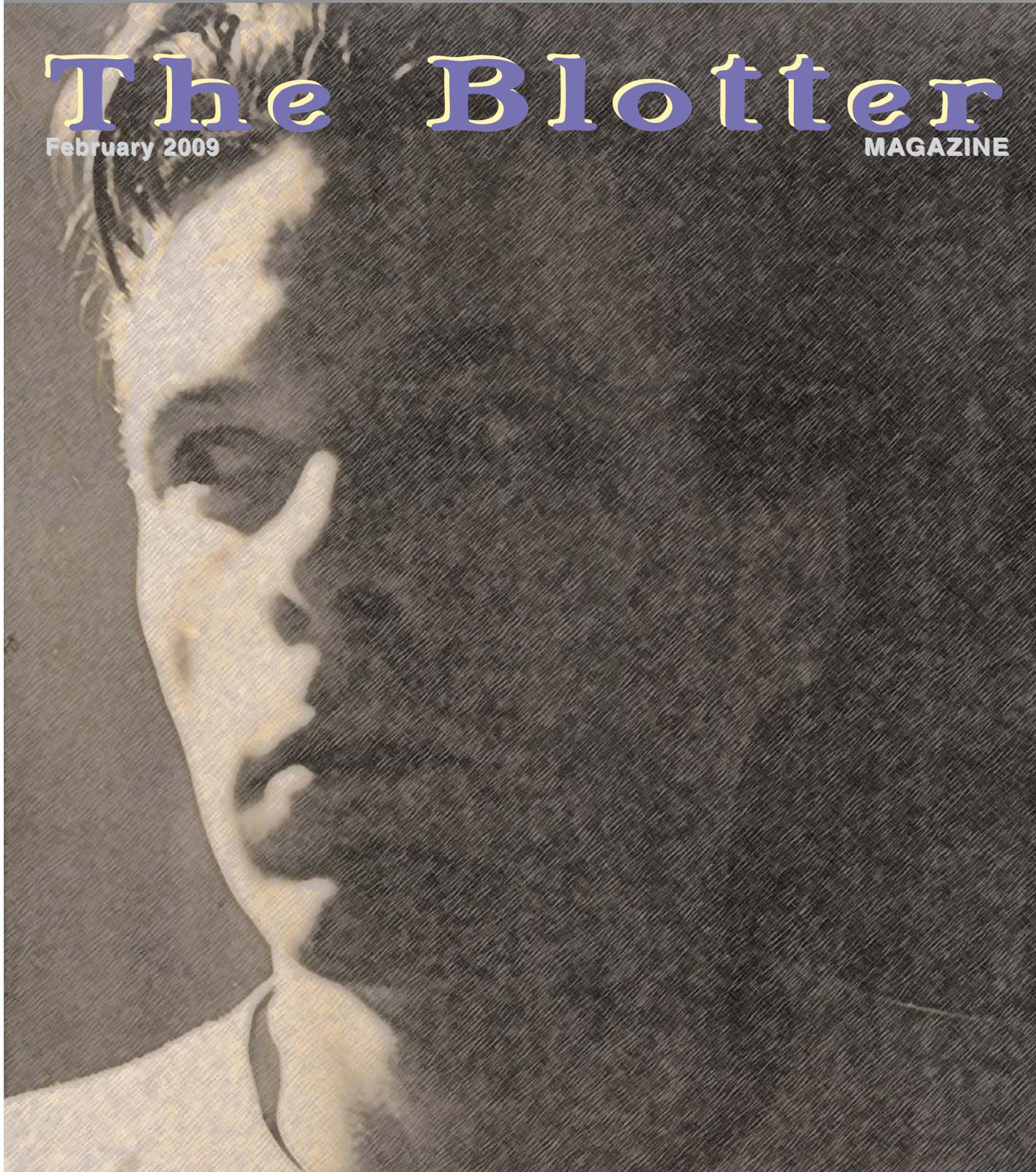


Paranoia especially for you! The howlings of Brent Powers; The plainsong of Hannah M. Sweetser; the whispers of Ashok Niyogi; a new Staccato, and The Dream Journal. Embrace it, why doncha?

The Blotter

February 2009

MAGAZINE



THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE

visit www.blotterrag.com

G. M. Somers.....Editor-in-Chief
Martin K. Smith.....Publisher-at-
Large, Treasurer
Matthew Boyd.....Micro-fiction
Editor
Lewis Copulsky.....Publishing
Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Director of
Development
Marilyn Fontenot.....Marketng Guru
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Advertisers and Subscriptions Contact:

Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:

Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com
919.933.4720 (business hours only!
you may call for information about
snail-mail submissions)

You know, I still can't believe you expect
press releases. It's only sixteen pages, for
pity's sake.

Cover art: "What's that? Put that
down!" from family archives.

Unless otherwise noted, all content
copyright 2009 by the artist, not the
magazine.

The Blotter is a production of
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

"Read Like Nobody's Grading"

I like to read. Books mostly, and the stories, poems and essays of submissions. Sorry, only the rare newspaper, and my three magazine subscriptions – *Poetry*, *Natural History*, and *Progressive Farmer* (this last one is admittedly an oddity). My sister thinks I'm dumber than I might be because I read a lot of novels, and I get my news from Yahoo. She has no time for frivolity in her efforts to be very, very, *very* smart (she's only up to two veries, so far).

And she may be right. But in my defense, I didn't read everything that my teachers and English professors assigned back in the day, and I'm playing a bit of catch-up. *War and Peace*. First of all, did you know that Tolstoy is one tough road? I'm damned if there isn't all this French in it. Sure, it's translated at the bottom of the page, but boy does that derail your train, eyes bopping up and down on the page instead of the normal left-to-right. And it's a heavy mother, so between it and the cat both trying to rest on my chest at night, old Gettysburg has to go. And he's not happy about it, either.

But I read books and here's how it works. My good friend John and I have a rule of thumb. We always have at least five books that we've opened and engaged. One is Work – the book needs to be one you must know, either for research or as an assignment, or something like that. One is Play – a fun book that has no particular intellectual value. Call it "fluff" if you want. One may be Candy – a book you've read before that deserves a second or third go-round. One is Tough Fiction – Ulysses or Proust or a volume translated from the Russian or something like that. Poetry counts here, too. And one book must be non-fiction. In this way we never reach a point where we're not reading anything, or disappointed that we've just finished a really good read and now have nothing on the plate, or finished a tough story and have nothing with which to lighten up.

What are my current five? Well, *W&P*, like I said, is my Tough Fiction. After it, (ha!) I'm going to go through the collected poems of John O'Hara. The newest Kathy Reichs "Bones" book is my Play – no offense intended because I am learning more about forensics than my creative writing professor in college would have imagined I had capacity for – but this is still my fun "sneak in a couple of pages in the library (bathroom)" book. My non-fiction is *The Long March* by Sun Shuyun – a history of the Red Army's fight with the Nationalists across the breadth of China in the mid-1930's. My "work" book is *HTML for Dummies* – which may not be built quite dumb enough for me. I may have to track down *An Idiot's Guide to HTML* or a rare, collectable copy of *Please Put Down The HTML And Step Away From The Computer With Your Hands In Plain Sight, Fool*. I'll follow it with *The Messenger* by Markus Zusak. My candy-repeat is *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* by Susanna Clarke which is superbly crafted prose and sort-of like Harry Potter for grown-ups.

I have another rule that I learned somewhere back in my youth from a teacher who was wiser than my lack of recollection of a name implies. He or she told me to always give a book a thirty-five page chance. One shouldn't expect to be "into" a book before that – with characters, place, plot and pacing fully developed – and if you read that far and it still hasn't hooked you, well you gave it everything it deserved. In other words, books are not movies – looking at ten minutes before you fast-forward or ask for your money back just won't do it.

Recently, I heard the words “junk food” used in context with music. Someone made the claim that an intellectually healthy person needs to be influenced by different types of music – that to pick any one type and that alone is to consume the intellectual equivalent of junk food. Arguably, classical music probably is never junk food, but then there are those who would say that jazz probably isn’t either, nor the blues. So can rock ‘n roll – a natural progression from those styles – be junk food? I think that it is more likely that we need some from all of these styles – these intellectual food groups – to be the most well-rounded, *in the best shape*, if you will. And I carried the metaphor over into reading. Man does not live by magazines alone, or newspapers, or comic books. Or ghost-written autobiographies, or penny-dreadfuls, or political thrillers, or magical realism. Take some of each and move down the aisle, is my advice.

Personally, I’m worried about the economy because, among other reasons, I think that it will affect the publishing industry in ways that will prevent eclectic (read “potentially less-profitable”) work from making way to print, and the independent book publishers from remaining open and viable and keeping the interesting and unusual on their shelves. I regret somewhat that self-publishing is not considered “publishing” by the publishing industry (really? No way!) and that it withholds that brilliant shining moment from a new author, when a publisher says “we wish to publish you.” On the other hand, it’s terrific that self-publishing is no longer referred to as “vanity” publishing, with all the negative connotations that totes with it in double-fistfuls. It turns out that, in the end, self-publishing is just the method for accomplishing the goal of connecting writer to readers, and what’s wrong with that? The self-published volume is not necessarily less sophisticated than Viking or Penguin, just less complicated a path to market. Aspiring authors who craft a book, lovingly edit it (or go out and find help with editing – no harm with team efforts), get creative with layout and art, and pay for printing, deserve a chance at an audience. And I didn’t necessarily want all of my reading decisions made by a Bennett Cerf or Maxwell Perkins.

So take a gander at self-publishing/marketing sites like Lulu or XLibris – there are folks putting books in them thar hills. You’ll have to do your homework – they’re still Amazon’s kid sisters in terms of reviews/blurbage/browsing, but combine them with downloadability to tools like Amazon’s “Kindle” device, and you can carry around a complete library – your own “rule of five” and your best friend’s as well – for very little do-re-mi, after the initial cost of the Kindle, of course. Books, and publishing, are going in a neat direction, say I.

It’s almost Spring here in Calinky and thoughts always turn to the soil, to the earth from which we all were born and to which we will eventually return. I’m thinking about pole-beans and tomatoes and staring at the little packages of seeds in the Southern States store. Soon I will let the guinea hens out to investigate their stomping grounds and to eat the new batch of deer-ticks and yellow-jackets. I’ve also been thinking about The Blotter in 2009. It will be nice to sit in the woods, leaning against a tree, reading poems and stories, looking at pictures. With The Blotter, there’s a keen satisfaction in helping find voices and shapes and giving them a place. I enjoy planning each issue as much as I enjoy anything that resembles gardening. There are worse things to do, that’s for sure.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

We often use Bobco fonts, copyrighted shareware from the Church of the Subgenius. Prabob. We also use Mary Jane Antique and other free-ware fonts from Apostrophic Labs and other fonts from other sources.



The Blotter Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is published in the first half of each month and enjoys a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re. same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

*Brevior saltore cum
deformibus mulieribus et
vita.*

"Blues for Deedee"

by Brent Powers

In the town of Wichita Falls Without The Water (it's not too far from London, Missouri, if that helps any) I was once left in the dooryard of Deedee Cushmar tied up in a wheelchair naked by my peers. One of these latter announced my presence by firing off his big old Buntline Special a couple three times and then the gang of them ran away into the night like the cowards that they were.

It was Deedee herself who came to the door and seeing me she showed no surprise.

"I figured it would be something like this bringing us together at last."

"I had not," I confessed. "I was hoping for me wearing a white sport coat and a pink carnation and you in some low cut thing and we would go to dinner and a movie and make out while we

were watching it except for during the parts where there was car chases and later I'd take you home and try to obtain a sexual experience. Probably would get my hand inside the low cut part of your dress at least because that's why you wore it: in order to make the sumptuous breast ballooning out of it more available to the explorations of my young scientific hand, which hopes to join my mind some day in the pursuit of surgery or something prestigious and remunerative like that. I was hoping along those lines. I guess you were not."

"I was not hoping for anything, Iron Brento," she said loftily (she was floating somewhat above the floor of the entryway on the wings of song or something). "I said I had been expecting."

"Figured' is what you said," I corrected her. "But farewell it for more immediately I have need of

some coverage of my person at this point, and to be released from bondage."

"I ain't gonna give you no white sport coat," she huffed, and this action somehow brought her so that her feet rested on the floor. I liked her better that way.

"Look, angel baby, just reach in yon closet and yank something off a hanger," I implored. "I don't care if it's a white sport coat. It can be of another color, even brown. Or it could be some different kind of clothing, or not clothing at all but curtains which are normally used to undisclosed our criminal hyenas from the eyes of men. Hell, I'll settle for your father's evil old Masonic robes if it comes to that. Just do something for me before the whole neighborhood knows what a huge and wondrous penis I have. Only you should know that, for it was only meant for you. I came into this life with such a weapon in order to wield it against the great hoards of your resisting angels who, even as we speak, encircle your secret parts with deleted expletives which are effective against men of lesser prowess, but Iron Brento? Nope. Not against Iron Brento. For he is not like unto those others. He is of a different order of being. Iron Brento



106 South
Charlton Street
Hillsborough,
N.C. 27278
919 / 732-2555
www.
bluebayouclub.
com

descended from Transcendent Heights, rolling down the eponymous Falls Without Water, and that is a hard life experience, far worse than being tied into a wheel chair naked and without recourse, exposed so to his heart's desire. I didn't want it to be this way, Deedee, I swear unto you upon my gold records. Really, I do."

"Am I to expect this kind of verbosity throughout the course of our relationship?" Deedee wondered. She had thus far made no move toward scissors or closet, toward rescue of Iron Brento from his deplorable condition of Shame in the Neighborhood, incidentally, but just stood there, just stood there. Iron Brento could learn to hate her for such things in future. He took note of it in the book and volume of his brain, filing it under "Assholery", but only because that folder was closer to the front. Iron Brento was famous for his laziness.

"Well, no," I promised her. "I mean I can be quite taciturn if you wish. Indeed, it is my preference to be so. I can sit for hours in my lonely porch swing, watching the play of phenomena and not commenting on it at all. I say nothing of what I behold. I simply shut up and take it like a man. And you know what a bitch the play of phenomena can be. Bats and bird shit, leaf blowers, salsa music and the plaintive

trumpeting of elephants seeking Truth. Even you must have suffered thus. In a porch swing. Alone. Yet I could join you there and things would be better. We could make out. We could touch each other and finally, with utter abandon, get it on with a will. Might even knock the God damned thing off the porch and end up humping in the grass. Do you like to hump in the grass, Deedee?"

"Nah. I'm the back seat of a four hole Buick type gal, myself," she confessed, looking back longingly into her desperate past, which she had invented whilst stroking that part of herself which felt best being stroked. "You got a Buick?"

"I have," Iron Brento confessed. "'Twas given to me by Bob Big Boy de France, who is the founder of this town. When he saw that I was a man who obeyed the secret promptings of his penis he figured I could use a Buick in which to deploy that instrument, the penis, most musically, for the Buick is known to provide a very effective reverb when the penis would sing, which only the best do, while they are going about their lugubrious work. So now, Deedee. Find us a towel or something. Untie me from this unkind horse and we shall go then, you and I, and see if we can find my Buick, nestled among its parking tickets, in some dark wood of gas guzzling Hummers.

Once found, we shall drive away into the night, find a beach or a bowling alley abandoned long ago by the gods, a barnyard swarming with orgone, a vast Samadhi Tank of Young Love. I don't care, baby cakes, let's get cracking."

"I gotta finish my trig," she warned. "You'll have to let me do my trig first. In the Buick. With the lights on. I mean the light inside the car so I can see all the meaningless symbols. Maybe you could help me with it. Can you do trig?"

"Deedee," I said. "I'll do anything. Anything. Just ..."

She slammed the door.

Son of a bitch. She was leading me on all along. For soon there were sirens, then police cars, policemen included. They leaped from their vehicles and rolled me away into a paddy wagon which was full of Irishmen who had once been snakes. I was set down among thieves and liars, pimps who had peed in half the pools of Phoenix, only half, no more, and men whom I would come to know over the years of hard bondage, making little ones out of big ones, and providing you with some of your finest blues. Who could ask for more?



“Proof of Non-existence”

by Brent Powers

Since the turn of the century I have come forward in print several times and twice in PBS interviews to announce that my work with Ernesto Puddle-Brown has come to an end; indeed, that he, Ernesto Puddle-Brown, erstwhile fabricator of distinguished fictions, is himself a fiction. The man never existed at all. I invented him. He is a “made up story”, as Mark Twain would say. His very name is whimsy, what is called “found object art”, for I had been out at the local zoo with my children one day and as they oohed and ahed at our one pathetic giraffe I went for a piddle in the facilities nearby and in the course of it espied there scribbled upon the hideous and filthy blue linoleum floor a message from some folk historian letting us in on the little known fact that “Ernesto puddle brown here”. I suppose this was important to someone. I didn’t think it was me at the time. But later, after I

had put my children to bed, for no reason at all I set about writing a novel. I have no idea what compelled me. I had never written anything but school papers and of course a thesis which sees no reason why it should be completed, hence goes on over the years in fits and starts, is revised, advised upon, returned as half eaten hard copy or a file strip mined with edits and corrupted by expletives. Began, I say. The novel. Actually, I finished the thing in one sitting, working like one possessed for the remainder of the night. Then, when my children arose and called for their breakfast I told them to fuck off. I never say such things. By dinner time of the following day, after the kids had decided to return to their mother, I was thoroughly wrung out and twitching like some insect that had escaped repeated hammerblows from a giant gleeful boy who drools. I wondered who

I was and what I had done. For here was printout shooting onto the floor in a rush. Here were pages and pages of single spaced lunacy having nothing to do with me, resembling nothing I had ever thought or envisioned, definitely nuttso and dissociated, I say, for I am not like this, no, not at all. Even though I wrote it with my own two fingers and put the whole package before a literary agent at some point, still I could not lay claim to the work as my own, so I signed it off as that of one Ernesto Puddle-Brown, half joking, I think. No, not half.

The rest is well known.

But really. Really. Must I point out the absurdity of this whole affair? Nova Burbank, for instance. In the bio I prepared for him, I said that Ernesto was born in this undistinguished town in southern California, where he attended the Walt Disney Elementary School, James Dean Jr. High and ... and ... for heaven’s sake, the Bob Dylan Post Bop Preparatory School of Disaffiliation! And now, although certain people have come forward claiming to live in this town, to have attended the institutions mentioned, nay, indeed, to have attended them *with* Ernesto (some of the co-eds go so far as to confess to having had carnal knowledge of him,



CARRBY BURRITOS
Burritos, Tacos, Nachos and Margaritas!

Mon thru Sat 11am-10pm - Closed Sunday - 933.8226
711 W Rosemary St. Carrboro www.carrburritos.com

one to have been sent off to Tajunga bearing his child); indeed there is even a website, maps, historical landmarks, homes of dead movie stars. There are elected officials with pictures and bios. There are plaques everywhere: "Here Puddle-Brown Came To Understanding," or, "This is where he felt up Sue." Video clips abound. I do not recognize the man starring in them. He is tall and stupid. He blinks geekishly. There is a photo of him in the downtown library, smelling a book. He is strange and ugly. If I knew him, I'm sure I'd punch him in the arm.

Then there are the books. Dreadful. Unreadable. Yet I wrote them. Why?

My son has been watching me as I work here in my fat chair. I have a fat chair and I often sit in it, scribbling away. My son watches. This is the younger. My firstborn shows no interest in what I do. He looks at space boys whirling across a vast screen which I installed myself. For him. My firstborn. To shut him up at last.

"What are you writing, Dadster?" the younger one asks.

"I am writing my obituary," I tell him.

"But isn't that when you're dead?"

"Well, I can't wait."

"What's it like?"

"I'll let you know when I've finished."

"Don't. OK?"

"All Right."

And so. To continue.

When Puddle-Brown first started writing he did so because of "the bitchin sounds the words made when you put them together and shook them in a bag." He was often asked about the subject of his work. He became defensive at such times. "Who cares?" he would say, returning one question with another.

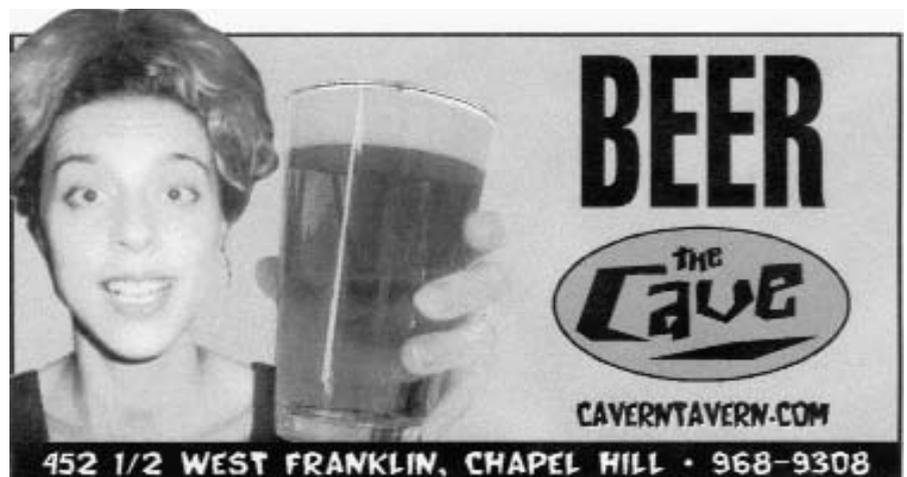
A second common inquiry – now imagine, if you will, a weary old English professor at a city college somewhere, looking over his glasses at the slouching, chain smoking Puddle-Brown, at the medium sized young man who seemed to feel he was casting a great shadow behind him – although sometimes to the fore, when the sun was at his back, that is, so that he seemed to be walking into a Great Darkness which was ever out of reach, for as he moved on so did the shadow, always just a little bit ahead and never making itself available to him as some-

thing into which he might be absorbed, become one with, hence be known as, say, Puddle-Brown, that Great Shadow of a Man. Anyway, this old prof asks, quite reasonably enough, "What are you trying to *express* here? What does it all mean?"

"Well, it's music, you know. It's like music. What does music mean?" Puddle-Brown replied, looking contemplatively out of the window at a cloud shaped like an osteopath.

He directed the professor's attention to it by hoisting his prominent chin and making jabbing motions with it toward the window and saying, "Yon cloud."

"That is not a cloud," the professor said impatiently, "but Philips, my osteopath, waiting to escort me to his surgery. He thinks I need to be taller, you see, to improve my self image. He hopes to do this by means of bone grafts and I just can't seem to dissuade him. Yet I am hoping to wait him out, you see. That is why I am indulging this driv-



The Blotter

you've handed in to me in lieu of a paper."

"Shall I whack him for you?" Puddle-Brown asked mildly.

The prof of course feigned outrage.

"Puddle-Brown, sir, we do not whack people at this institution."

"Very well, then," Puddle-Brown said, taking up his books, papers, supplies, etc. "I'm gonna go get me a tall grape juice, maybe even a burger with tomato, lettuce and many onions, extra mayo, get the picture? Bring you something?"

The professor considered.

"On the other hand ... *outside the gates*," he said in an emphatic stage whisper. "Anything can happen – outside of this institution, sir. Even to clouds."

"You mean – *osteopaths*," Puddle-Brown said, raising one eyebrow (the other followed, ruining the effect he was striving for).

"It could mean a passing grade," the professor insinuated.

"I could find it in my heart to – invest meaning where there is none, Mr. Puddle-Brown. None whatever."

However, seeing no reason to work his way through school as a hit man, he stayed home and wrote with the aid of a grant from his parents, completing two enormous autobiographical novels, entitled simply *Number One* and *Number Two*. Nothing happens in either of them. That's because nothing had happened to him in his life. It was only when he stopped writing autobiography that he began to truly live.

He left home and became a film inspector. He had sex with many chicks. He performed feats of Black Magick against exploitative management, who suffered hemorrhoids, flat tires and obesity, not to mention the poisonous wind blasting from Puddle-Brown's mouth when he spoke.

"We had expected a nice guy when we hired you," they explained. They were wearing gas masks and heavy gloves when they delivered his notice of dis-

missal as of this moment through a slot in the quarter inch bullet proof glass which separated them from their employees. "Instead we get Judgment, Sore Boils. We get ugly dreams of an ophthalmologist..."

"Osteopath."

"What?"

"It's an osteopath. Check the job code tattooed on his forehead."

"You sure about that, son?"

"Yep."

"OK. Osteopath. Evil dreams of an osteopath wandering fields of dry ice fumes, wailing, 'Bone crushing defeat to Puddle-Brown. Stop Puddle-Brown. Eat his people. Challenge his product with science. Fuck him where he blinks.' We choose to view these dreams as Prophecy, Injunction from the Higher Self. Hence we fire your ass out of here."

But I am running away with myself here.

I wrote two more novels and a slew of short pieces under his name. In less than a decade I

Looking for an Artist?

find a great artist @...

Are you an Artist?

expose yourself @ ...

...The Raleigh Artist.com

www.theraleighartist.com



The Nightbound Show

Weekly internet radio
featuring **your**
music, poetry, essays
& short stories

listen + submit
nightsound.com/radio

moved from cult status to raves in the NYR, nominations for this and that, one win, even an appearance on That Woman's Show. I couldn't go myself of course so I tracked down an actor who looked the way I imagined he would but more importantly he had just the right manner; it was a sort of sleepy, distracted manner, as of someone who had been bored with life before he could even walk. And when the Woman – her lips glistened with starbursts and her teeth filled the world – after having asked a lot of silly questions which received the sort of laconic swamp sounds they deserved, finally got around to a zinger, that is, "Do you believe in God?" he said in a most wonderfully bland way, "I don't see why I should." I loved that. I paid a bonus for it.

But here's how I killed him off. You'll like this. I like it, too.

At the very summit of his fame, at a point when his work had become required reading in certain university courses, and I had been offered an enormous

advance by my publisher to write something that he gave me every encouragement to tart up with all the colorations of hagiography, Puddle-Brown climbed into his MG and drove as fast as he could right into the Pacific Ocean. The moon was full and there was a fluorescent tide composed of micro-organisms which are radioactive or something. The Santa Anna winds had cleared the air of all our follies. The gods jubilated, radios blared. Puddle-Brown felt in those last moments that he should be making out with somebody instead of doing this, some blonde named Paula Gross, or Maria Magdalena Woods, although he liked Shelly better. But no, but no. He had to go and suicide in an MG, shooting off the side of a cliff as though he would achieve the vaunted escape velocity – a coming close – closer – then a long pause – what's he gonna do now, sportsfans? – alas falls, he goes WHEEEEE! like a kid on a rollercoaster as the water nears and there is an explosive sound, rivaling the tide's own ravings,

followed by bubbles, smaller and smaller (are they tiny yet? you may well ask; I believe so, yes, tiny by now, one would hope, he had so long hoped to be rid of himself, you have no idea what a drag it was for him to be) and finally there is darkness and silent stars, a snoring as of a beached whale saying forgive us, forgive – and dies, alas. Dies ...

But I have suffered a nose-bleed. My children are seeing to it. These pages are covered with crimson drops, very lovely. They've been put to sleep by now. To bed, I mean. My children, the real ones, and Puddle-Brown, the which *n'exist pas*, never did, sorry. There are space boys howling across the screen. They say things like Mofu and Sucky Day. Loud, and in High Definition.

[MS. is end here. Mr. Powers have working on it when he shoot. I have done my best to sew corners together for good matching but sometimes unavoidable fucked up. Little book open before sleeping screen which if awakened have all on desktop with the famous last words: "I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU THINK. ALL YOU SEE IS THE DIRT IN YOURS EYES." -ed.]



Taverna Nikos

at Brightleaf Square
Greek & Mediterranean Cuisine

Lunch: Monday - Friday, 11 to 3
Dinner: Monday - Saturday, 5 to 10

Reservations accepted

905 West Main St, Durham, N.C. 27701
919 / 682-0043



“The Mask”

by Hannah M. Sweetser

There had been no mask shop when I was younger. Before Mr. Delligatti showed up, the building was a dingy little bar that could barely fit a piano in it. Smoke used to lace the ceiling as bums traded their pocket lint for a pint of water with a hint of beer. The lights, neon back then, buzzed overhead as faces were illuminated by the snap of a lighter. Gray, ashen, hollow. My dad was there, drunk. He couldn't see me as I looked at him from across the street.

Then the owner had to sell the bar out of debt and Mr. Delligatti showed up in a corduroy suit with a gold cross beating at his heart. Or maybe it was dirt-worn jeans and snakeskin boots. I didn't care at the time, and always kept my head down as I passed, only looking up enough times to see it had closed for renovations. Neighboring shops snooped around for any hint of this mys-

terious stranger's profession, wondering if he would dare attempt to take away some of their business, but no one knew anything. Not even me.

I was working down at Bea's Apple as a busboy at the time when, one morning before work, I noticed something different about the closed shop across the street. A wooden sign dangled from an iron pole where the neon sign once sat. On its sides were two figures, masks, one laughing, and the other crying. I didn't know what to think of it until I heard my coworkers chatting during their break time.

“Did you see that-that... thing above the old Bailey place? It's so old fashioned!” said Esther in her usual whiny voice. She had a bad past with the whack church just outside of town so none of us told her about her weird high pitched voice that bugged the heck out of everyone, including the customers. I kept my head down and at my work, not letting them know I was eavesdropping. As if they cared enough to notice the fellow with the lower job of not breaking the plates in the first place.

“Yeah, you'd think the guy was a freaking foreigner with that type

of sales technique. What in the world is he selling, any way? Theatre equipment?” said Tina, another high-and-mighty who smoked in the break room, poisoning it for all the rest of us. They moved from the subject, babbling about their recent scores on a business test they shared at AU, but my thoughts drifted away to the old bane of downtown Apple, my dad, and what type of store would take its place. I stuffed the last of the dinnerware into the dishwasher, a dangerous thing building in my gut. Hope.

Opening day was July 15, the same as The Core's famous Swing Night. It was only because of my dunce-like ability on the dance floor that I wasn't by the side of some sweet girl, snapping my fingers to the music, but, instead, was walking down the street with the far away music as static in my ears, cursing my genes as I scuffed my way down the lamplit sidewalk. It was then that I noticed that one shop had kept its lights on when all the others had closed for the evening event. I paused for a moment as I saw a thin man under the familiar mask sign, leaning back on his heels while his head turned in every direction as if looking for someone. By what I could see

Haircuts • Color • Highlights

ALTERED IMAGE

Hair Designers

1113½ Broad Street
Durham, N.C. 27705 **919-286-3732**

Over twenty years at your service

Redken • Paul Mitchell • Rusk

from the street and display window lights, he wore a streaked dark apron over a white collared shirt and khakis. My old curiosity peaked, that dangerous thing called hope clenching my stomach as I crossed the street to say hello.

The old man's eyes lit up when he saw me and instantly I was rushed with a thousand pleasantries as he grasped my hand and shook it heartily in his bony fingers while speaking through a thick, unusual accent. "You come? Opening night? Bello! Lovely! Fantastico!"

The smile that illuminated his face baffled me as he opened the store door. I still don't know what it was about his manner that amazed me so much as I stood, shocked, my simple worries forgotten before the gaping door. Out of his bowed skeletal figure, liver-spotted bald head, and overwhelmingly large nose, that smile pulled his face muscles into an eagerness that I could only match in the expression of a child, and a father. I stepped onto the carpeted threshold and looked around.

I must have gasped, for he stepped behind me, exclaiming with pride. "They speak to you, yes?"

Before me were a hundred visages, eyeless and beautiful. They danced across the length and

width of the short walls, laughing, snarling, weeping, screaming in a blaze of color and festivity. For one second, I forgot my dad, his one-night stand with my mother, and those heart-torn years I spent looking for him. Unlike my father, there were no blemishes in their undying faces as they looked infinitely into space, carrying voiceless secrets that passed through my body with an icy shudder.

"Yes." I said, my voice hoarse as I finally found it somewhere in a rusting corner of my mind. It sounded tinny and weak among all these empty lungs that whispered in a rapid's rage around me.

I heard sniffing behind me. When I turned to Mr. Delligatti, I found him wiping his nose with a large handkerchief, his dark eyes bright with tears. I didn't know what to say, my mouth open, unable to contemplate a single word in consolation for his

tears. What had I said, "Yes" to? *They speak to me.*

I began to think of my dad and his friends who once sat here where I stood now, draining their conflicts with the emptying of their glass mugs, setting their problems down in a flick of the wrist at an ashtray. Were these their faces? Were these the faces of those two miserable girls with all the problems, but no common sense? Was that dad I never saw staring down at me now? I lost myself, unsure of my footing as I shifted in my place, my eyes wandering to where I worked across the street, past the watering eyes of the shop owner into that empty face of a restaurant in which, without people, was simply a place.

If there was something in my hand, I would have set it down. If there had been a chair behind me, I would have sat in it. But, there was nothing but the sales counter further down the room



The Blotter

and a wall between the door and the display window that was blocked by the shop owner, who now was putting away his handkerchief in one of his pant pockets. I shifted my feet again nervously, putting my head down.

The room was quieter now, the rush of my first impression fallen to a trickle of sound. Mr. Delligatti smiled at me, his eyes sharp and clear, his back straighter, and with that childish smile, renewed, hopeful.

“You get it. You really do,” he said. Then, he left me for the sales counter where there was a chair waiting for him. My eyes began to wander through the mask shop. I spotted a lion growling in a fury of glittering gold as it dangled from the ceiling on an invisible string. On the far wall a phoenix screamed in joy at its own resurrection, bursting with red and gold and orange as it sat beside a horned demon that grimaced at its excitement. Aside to my left, a geisha wept, her make-up blurring on an oval face among a peasant’s frown and a child that laughed with glee. I

sifted through the faces, insecurity twisting at my gut as I walked up to different ones, unsure, undecided, my eye always seeing some flaw, some imperfection now as I drew closer to them. But, then, it caught my eye. I stepped up to it and touched its perfectly smooth face, fascinated, enraptured. This was the mask.

I bought it, a full face with no decoration or color; it was just white. There was no expression on its face, yet in that there was every expression. Mr. Delligatti chuckled at the sight of my choice, saying, “Some would call that *alesaggio*—eh, how you say—boring.”

I looked at him, then at the mask, some hard thing cracking in my heart as I stared into those empty eyes, a vision of blue passing through them and replied, my face tight, “No, it’s... perfect.”

He looked at me for a moment; then, he began to call it up, a knowing grin hinting in his cheek. I don’t remember the payment or the quick farewell to the shop, yet, as I stepped out of the store, I remembered hearing the

swing music in the distance. I let it fall to the back of my mind, and took out my purchase from its plastic bag, pondering on it in the lamp light. I didn’t think of my dad and his disappointments; I only thought of its promising face and incredible secrets. It wasn’t just perfect, it was fascinating, I thought as I looked at the vision, its countenance tightened with thoughtfulness. A smile tugged at its lips.

Few people think about that opening day now. The mask shop became part of the town the next day, as regular as the restaurant next door or the Sweet Shoppe around the corner. When it wasn’t making enough money to stay afloat, the people of Apple made it a miniature museum. Mr. Delligatti is there, older now, still smiling, those peerless eyes searching for the people who see so much more than plaster in the decorated masks he crafts for them.



Noah's Ark Kennel and Cattery Boarding & Grooming

1217 East Franklin Street, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514
Telephone: (919) 932-7322

Hours:

Mon & Fri: 8 am - 5 pm

Tues - Thurs: 8 am - 4 pm

Sat: 8 am - 3 pm, Sun: pick-up by appt.

Owner/Manager
Lynn Patterson

CREATIVE METALSMITHS

Kim Maitland

117 E. Franklin St., Chapel Hill
919-967-2037

www.creativemetalsmiths.com

Weekdays 11 - 6 • Saturdays 10 - 5 • Sundays 12 - 5

"I Am Not Taking off this Hat"

by Erin Coyle

"I said take it off. We don't allow hats in school."

I stared defiantly into her eyes, deciding how best to usurp her authority.

"I am not taking it off. It's part of my religious right."

"Religion? Child, what religion says you suddenly need to wear a hat?"

"It's not a hat." I argued. "It's a tam and it's Bob Marley's birthday and I am honoring his memory today by covering my head."

"Bob Marley?" she retorted. "That ain't a religion; that was a person."

"He was a Rastafarian and I am choosing to honor Rastafarian tradition."

She laughed. I hadn't been hassled in any of my other classes, but Ms. Simmons was such a bitch. She should have just let it be, because now she had me fired up. I had to crush her.

"Well, I have never seen a white Rastafarian child. So I say take the hat off or take your little white ass to Dr. Crumley's office."

The principal, Dr. Crumley, had seen me before, so what did I care? I got up from my seat. The kids all looked at me—snickering. "If you step out that door, I'll fail you. Do you want that on your permanent record?" All I could think of was the line from a Violent Femmes song, "This will go down on your permanent record."

"Nothing's forever." I smarted back as I walked out the door.

I sat down in the chair outside Dr. Crumley's office. He stepped out and looked down at me sternly. He used to be a drill sergeant in the army—shaved head, grey suit. I looked up at him sheepishly. "Come in Erin." I sat down in front of his large, imposing desk. "So, Ms. Simmons' class, huh?"

"Yes sir." I answered obediently.

"And what's the problem?" I explained the whole Rasta-birthday-hat situation in as professional and intelligent a way as possible.

He looked at me, nodding and frowning. "Ok, Erin. Write an essay about the religious significance of covering one's head and submit it to me tomorrow. And we'll just take it from there. You can go."

I thanked him and headed for the door. "Oh, and Erin," he said, "get up, stand up, stand up for your rights."

Staccato Microfiction

is the effervescent adamantine, so to speak, of
Staccato Magazine,
Matthew Boyd, Editor.

Submissions, five hundred (500) words or less,
to staccatomag@yahoo.com.

"SOUTH TAHOE"

just yesterday
we walked down Stateline Boulevard
grandchild in tow
this American daughter of ours
leading us to the beach snow

between the puddles I beseeched
"mermaid don't abandon me now
so much water has flown by the Don"

the park benches are at a level
with eyes that see patterns
the sun makes on the Tahoe water
sea gulls bob up and down
with the afternoon

now the Nevada sun is a narcotic
two souls sit erect
feet frozen into puddles
left behind by ski-boots
that have taken a gondola to the peaks

in between
a bundle of unmanifested dreams
bakes and snores gently at
walkers and assorted cars and trucks passing by

there is no wind
no cloud in the California sky
blue Sierras
and time for her afternoon bottle of milk

I delight in deliriums
of rides on one horse sleighs
across snow fields
steppes
to homes made of fresh cut pine wood
beside a rail-road winding away
in another continent of opera
"don't abandon me
now we have come this far"

Three by Ashok Niyogi

"MOFUSSIL TOWN"

lacerations in my brain
from cut sugarcane
on a tractor trailer that ravages
mist above ground
but below leaf level
in poplar declared war
with childhood days
when cabbage and cauliflower
were crops of cash

now one horse carts
carry plastic garbage

monkeys watch us eat
salted and spiced guavas
after 'broad-gauge' crossed
with hostility
everybody else
overtakes the green grass
beneath lemon trees

factories belch organic smell
muezzins call on cellular phones
from modest minarets
of freshly whitewashed
green and white mosques

the asphalt is littered
with horse manure
and sugarcane husk

a dusky lady
oozes sexuality
and sits for tea
with a flashing nose-ring
and a much fondled paunch

there is hope yet
from here they will launch

"AWAY"

one more picture-postcard
 Bay day
 no memory of virtue
 no desire for vice

just yogurt and basmati rice

CONTRIBUTORS

Brent Powers has nothing to tell, except, of course, everything he has inadvertently revealed about himself and the honest nature of all things, hard-coded into his prose.

Hannah M. Sweetser sent this story to us a long time ago, and frankly we're pleased at how good it is and ashamed of how slow we are.

Erin Coyle is a Blotter-friend, and sits quietly tapping on an Apple notebook until I interrupt her. She is a good and faithful daughter and a loyal employee, understands excellent customer service but works too hard, is self-effacing and has really good ideas. That's about all I know about her.

Ashk Niyogi's poetry has blessed the Blotter pages before. He is retired, and divides time between California, US, where his daughters live and Delhi, India, where his wife is a Corporate Manager. He travels extensively in the Indian Himalayas, the Sierras, along the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. He has a book of poems TENTATIVELY and has been published extensively in print and on-line magazines and chapbooks in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Turkey, Hong Kong, Netherlands etc.

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterra.com

Something - a night-cramp in my neck, breeze in the camelias, the pesky cat waking to a tid-bit of sour kibble and selecting a chair-leg on which to sharpen his talons - reacts in the as yet not understood chemicals of my brain to place me in time-and-space which I have never occupied. Women with legs airbrushed impossibly long extracted from false memories decades archived and dusty. Childhood falls amplified into dizzying spirals towards an unearthing of my own manufacture. Rhyme and balance so out of skew that it skirts the line of comedy and lust. Who can remain asleep with such shenanigans romping the electric boogaloo in the quiescent jelly, the night sparkle, the intellectual chill-blains and suppressed madness of dream?

And so what of it? I wake, I sleep, I sometimes watch the midnight movies in my skull. I wage donnybrooks with old enemies, and chase what cannot be caught, I walk on wilder sides than I would ever in the middle of day's callous eye. My darkest loves and fears exist in privacy; my most onerous activities take their toll, then fade from recollection. Later, in dull as dishwater daylight, when I clop along the gumbly'd sidewalks, I glance in the eyes of passers-by, attempting to discern their moods brought about by intense immersion in the cool flickering waters of dream.

G - Cyberspace

Download music. Downsize cancer.



www.cytunes.org

WOMEN'S FLAT-TRACK ROLLER DERBY



NEXT HOME GAME
SATURDAY, JANUARY 24
DORTON ARENA, STATE FAIRGROUNDS
DOORS AT 5PM

OPEN TRYOUTS
SATURDAY, JANUARY 31
SKATE RANCH OF RALEIGH 2901 TRAWICK RD
TRYOUTS AT 8AM
DETAILS ON WEB SITE

★ SEASON TICKETS
NOW AVAILABLE!

CAROLINA ROLLER GIRLS.COM

Up To
\$4 OFF
ROLLER DERBY TICKETS

2 Ways to Save!

1. Redeem Online by entering **BLOT2009** in the promo code box at CarolinaRollergirls.com. \$1 OFF each adult or child ticket, up to four (4) tickets.
2. Bring this Coupon to the Box Office for \$4 OFF one (1) adult, or \$2 OFF one (1) child ticket on game day.

No substitutions or rain checks. Cannot be combined with other promotional offers. Limit one coupon per person. No cash value. No copies accepted. Expires 11/22/09.