'll give them a little less intelligence," he thought to himself, preparing the machine to plant Homo sapiens and his attendant ecosystem on yet another test planet.

# An Expository Essay on Personal Enlightenment

by

# Fred V. Bradford

## Religious Chaos (My Philosophical Catharsis)

### Preface

The intention of this writing is not to “prove” anything (which is hopefully refreshing in itself). Nor was it written as a philosophical “opinion” piece. I intentionally refrain from offering my own beliefs, opinions, or ideas on the subjects of religion, philosophy, chaos theory, or even on a solution to over-population. I believe there are those out there searching for knowledge and understanding. Part of my intention here involves introducing those beginning learners to the beliefs of certain individuals and groups. For those wishing to pursue these basic concepts further, I recommend visiting your local library or performing simple searches via the Internet. You’d be surprised what knowledge awaits you. Furthermore, I admit that this entire writing, and all that it encompasses, has been my much needed catharsis. My conscious is clear. What you choose to make of this article is up to you—the individual.

### Chapter One (of one)

Question: If I push Joe off the roof of the house a hundred times, will he always land in the same spot?

Answer: Never. However, a general pattern will emerge.

And that, my friends, is chaos theory. My example is rough, perhaps a bit narrow in scope, but chaos theory nonetheless. The ability of one event to profoundly and randomly effect another, and another, and another, until the final result becomes anything but predictable. Or so it would seem. As mentioned above however, a general pattern will emerge. And it is these *patterns*, not the “chaos,” that is the true value of chaos theory. Okay, on to the next form...

Philosophy: The love of knowledge as leading to the search for it.

Philosophy, it may be argued, is as old a profession as prostitution (though the latter may have often been more profitable). Our oldest surviving records seem to indicate that philosophers have been around at least as long. And were it not for our next (unavoidable) participant in this discussion—Religion—philosophy might well be the lone oldest “belief” discipline.

The Holy Bible

The Bible (to include the *old* and *new testaments*), is generally regarded as *one* of the oldest written records on earth, some books pre-dating Socrates and Plato. (whether or not you believe in the Bible’s significance is really of no concern at this point as we are working here with information and concepts only—not beliefs). And this same Bible, while not often thought of as “philosophical” in nature, may eventually prove to be the most philosophical writings in history. But, of course, that’s speculation on my part.

So, now that you are familiar with the general participants, let’s begin:

We’ll start with the Bible, these inspired writings if you will, that offer laws to live by and recommend

a path to knowledge and happiness—Namely, the acceptance of Jesus (or God) as your savior.

The Bible has one major flaw though. And we see that flaw evidenced even in the Bible itself. What is it? Simply this; mankind, by nature, is diverse. As a result of this diversity, not everyone shares the same beliefs. For example, it would appear that the Romans embraced far different beliefs than those of Jesus, eh?

And so, it comes as no surprise that philosophers such as Socrates gain acceptance and acclaim, just as Jesus did. You see, then, as now, people were searching for alternative beliefs. Preferably, that which most closely matched their desires (be it immediate desires, or long-term, spiritual desires). And who could blame them. Look at it this way; lets say you believed in Jesus. Being imperfect yourself you eventually screw up. God rains down fire from heaven and burns you to a crisp. Now conversely, you might be inclined to share the beliefs of Socrates where if you screw up you're simply *ignorant*. Much preferable, would you not agree?

Additionally during this time-frame the birth of Buddhism came into existence. More specifically, around 500 B.C. with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, and later expanded (around 470-475 C.E.) with the Zen teachings of Bodhidharma. Gautama instituted the Four Noble Truths—1) suffering, 2) interrelationship of all reality in terms of an unbroken chain of causation, 3) that this chain can be broken—that suffering can cease, and 4) a way exists through which this cessation can be brought about: the practice of the noble Eightfold Path. Thus, the Four Noble Truths laid the foundation for Buddhism.

Although some scholars doubt that there really was such a historical figure as Bodhidharma (perhaps often due to legendary eccentricities—i.e.-cutting off his own eyelids to prevent falling asleep while meditating, spending an entire 9 years in meditation, the legend of his never having died, the idea that he is generally perceived of as hairy with round, bulging eyes, and the idea of his coming to enlightenment under the legendary Bo-tree.), the fact remains that *someone* wrote the Zen teachings. So, history credits Bodhidharma with “The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma,” published by *North Point Press*, New York.

So what is Zen? Well, early Zen became associated with enlightenment rather than physical seated meditation. Furthermore, it concerns itself most specifically with the Mind. The Chinese Zennists practice “cultivation” of the Mind, in which they paradoxically believe that we need only remove the illusion of non-enlightenment to become enlightened. Nowadays, most Zen study is done through only two channels:

- 1) Through the study of ancient Zen writings such as the aforementioned “The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma,” and various Sutras like the “Heart Sutra.”
- 2) Through seated Zen meditation.

Here is a brief quote from “The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma” that I found rather interesting:

“The ultimate Truth is beyond words. Doctrines are words. They're not the Way.

The Way is wordless. Words are illusions... Don't cling to appearances, and you'll break through all barriers...”

Obviously, the information provided here does not do justice to the entire religion of Buddhism, but the general concept appears to be: The search for enlightenment through proper meditation. The key word being *proper*. Without knowing the language of Zen, and the more profound concepts behind the religion, proper meditation is impossible.

Now lets fast-forward a bit to Descartes. Descartes, perhaps a mathematician more than a philosopher, was a firm believer in God. So much so, in fact, that he attempted to prove (by logic) the existence of God. His basic argument came down to this:

1. My idea of God is the idea of a perfect being.
2. Therefore, if God exists, God has all the perfections.
3. If God failed to exist, he would be less perfect than if he existed.
4. Therefore, existence is among the perfections.
5. Therefore, God's existence is an essential property of God.
6. Therefore, God exists.

Now some would argue (surprise, surprise) the validity of this logic. The strongest argument claiming that “existence” cannot be a “property.” And in logic reasoning perhaps that is true. In any event, Descartes has also proven to have been in error on other issues, specifically, his theories on space and the existence of vacuums. However it is the mathematician, more than the philosopher, who takes issue with the latter. I only mention the subject of “error” in fairness to all. Despite these errors, Descartes still enjoyed a degree of fame as a great mathematician and philosopher. (He did produce much that was both “correct” and cutting-edge in his time). And as Nietzsche once quipped, “The errors of great men often prove more fruitful than the truths of little men.” (Although I doubt Nietzsche had Descartes in mind at the time).

Okay, now we jump forward to William Blake and his seemingly mysterious beliefs. Though Blake's overall beliefs may be summarized as; all religions are one. And knowledge comes from sense (ie—experience),

his poetry often seemed contradictory. For example, in “The Divine Image” (from *Songs of Innocence*) Blake basically contends that God becomes man, and therefore all men should be seen as divine creations. But then in “A Divine Image” (from *Songs of Experience*) he portrays man to be his own worst enemy. Almost the epitome of evil. Additionally, “The Chimney Sweeper,” (also from *Songs of Experience*), portrays the God, the Priest, and the King as uncaring.

But what one must realize is the overall concept of these Songs. In *Songs of Innocence* Blake is showing the naïve. The... inexperienced. The innocent. In *Songs of Experience* he’s showing the opposite (and in his beliefs, the more accurate) side. He’s saying, as summarized early in the previous paragraph, that all religions are one and that knowledge comes from experience. An interesting method of demonstrating his beliefs, to be sure.

Fast-forwarding a bit more we come to Friedrich Nietzsche and his “overman,” or more commonly; “superman.” And Nietzsche, he says that God is dead (which would seem to indicate that Nietzsche believed God *lived* at some point). Mr. Nietzsche (to summarize) believed that men should only serve men, and that they should not waste energy concerning themselves with such things as afterlife but should focus instead on the here and now. Religion be damned! Nietzsche then, was perhaps the epitome of egoism. And today you can find Nietzsche fans worldwide.

So what about Christian philosophers? Well, there was Descartes, of course. And also Dante, as witnessed by his *Divine Comedy*. But generally, popular Christian philosophers have been somewhat rare throughout the ages.

The lack of popular Christian philosophers may be explained simply by considering that: Christians already *have* their philosophy, as provided by the Bible and the Crusades of Jesus. Christians seem to have little trouble believing in an unseen, untouchable God. And once they have accepted Christianity, few ever seem to stray. So for Christians, human idols are unnecessary and in fact, undesirable.

There are a great many other religions and philosophies on life as well—far too numerous to transcribe here—and then there are “theorists” who often propose spectacular-sounding theories on both creation as well as future possibilities. One such theorist I came across in preparation of this article was Immanuel Velikovsky. Like Descartes, some of Velikovsky’s work has been shown to have been in error. However, fellow catastrophians (those who believe the earth experienced great catastrophes through the actions of extraterrestrial agents), Dave Talbott and Ev Cochrane, continue to support and expand on Velikovsky’s general claims to this date. Basically, Velikovsky came to believe (through the study of ancient texts and cultures) that human history records a time when the Planet Venus was a flaming comet. In fact, Velikovsky’s theories suggested an almost inconceivable re-shaping of the solar system as we know it today. The results of these changes, he proposed, were cataclysmic events on earth such as those recorded in the Book of Exodus (and, he suggested, in the Egyptian “Ipuwer Papyrus.”). It all sounds unbelievable, but I assure you, some very educated scientists and historians are giving the proposal a more thorough perusal.

By now you’re probably wondering what all of this has to do with chaos, eh? Well, for that answer lets look at the present and future...

I remember reading some years ago a trite statistic that said a person dies somewhere in the world every three seconds. And that somewhere in the world a child is born every single second. This statistic may not be entirely accurate, but the overall pattern is proven by simple census charts. If you require further proof just drive around and count the lots in your neighborhood that are no longer vacant.

Pollution is at an all-time high, our rivers are all but destroyed, we clear-cut thousands of acres of timberland annually to build more houses to hold all our increasing numbers, the crime rate is the highest it’s ever been (both organized and unorganized), we are literally destroying our ozone layer, and here in the USA more and more people are questioning the government (as witnessed by the rising number of anti-government cult groups). If all this isn’t chaos, I surely don’t know what is.

Is there a hope? Well, just two actually.

Remember the Bible and it’s believers? These people believed all along that these current events would come to fruition. Their Bible (or philosophy) tells them so in the book of Revelations. So their hope, as it has always been, is in Jesus Christ—or God.

The second hope, the non-spiritual one, relies on man (Nietzsche?), specifically, his ability to acquire and implement knowledge at a pace surpassing that of over-population (and perhaps greed, but that’s another story that we will touch on shortly). For example, if the advances in technology were such that we could (and would) begin worldwide purification of our waters, be prepared to colonize distant planets, and develop toxic

waste treatment plants... we might then begin to hope (if only briefly).

And these advances may indeed come about. However, they will have to hurry.

Think about this: What is the difference in damage to society and earth's ecology between now, and say, thirty years ago? Rather substantial, I would venture.

Now consider the technological advancements over that same span of time. Thirty years ago man was about to set foot on the moon. And today? Well, we're working on a little space-station near the moon, although we don't really get there any faster. And we haven't really been any farther. And thirty years from now? That space-station might be complete. Someone will *possibly* have made an historic visit to Mars. If the ship wasn't damaged in a drive-by.

You see, there's no *money* in space travel. Or ecology. Or the future. The money's in the Internet, man. It's in software. It's in artificial body enhancements. It's in forestry and new housing developments. It's in the present!

But our old friend chaos theory tells us that our current lifestyle is self-destructive. And that the degree of that destruction increases exponentially with every negative event. How so, you ask?

Well, Issac Asimov, in an essay shortly before his death (printed in *Science Past—Science Future*) titled "The Case Against Man," shows through the example of history how mankind is destroying himself. Asimov's entire argument consists of chaos theory. That is, the effects of one event (say, cutting down a forest), profoundly and randomly influencing additional events (say, the decline in the deer population, which, in turn, influences the cougar population, the local flora and fauna, etc., etc.).

The key to understanding chaos theory lies in understanding that what's important is not the "chaos," but the emerging overall patterns. In Asimov's "The Case Against Man" (which is basically a warning about over-population) his sole cure for preventing self-annihilation is simple birth-control. Without it, and at the current rate of population increase and consumption, he predicts a best-case scenario of 460 years before extinction of mankind. This prediction is generously based on *serious* science and technological advancements. Furthermore, Asimov considers colonization of the moon and/or neighboring planets so impractical as to be impossible. At least in the degree necessary for our survival.

So how do we remain positive in view of this depressing information? And what can we do to improve the situation?

If your belief is in Christianity, remaining positive is relatively easy. I mean, you already believe that the eventuality of mankind's destruction is inevitable. The Bible tells you so. However, that same Bible offers hope and everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven. And Heaven, we're told, is a paradise. The Christian's desire to "improve" the situation is based not on attempts to save mankind (in the material sense, anyway), sense the end is "inevitable," but on the teachings of the Bible in which people are created in God's image and are... worth saving. In any case, Christians seem to have little to worry about, except perhaps, trying to retain their faith in times of difficulty.

For others the concept of going forward and braving the struggles of live, as seen in Tennyson's "Ulysses," might well be enough inspiration. I know many people who are quite comfortable with this general attitude. (though they usually possess additional beliefs to supplement this most general concept).

Then there are the followers of Nietzsche. I suppose they believe "superman" will save them. Perhaps he will. Only time will tell.

And still others, the Doom & Gloom group, I shall call them, have little use for optimism anyway, so for them a "solution" is likely perceived of as non-existent.

Whichever group you belong to (or if you believe you belong to no group), I hope you've found something in this article worth its effort. I know I have.

*Fred does his damndest to agitate, irritate, and alienate all the women on IRC. He sent me this piece to fill the call for "opinion articles." As you can see, Fred refuses to cooperate, and more power to him. Two interesting poems of his appear later in this issue. Keep your eyes open when Fred is around, you might miss something important. Fred unpretentiously goes by the moniker Poetguy on IRC.*

# A Poem

by

# Aaron Hamm

## How Long Ago

Earlier today, my brother sat in the living room watching porn,  
he asked me at one point to put some music on,  
And I wondered why, until I heard the notes  
drown out the moans, the groans, the grunts, from the TV,  
till everything was one monochromatic sound.

I remember when I was young and slept in the far room  
back in the corner of the house. I would bundle up in blankets  
and listen to strange sounds drifting from my parents' room-  
I could not sleep till the creaking died down,  
till I was sure the world would not turn inside out.

When I was older and sat in church, I recall a girl  
who would show up in her white Sunday dress.  
She was two years older and had already passed to the threshold of sin.  
I would sit in the pews, my eyes pulled from the pulpit,  
to dart at her legs, the small part showing beneath the slip.  
She would cock her head and look at me smiling,  
knowing what I was looking for, what I had not yet found-  
That dark piece of youth that sinks down through the sky,  
quits tousling the hair, leaves kisses goodnight behind.

My brother is through with his movie now,  
he sits looking at girls passing by to the pool.  
I watch and think how long ago it was when I could look  
and see nothing but the color of a bathing suit.

*Working and playing in Washington state gives Aaron an abundance of scenery for his poetic observations. His poetry shows much observance of others and is refreshing with details. For narrative poetry, Aaron, who goes by the nickname Twinner on IRC, is hard to beat.*

# Four Poems by Greta Lee Schmidt

## Back Road Break

For conference time they gather at Nick's.  
Drink weak coffee from styrofoam cups.  
Their hands raw from decades of scraping together  
everything just to make payment on a few acres of dirt.  
Outside the parking lot is filled  
with a collage of pickup trucks,  
half carrying waiting dogs,  
mostly mutts or golden labs,  
half filled with remnants,  
of the mornings work,  
pesticide bottles,  
hay bales,  
chunks of debris from some machinery,  
that is always needing to be fixed.  
They gossip like old hens,  
but sound more like old hogs,  
grunting about taxes,  
snorting about the "keeds deeze dayze"  
Downtown the noon whistle blows,  
they disperse.  
Into their pickups  
and down the dirt roads  
clouds of dust  
past the rows they know intimately  
like yesterdays mashed potatoes

*Greta hails from southern Minnesota where she works as a technician both professionally and with her artistic life. Her poems seem a taste of industrial cynicism, and rural society townlife. She was featured in last May's Giltweasel and will hopefully not cut her poetic production despite her occupational successes. Her handles on IRC are variably Imitriker, DrTriker, Imigawd, or Rexitrimi.*

From the "Cooper County: Remains of an Era" series. ©1996 by Matt Schneider



### 3rd Class Wake Up

On those thick headed, clouded clumsy mornings  
when the mirror is the  
last place your face wants  
to be seen  
and even the green of  
grass makes last nights  
gin creep back up to a  
lump in the throat  
knowing that struggling to  
emit even a yawn... gross and tepid  
would be a fallacy, the words fall  
out .. down the edge of the bathroom sink filled  
with spewed toothpaste and  
tiny flecks of blood from weak gums...  
all those words that sounded  
per fect ion ary  
on the tip of the tongue the night before  
the same tongue you slipped into her wet flesh  
in search of an understanding that called  
out to you through the scent of her depth  
the quiet of response of her musk  
grossly judged you forgot that the tip of her  
tongue wouldn't come back to you just for  
respect, and after all the tests of  
orgasms and screaming null contradictions  
she was really aiming to leave you spent  
for one greedy bitch is the same as the next  
but that you forget once the flash of  
the sun takes over.. after the  
numbness of the pain wears off  
you forget  
you forget  
just like you forgot the frightening words you  
called out at four am without  
anyone to listen to because she was gone  
now you go stretching for your muscle's sake  
grasping for that piece you wrote in your head  
that goes floating down  
the drain with the  
toothpaste and tiny  
bits of blood...

## Once Held Saints

At ten past nothing  
every morning  
they gather at Cunnigham's diner  
just west of the river  
in the shadow of the highway bridge  
tempered by the slamming of taxis  
next door at the yellow and black garage

Under the pretense of faux tiffany lamp shades  
they disseminate between principles of posture  
Catholicism and the Episcopalian  
They become mother-in-laws with no mercy  
towards the flaws of the children  
ghost servers of the altar  
traded lust for commitment to flesh warm.

Cabbies file in for the blue plate  
Among their hisses of pious tea steam  
breaking clouds of Este' Lauder  
sterility with stern glances  
They knew those boys  
in robes,  
shivering book stands as their sons,  
when still resolute to communion  
in the sacrament of blood and bread  
before the toast of mortal wine.

Noon calls them to disperse  
back to kitchens and committees  
in cloth coats the step  
from tiffany light  
into exhausted air  
assured that their cause  
justified remains

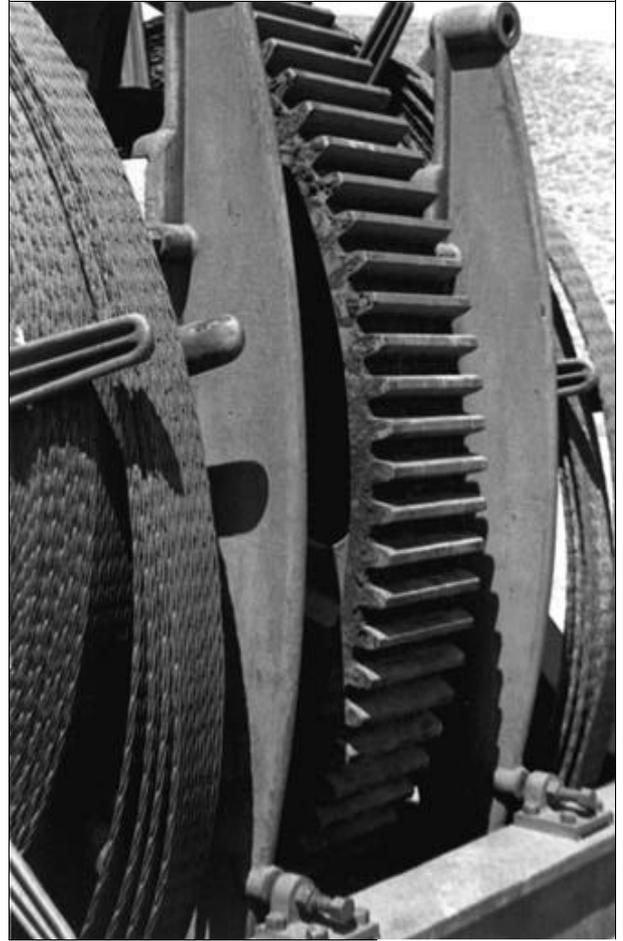


Photo ©1996 Matt Schneider

## Rising on the West End

Hard Polish coffee  
tanned with cream  
sipped as August sun  
melts river fog  
accompanied by the morning  
mass bells of St. Casimir's.  
Five blocks away the  
rail yard yawns to life  
steel on steel-  
wheel to track screeching.  
Box cars mated together,  
sanctified by conductors  
of Union Pacific.

## Two Poems

by

# Fred V. Bradford

### Hips Don't Grind Like Coffee

Hard rock beating an echo  
in a smoky cathedral of sweat  
and lust.

Must she move her hips that way?  
Smile in that seductive way?  
Lure me to her web today?

Play another song, D.J.!  
Because hips don't grind like coffee.

A strap slides off her shoulder and  
still bolder she dances on.  
And on  
top of all of this she winks at me!  
Closes both her eyes and moans silently.  
I can see  
there's nowhere to hide.  
And I'm gettin' scared.  
Because hips don't grind like coffee.

She moves a little closer and  
closer still.  
Feel her heat dancing up your spine?  
See her graceful hand reach out for mine?  
Time to be brave.  
And behave.  
Here me down there?  
It aches.  
Because hips don't grind like coffee.

6/26/97

They Cum In All Flavors  
-----

I.

Once upon a

mound of woman...

I thought of the firmness

of pudding.

The sleekness

of pudding.

The motion

of pudding.

And the plainness

of repetition.

II.

Once upon a

cold day in hell...

(or was it December?)

I thought of her

again.

Of firm pudding.

Of sleek pudding.

Of pudding in motion.

My plain poem.

III.

And once upon a

firm, sleek, plane in motion...

I missed my tiny

pudding woman;

Her chocolate eyes.

Butterscotch skin.

Tapioca attitude.

And vanilla kisses

on a graham-cracker bed

in my fragile mind.

IV.

I looked at the woman

next to me and asked

(I swear)

if she too liked popsicles.

[or if]

her nipples were just happy

to see me.

When I woke up...

This lady (who was obviously

NOT

fond of

[my]

popsicle)

grinned a toothless grin and

flexed some 32Bs (in 3D)

at me.

When the stewardess came

(20 minutes later in the head)

I played with her

firm titties,  
looked into her brown eye[s],  
and asked if she liked pudding.

"Not really," she answered,  
admiring her own body in the tiny mirror,  
"why do you ask?"

V.

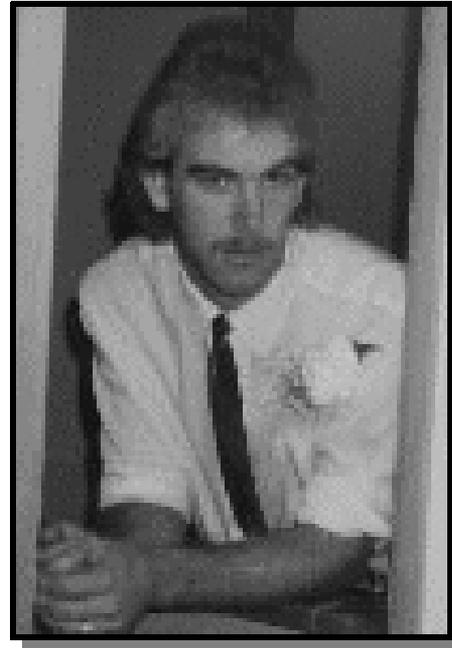
So once upon a

time  
(There! I said it!)  
I came

and came

and came

[all the way home].



Fred Bradford

---

The Giltweasel is sponsoring two contests for articles that appear throughout the monthly issues. These contests are intended to promote quality writing amongst the readership and writers in general. There are two categories for judgment. There will be a \$1000 poetry prize for the best poem printed through the publishing year. This prize is the editor's choice and cannot be awarded to anyone in the publisher's family. All poetry printed in the magazine will be considered for the prize. There will also be additional prizes of \$500, \$300 and \$200 awarded to any other item appearing in the magazine. This includes essays, reviews, opinions, photographs, and artwork. These prizes will be determined by a qualified jury of not less than 4 and not more than 8 judges. These judges will be selected by the publisher, and members of the publisher's family are ineligible for any of these prizes as well. All prizes will be announced in an annual review issue of The Giltweasel. This review will publish all the winners and the runners up. It is important to note that unless an annual review is published, these prizes will not be awarded. So your support of the magazine will determine the outcome of the contests. To be eligible for the contests any article or poem needs to be submitted by May 10, 1998 at the latest. This is to enable time for the judging and printing of the annual review by the end of Summer 1998. To submit a poem or article you should mail either a file on disk or a competed manuscript copy to The Giltweasel. Computer files should be formatted in plain text on an IBM formatted 3.5" floppy disk or e-mailed to The Giltweasel at the following address:

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# Three Poems

by

# Stephen Parks

## The Craziest Student I Ever Had

When I first met you Myra, you were coquettishly  
lifting your shirt to show off your breasts  
in order to impress Erwin (poor guy was just slow  
not crazy, and didn't fall for it)  
I lost track of you for years, but picked you up  
right where we left off, showing your mammary glans  
hoping to bed a prospective mate.

The time you were found on Grand Central Parkway  
I got in trouble for letting you out of my sight  
I was green and felt the sting of disapproval from superiors  
I poured water on your desk  
(copying a teacher who got fired)  
because it freaked you out.  
I apologize for that lack of judgment  
and I know I should have transcended  
the bad influence of that teacher.

When you are nervous, you laugh hysterically  
and we had to keep other students from setting you off  
because they thought it was funny.

With your compulsive gibberish homework  
that I could only just put a question mark next to  
and your three lines of text on one line sheet  
I'll never forget your handwriting  
I spent many a minute in conversation  
with your social worker, trying to understand.

Your beautiful Russian mother  
couldn't grasp that you would never  
work in an office like she does.

There was the particularly trying time

when you began to eat everyone's food  
snatching it when I was looking straight at you.  
Not even a disproving gaze could stop you.  
Do you remember that Myra?  
I had numerous conversations with you about it.  
That was about the time you began stalking boys  
They would try to shake you by going to the men's room  
and you would follow them in.

I've know women who could have gotten away  
with everything you have done.  
I had a teacher who gave me the finger  
in a student counsel meeting.  
But that's all in a context of restraint.  
You, Myra, represent disinhibition  
No need for you to drink alcohol.

Photo ©1996 Matt Schneider



*Steve Parks lives in New York State and works with developmentally disabled individuals to write and edit a newspaper. He teaches at a private high school, and I've encouraged him to write more about his experiences in this position. I have not been disappointed with the results. Steve goes by the nickname Egad on IRC.*

### Barking Hindsight

I'd like to write a poem just once  
that didn't stink of inner bile  
hospital smell  
the self stench of my innards death.  
I'd like to stumble on it  
and say, "who's that fresh wit?"  
then realize it was me.  
I'd like my ideas to be  
veritable babemagnets  
to attractive chains of thought,  
a beguiling thought process  
a captured lucid moment  
(no zoo display).  
It's all hesitant self doubt  
straw grasping  
posthumous Johnny come lately.  
I want lightning  
not static electricity.  
I want the Niagara  
not a muddled puddle,  
I want Marcy vision  
not naval vision  
not barking hindsight  
not cage rattling.

Crazy Jay

charged up the block  
and after a pause  
back down again.  
He's got maniac energy  
that shoots his body running  
ad hoc, he says he needs the exercise  
but everyone knows  
it's faulty brain connections  
he's got learning disabilities  
(don't we all)  
but he got 98% on the SAT  
he got a scholarship to college  
I can see him in introductory to finance  
(he wants to work with the stock market)  
hopping up and down  
slapping his his ribs

When teachers would get together  
and have a few beers  
it was easiest to imitate Jay  
hopping up and down  
slapping his rib cage  
He also constantly shuffles cards  
or handfuls of paper  
but that's more of a curio  
than something to imitate

When I first met him  
he said he didn't want to be  
a blue collar worker  
in his sing song voice.

Then he became a conservative  
and religious right monster  
listening to that fat slob  
and spouting out preacher-like  
denunciations of right and wrong  
teachers used to joke that he  
was trying to form a cult

Seeing a student outside of school  
is weird in NYC  
since everyone is a stranger  
Once I saw Jay at a bookstore  
reading a book  
I didn't say hello  
but I know he would go to book stores  
and read all day

Now he's a cross dressing  
east village music loving  
internet maniac  
who wonders how to tell his parents  
about cross dressing and being bi  
he tells me to follow of my dream  
of being a poet  
though he knows I must pay the rent

Graduation day he showed up in a limo  
his graduation present.

# Eric Ormsby's "For A Modest God" reviewed

by

## Tim Truxell

*Tim is a technical editor for an Atlanta firm, and much of his poetry is touched by images from the deep south. Tim will hopefully offer a monthly book review for The Giltweasel and will offer up some of his verse as well. His IRC nickname is Palomides.*

Eric Ormsby's poetry has been praised, and rightly so, for its "musicality" and its "remarkable powers of observation." His latest collection of poems, *For a Modest God* (Grove Press), published earlier this year, continues to display both these qualities. But to limit his work to such small categories does his poems a great disservice for there is much, much at work in the poems of this collection. His poetry's musicality, in a large part, springs from his attention to sound and sense of the language within the poems themselves. This attraction to language as language runs throughout the myriad poems in his new collection--poems that range in topic from theoretical physics to a tenth-century Arab poet. Ormsby possesses a seeming gift for taking language and making it somewhat new, all the while preserving the musicality inherent in the words he chooses to such an extent that their loss would be comparable to removing notes from your favorite symphony. Ormsby's attraction to language, however, lies not only in its love of words' sounds, but also in their greater implications.

The collection opens with a single poem that shows both his love of and concern with language. This poem, "Quark Fog," takes on a subject not readily familiar to most readers of poetry, theoretical physics, and it sets the stage for the poems to follow. In this poem, Ormsby makes the usually dense and sketchy language of science into music peculiarly his own, combining through poetry the familiar with the unfamiliar. Take for instance:

If merest fable drops into the fog,  
articulated stars assert  
eclosion of the gold-sewn chrysalids.  
Early nouns bob in blunt fens.  
Verbs browse electrically in the mist,  
particles gnarl the stems of bulrush copulae.  
In a pristine caldera of consonants,  
vowel-magma brims and  
virginal horizons spike  
cordilleras of speech.

This passage shows at the collection's outset how central language is to the themes that Ormsby will embrace in the poems it presents. Throughout the collection, Ormsby takes unfamiliar words and weaves them into the text of the poems. Although unfamiliar, and I must admit I had to keep a dictionary at hand while reading the poems, the words do not seem to be used for pure novelty's sake. The words are at once strongly linked to the familiar ("particles gnarl the stems of bulrush copulae"); as such, Ormsby is a poet more of metaphor than of simile. The unfamiliar becomes the familiar rather than merely being like the familiar. The unfamiliar words are also sewn tightly into the rhythm of the piece--so much so that they are inextricably linked to the poem itself. To change one syllable of "a pristine caldera of consonants" would at once would weaken it too much to actively contemplate.

This passage also shows the primacy of language in the universe of the poems. Ormsby links the most basic building blocks of the world itself with the bricks that form language and, hence, poetry. If taken far enough, language becomes the foundation of the world itself, constantly speaking to those who hear (of which Ormsby is certainly a part). "Matter," by itself, "will not chisel a voice from this / fog of quarks." Although the voice is there, it must be evoked: "If merest fable drops into the fog / articulated stars assert." This tendency culminates with the close of the poem: "our sun is uttering her saffron palatals." The world itself, through language, is speaking, offering a subject matter for poetry and poetry itself.

From this strong opening, the collection is divided into four parts, each of which taken as a group holds

together remarkably well. The first section of the collection deals with the natural world, what one can observe, and the poet. These are the most voyeuristic of the poems in the collection. There seems to be a strict separation between the observer and the observed. These poems still show the importance of language. Take, for example, the poem, "An Oak Skinned by Lightning." Here, the scars on the oak become a language to be decoded:

I am moved by the incommunicable script  
of the lightening on the oak tree's swept  
pith. Is this the idiolect of summer, the sign

our eyes are aching to decode,  
these edicts from a canceled chancery,  
these mute comunicados of the sensory,,  
whose each jot seem a letter in a word?

My fingertips Champollion the oak;  
the burined lice trails teach my skin.  
Here, hands alone, not eyes, draw you within  
the secretive syllables the lightning struck.

While the language Ormsby finds and presents may be secretive, it is still alluring. This follows throughout the first section of the collection. The subject of each poem has the same allure as the stricken oak, whether it be a strutting rooster or the skull of a turtle. The poet finds and writes a story upon each.

The second part of the collection delves into history as its subject matter. It is here that Ormsby takes Abu al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi as a subject. These poems are the weakest of those presented in collection. Although Ormsby has explored such matters in his earlier collections (selections of which are included along with *For a Modest God*), notably the five Lazarus poems from *Bavarian Shrine and Other Poems*, Ormsby's gifts do not lend themselves as well to the monologues included in this collection. The poetry seems more watered down in its pursuit of the person of Mutanabbi. Only "The Caliph" seems to stand on equal footing with other poems in the collection. Ormsby exhibits a great playfulness with the language in the poem, yoking together words in odd and wild ways--ways that, once read, seem to be their natural order. The following selection opens this poem:

The wily and flamboyant Fatimid, the  
intricate Caligula of God, the  
neurasthenic delegate of the prophets (may  
God pray for them!) forbade all women  
to wear shoes. He barred the cobblers from  
tapping their lasts or battering their little anvils;  
only poor prosodists could mime their hammer taps.  
This, before he vaporized in the mauve  
and umber desert of the air: al-Hakim,  
defender of the devious  
ambiguity of the Godhead, His penchant for  
bagatelles, creator of the paradox  
of sharks and swans, Draconian Comedian!

This said, these poems still exhibit many of the concerns of the rest of the collection. Again, through figurative language, language flows from the natural world: "... and now language flows / from my fingertips and from my quill / the way a spider tessellates its silk."

A number of poems in the third section bear further inspection. In fact, this may be the strongest section of the collection. Each poem leads inexorably into the next; the section hangs together remarkably well.

It opens with the poem, "Origins":

I wanted to go down to where the roots begin,  
to find words nested in their almond skin,  
the seed-curls of their birth, their sprigs of origin.

At night the dead set words upon my tongue,  
drew back their coverings, laid bare the long  
sheaths of their roots where the earth still clung.

I wanted to draw their words from the mouths of the dead,  
I wanted to strip the coins from their heavy eyes,  
I wanted the rosy breath to gladden their skins.

All night the dead remembered their origins,  
All night they nested in the curve of my eyes,  
And I tasted the savor of their seed-bed.

Once again, language is one of the concerns of Ormsby's poetry. But Ormsby ventures here into the realm of memory and the past--searching for the language of the dead. This conversation, if it may be called such, continues in the next poem of the collection, "Gravediggers' April." Where those who are left: "comfort our dead with out talk, / We entertain them with idle gossip." Language here becomes a solace as well as a point of origin:

Its comforting to chat even if  
no answers return. The winter shapes our words.  
The widower drinks, the widow squeezes shut  
her eyes, imagining the bluish stain  
corruption spreads across a loved complexion.  
Come back! they whisper, I'm lonesome here without you!

Interestingly, the outer world again shapes the language, much as in the collection's opening poem. It is the winter that shapes the words, and it is the winter that can allow the statement: "I'm glad you're there / at last . . . where I can love you finally. . . ." Everything, including the greatest feeling can only be processed through the conversations and words that spring from the world.

Ormsby continues his focus on origins and the past throughout this section--a past evoked through objects, such as in "Hand Painted China" and "Finding a Portrait of the Rugby Colonists, My Ancestors Among Them," or through feeling in "For a Modest God" (which seemingly answers a question posed by the previous poem. In each case, something evokes in the poet a contemplative air, which he goes on to explore in depth through the mediation of the language in the poem. It is also in these poems that Ormsby reaches his most musical, and his images become the most memorable and haunting. Take for example the following section from "Finding a Portrait of the Rugby Colonists, My Ancestors Among Them," one of the most effective poems in the collection:

Tell me, if you had been

the God who shaped their cheekbones  
and their brows, the dignified alertness  
of their ears, their ceremonial and  
formal smiles, their throats the patience of a  
May sun mottle with its little dabs of luminance,

the fingers curved on Bibles or on canes,  
the feet in their black-thronged propriety  
of dainty boots or strenuous clodhoppers,  
would you, for a world,  
have let them tumble into  
nothingness and seen their strong hearts rot,  
or would you have raised them up again,  
the way you rouse a sleeper or a child?

Although the fourth section collection of the poem continues in this vein, this poem, perhaps, is a fitting representation of the entire collection. Here, we see Ormsby at his most musical, making a dirge of ancestors evoked from a mere photograph. The language of the photograph falls into the "quark fog" of his imagination to produce a moving elegy for those who have come before and allow a rumination on the very nature of God. This questioning is immediately answered in the next poem, the title poem of the collection, which seems an appropriate benediction to this brief glossing of the poems of this collection. The following is a section of "For a Modest God":

The fresh towels invigorate our cheeks,  
that spoons tingle in allotted spots,  
that forks melodion the gusted air,  
that knives prove benign to fingertips,  
that our kitchen have the sweet rasp of harmonicas,  
that stately sloshings cadence the dishwasher,

---

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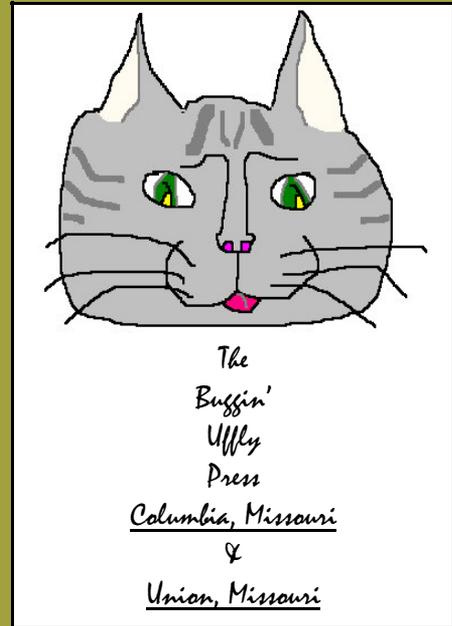
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