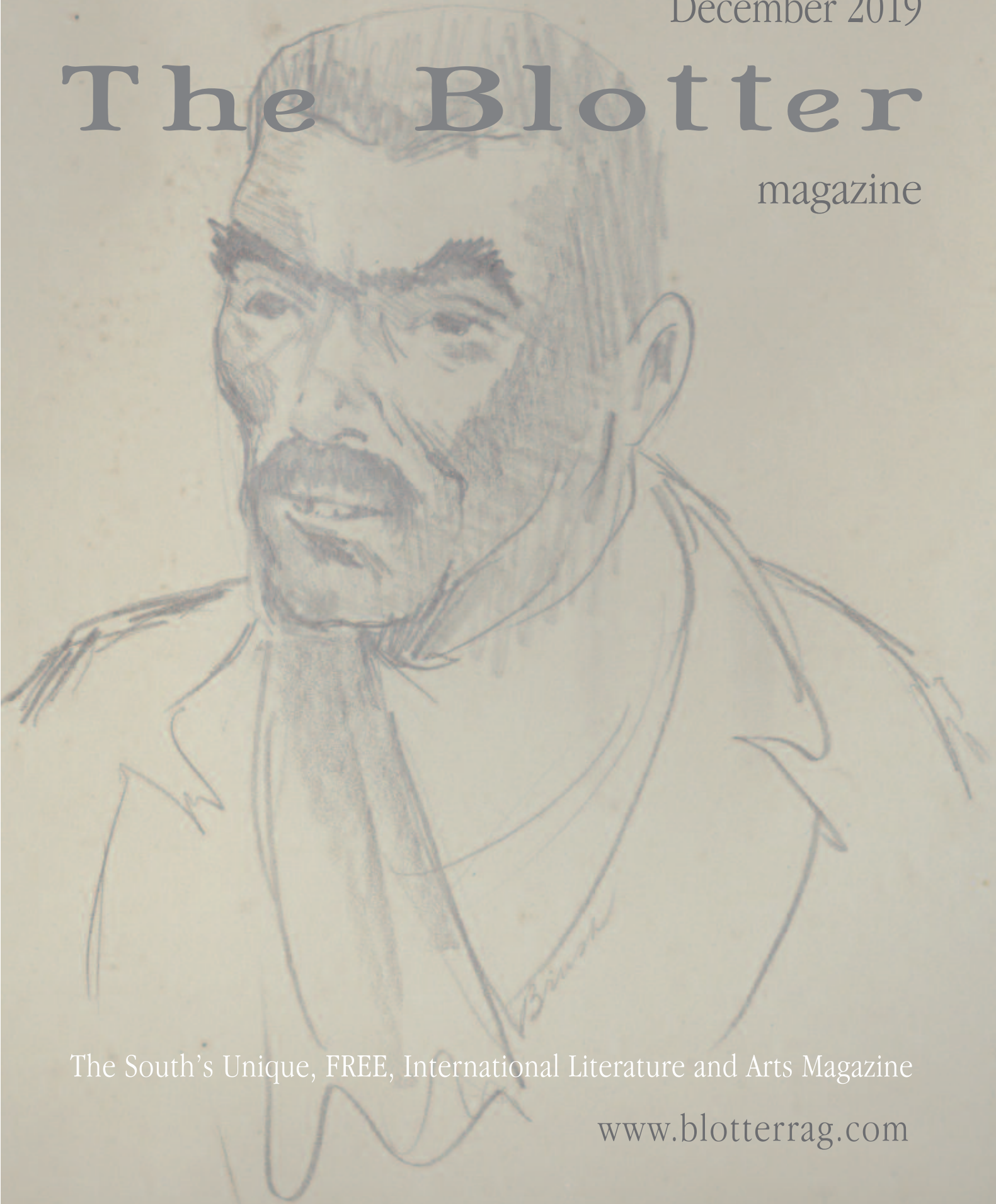


December 2019

# The Blotter

magazine



The South's Unique, FREE, International Literature and Arts Magazine

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# "Ranking"

It's that time of year again, where everything needs to be put into perspective. When we give awards for things we like. That mysterious grading of things we don't.

We are a culture of observation as much as participation. We look, comment and criticize. We *review*. Unfortunately, in my opinion, (yes, I see the hypocrisy in this sentence) one of those views that we are most satisfied with is rank. The quantification of stuff. Side by side comparison. Polls. Standings. Who's number one? Which Bachelor doesn't make the grade, won't receive a rose, a kiss, a date, or any other metaphorical prize? Who's the GOAT – which is an ironic acronym if ever there was one.

Other than in restaurants, I'm not a big fan of ordering things – except when it goes in my favor, which is rare. When I see someone's list of favorite movies, or foods or celebrities or zodiac signs or...any old thing, it reminds me that we have so much and take that quantity for granted and use our spare time to catalog it all and that's time ill-spent. It brings competition into play where it may never have been intended. And, unfortunately, competition sometimes breeds ill-will. I'm not for ill-will. None of us should be.

So, with that said, here are some selections from our "Best of" files.

## Best use of a sunny Saturday afternoon in July:

5: Watering the garden which hasn't seen rain in two weeks. Correction - sitting in a chair while someone else does it. Yes, that's way better...

4: Watering down gin with Schweppes Tonic and ice and a lime-wedge.

3: Hyperventilating, then floating face down in a pool until the lifeguard jumps in the water to rescue you, then calmly explaining that you are training to be a Navy Seal.

2: Napping in a room with the air-conditioning turned very low and the ceiling fan on, under a warm blanket, with March of the Penguins on TV with the sound turned down.

1: Watching a baseball game. With the bedroom TV down on the porch sitting on top of a refrigerator with sufficient replacement beverages in it. Every once in a while, shout "Beer, here! Getcha beer here!" like you're a vendor at Wrigley Field, and then lean forward and grab another cold one out of the fridge. Ignore your neighbors' stares, unless they come over. Then ask to see their ticket.

## Daytime TV commercials that piss me off.

5: Hernia mesh legal representation. Firstly, "hernia mesh" sounds like

someone explaining their heavy-lifting predicament while experiencing great pain through clenched teeth. Secondly, I keep thinking about firstly.

4: Warfarin. An anti-coagulant that is in my opinion the worst branded medication of all time. What nincompoop marketing type decided a medicine should accidentally be named after mankind's worst violent horror? Warfarin? Or, just as *troublin'*, maybe they thought it was a good idea.

3: *If you owe \$10,000 or more in back taxes to the government, you may be entitled to pay a fraction of that amount...* or something to that effect. Wait – who is the audience for this advertisement? Some burglar of a businessman who is cheating us all out of bridge-and-road repair? Nope – they shouldn't get a break. Some ne'er-do-well who won't get a job and keeps ripping us all off by being on welfare. Ahem. Folks like that don't accumulate ten-K in back taxes, after all. So at whom is said ad aimed? Someone who owes taxes. Earned the money, didn't pay the taxes. Should pay the taxes but didn't. Has a responsibility to do something but hasn't. Has decided to become a scofflaw. Shouldn't be given a discounted payment. Yes, yes, moving on....

2: Discount auto insurance. Why do they never talk about coverage, only about cost, with strange but memorable spokespersons/creatures? Because some people just want to be left alone to drive their car and let the chips fall where they may. I had someone explain to me once that the idiom "let the chips fall" had to do with gambling, like putting chips on the numbers and colors at the roulette table. It actually refers to chopping down a tree with an axe – and paying close attention to the task at hand, while not worrying about where the (wood) chips fall. You know, like in your eye.

1: Products aimed specifically at the senior-citizen demographic. Like reverse mortgages – using the equity you've earned in your house to pay the monthly mortgage (until you run out of equity, I guess.) Conversely, services intended to allow you to stay in your home as long as you like (until you run out of equity, I guess.) Retirement planning offerings marketed with the intent to scare the customer into thinking that their nest-egg is going to run out of equity before...they do. Selling annuities for cash *right now, to do with what you want!* Life insurance to help pay for the inevitable bills that will be there when you're no longer there. A mélange of confusing ideas for folks who may already have their fair share of confusion.

**Crazy things we do that if we were caught on camera would appall us (not including the cliché "walk through spider's web" or "trip over a pebble on the sidewalk"):**

5: Fighting with laundry. Trying to turn a partially inside-out sweater or

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in the Great State of Georgia!



The Blotter Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is an education concern. Our primary interest is the furthering of creative writing and fine arts, with the magazine being a means to that end. We publish in the first half of each month and enjoy a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

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CAUTION

*He's painfully aware that*

Two by Joan Gibb Engel

“Cordless”

*the flowers came up*  
a voice, my grandson's  
exiting plastic  
a voice in my hand  
in the white white kitchen

*the flowers came up*  
louder this time  
as to a senseless infant  
or a spider  
waiting by the downspout

then I remember  
fork-scratched earth  
a watering can  
streaked legs, pale  
seeds like packaged dust

*that's great*  
I say at last  
unable to hide  
the distance between us

## “Impromptu”

*Pack up all my cares and woe*

She is facing the music stand  
Bent forward as if to see the words  
But she knows the words  
And her voice, thin, unused  
Expresses an emotion normally hid  
Normally buried like the last  
Pair of nylons without runs

*No one here to love or understand me*

And my father, stroking the violin  
With exaggerated legato  
Must hear it in her voice  
A passion she keeps under wraps  
Like the hand gun in his shirt drawer

*Make my bed and light the light*

This is where the secret cracks the surface  
An almost smile makeup fails to cover

I'm the third party in this impromptu songfest

Pressing a flute against my pant leg  
I'm thirteen, maybe sixteen  
Old enough to hear what her voice betrays  
Old enough to have secrets of my own

## “The First Rays of Dawn”

by Dmitry Blizniuk

The first rays of dawn  
cut through the curtains,  
though the glass box of the room,  
like the sharp teeth of a circular saw.  
The mute magician of daybreak wearing an orange top hat  
saws the bedroom and us in it into pieces:  
the zigzags of arms, legs. A TV remote, a cup of tea, a book.  
The golden plankton of the dust motes  
flows like bubbles in a jug of cola,  
dances in the stuffy, overkissed air.  
Hello, the magic of a new day,  
Hello, my love!  
We can't guess what kind of future awaits us.  
A lab mouse in a forking labyrinth scratches its head with a pink paw,  
but always chooses a well-trodden, familiar path.  
Every morning, someone saws us to pieces and makes us whole again,  
like golems, like Franksteins.  
The leaden, silvered shoal of fish parts,  
letting through the embarrassed predator,  
and it can't kill us.  
-  
Your hair smells like our son's crayons.  
I like you like a pebble on which I may step now and again,  
knowing that something is hidden under it, something I don't own.  
We know each other so badly.  
We are locked in each other  
like astronauts in a space shuttle,  
and only hours of erotic training sessions  
and the chaotic aims: to be happy,  
to breed, to dissolve somehow in the mean, foul world,  
make us important to each other.  
We are an old apple tree  
and a wolfhound chained to it.  
And our future lumbers towards us  
like a fairy-tale ogre,  
and I'm not sure whether we should laugh or cry.

(translated by Sergey Gerasimov from Russian)

## “Why I Don’t Write About You”

by John Tustin

I don’t write about you  
because  
I write about love

and you carry  
no sane kind of love.

because  
I write about fealty

and you know only fealty  
to yourself.

because  
I write about remorse

and you are as remorseless  
as an insect.

because  
I write about confusion

and you dream  
in black and white.

because  
I write about passion

and it’s not a passion  
for power or possession.

because  
I write about empathy

and you step over  
the dead and dying.

and  
one dim day  
I will write  
my epitaph

and your eyes  
will bound  
to and fro

searching  
for your name  
in it.

## “Mansions of Northern Kentucky”

By Phil Huffy

But for their equally imposing neighbors,  
any of the brick manses of Garrard Street  
could offer a fine look at the confluence,  
the Ohio itself, and of course, Cincinnati.

In fact, those river views require elevation,  
so in some cases great windows, north balconies  
or porches adorn their upper stories,  
and even a few roof walks can be found.

Down at the street are the smallest of front yards,  
some about equal in depth to the sidewalk's width,  
fitting only the most basic tools of recreation  
or curious statuary to assail passers-by,

while between the homes are the slimmest of walkways,  
with side doors of humble design, and minimal room  
for trash bins or other refuse related accessories,  
and allowing simultaneous touching of adjoining buildings.

The back yards, also quite small, seem tokens,  
perhaps at one time intended for simple gardens.  
It may be imagined that household staff  
curated spinach or cherry tomatoes or piquant herbs.



## “The Company I Keep”

By Joseph Villers

I eat the dreams of others  
They are my celluloid snacks.  
I listen to their souls  
Rolling off grooves of plastic resin.  
I touch them in my mind  
With the power of a thought.  
I smell the echo of their scent  
Wafting from my skin.  
They might as well be here  
Though they never are.  
And yet they are, all of them.  
Never really alone in spirit,  
Though my body sometimes yearns for warmth.  
They surround and envelop me  
Through all the short hours.  
The best of them and never the worst.  
I taste the first kiss with my morning coffee,  
Sweet as condensed milk.  
I hear tinkling laughter in breezy trees.  
I look, but no one is there.  
If this is madness, then I thank God for it.  
To have the living kernel, frozen for all time.  
Man’s perfect moments captured,  
His failings a half-forgotten dream.  
I turn, and you’re there.

## "My Friend From The Old Days"

By John Grey

"Take a toke of this.  
Juice your head."  
That's all you've got to say.  
For chrissake.  
I've got kids now.  
Yeah, I know. Who gives a shit?  
But I have to.  
And I'm tired, tired of the old ways.  
They're over.  
They're as dead as Timothy Leary.  
I don't care if it's the best on the market,  
fresh from Mexico  
with some cabal on its tail.  
The old days are now  
more myth than fact.  
The truth is dumber than it looks.  
No, don't go all  
forlorn hippy on me.  
I have others to consider.  
They depend upon my sanity.  
Yes, I'm straight as a girder.  
It wasn't easy getting here  
and I don't plan to relapse.  
Call me numb-nuts all you want.  
Go at me with your peace-loving temper.  
Make a fist.  
But there are some that I never wish  
should see that other side of me.  
Accusing eyes are the last thing I need.  
So goodbye old friend.  
Don't look so much the tragic.

And don't call me "man"  
every second sentence.  
I'll keep on being a dumbass.  
You'll go do your thing  
as you have always done.  
I no longer have a thing,  
just sons and daughters  
and a wife with the first grey streak  
in her hair.  
Your world's as over as your 8-track deck.  
It's not my fault  
that, like your Grateful Dead tape,  
you're still mangled in it.

## “Woman With A Husband In Prison”

By John Grey

No bars, just regular windows.  
And yet, from room to room  
of her house, no regular windows,  
just solid steel bars.

Bars a-plenty for him:  
in front, behind,  
above and below.  
Nothing that could pass for a window.  
Even the morning sunrays  
come in stripes.

It's visiting day.  
More bars between them of course.  
It's like a home in conversation  
with a prison.  
They don't speak.  
They clang.

“diverging threads originating from a common point”  
by Lee Clark Zumpe

she quits her bed,	five in the morning	
washes her face,	she fingers the remote,	she rests her head against the door,
flushes the toilet;	blows her nose,	squeezes keys between numb fingers,
breakfast on the table –	checks her voicemail;	coughs as she takes another drag.
eggs toast cereal juice.	dog whimpering for food...	neighbor’s television too loud;
ham sandwich lunch;	whisky bottle hits the wall.	high heels under the coffee table,
she taps his shoulder	shadows mocking her;	she passes out on the sofa.
gently	she spits on his picture	she dreams of that long drive
his smile like the dawn.	spitefully	despondently
headlights on the pavement,	sick of window-gazing.	remembering the headlights.
dropping him at school.	headlights through the blinds:	reaching the clinic early,
she kisses his forehead –	one more late night meeting.	trying to beat the protestors,
thankful for every moment	she ignores his shrewd inventions,	trying to keep their resolve...
	declaring her independence	trying to do the right thing.

# 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.

When I dream about college days, it always comes down to not knowing my schedule: what day is it and where am I supposed to be? Was there reading I was supposed to do? How late am I? Did I wind my watch? Where's my textbook?

When I think about it, or in fact when my subconscious thinks about it for me, it's always an English class that I'm about to miss, or already have. I wonder in my wandering panic how many I've already skipped, either on purpose or by accident. Which English professor is this class, and does he or she know me (remember me?) and will I be forgiven this one (more) mistake or should I pack my things and go home and explain to Dad and Mom that I'm just not (never was) college material?

Then I am standing in the middle of my old campus, and the crowds have dispersed into classrooms like water swirling down a hundred little drains I am nearly alone except for strangers sitting on benches and walking in ones and twos. No one I know. No one to ask anything, even if I could think of the right questions.

If I leave now - just up and quit college because of my dream-confusion, how will I get all of my stuff home? The grown-up me takes over the thinking and I realize that there is nothing for me to take home, just some tee-shirts and my pillow and some books and old papers. All of that won't get me through my eventual (in real life) move away from my college town to the place where I will find my job and have a career in sales and service and the rest of my life as I muddle through to now.

Because the truth, hiding somewhere behind a tree in the college courtyard, is that I did make it to my classes, and do my homework, and study and graduate and move on. I toss this pitch to my subconscious to swing at, but it just lets it go by and chuckles at the lack of speed. You're late, it says. You've missed another assignment. Damn.

I might as well find out if I can get to my next class – history? Where is that schedule of mine? Why is there nothing relevant in my pockets - a key, a wallet, a comb, a piece of paper that tells me where to go. Is it almost lunch time? Are all of the guys in the cafeteria? I'd better hurry.

A stranger thought for this moment in my dream. I wish that we had had backpacks in those days – where all of my work would have been in one place and I could relax and just talk to my friends and then run to my next class.

— DS - cyberspace

## Contributors

**Joan Gibb Engel** writes, "My poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Comstock Review*, *Under a Warm Green Linden*, *Terra Nova*, *Cutthroat* and elsewhere. I divide my time between the two extremes of Tucson, Arizona and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan."

**Dmitry Blizniuk's** most recent poems have appeared in *The Pinch*, *Press53*, *Magma Poetry*, *The Nassau Review*, *Havik*, *Saint Katherine Review*, *Star 82*, *Naugatuck River*, *Lighthouse*, *The Gutter*, *Palm Beach Poetry Festival* and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of "The Red Forest" (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine.

**John Tustin's** poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals in the last decade. [fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry) contains links to his published poetry online. He lives in Myrtle Beach, SC.

**Phil Huffy** writes all manner of shorter poetry, often at his kitchen table in Western New York State. He is frequently published, with recent placements including *Eunoia*, *Hedge Apple*, *The Lyric*, *Sarasvati* and *Magnolia Poetry Review*.

**Joseph Villars** is a writer and poet in Hillsborough, NC. You can also see his work in *Corner Bar Magazine*.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *That*, *Dunes Review*, *Poetry East* and *North Dakota Quarterly* with work upcoming in *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Thin Air*, *Dalhousie Review* and *failbetter*.

**Lee Clark Zumpe**, an entertainment columnist with Tampa Bay Newspapers, earned his bachelor's in English at the University of South Florida. He began writing poetry and fiction in the early 1990s. His work has regularly appeared in a variety of literary journals and genre magazines over the last two decades. *Publication credits include Tiferet*, *Zillah*, *The Ugly Tree*, *Modern Drunkard Magazine*, *Red Owl*, *Jones Av.*, *Main Street Rag*, *Space & Time*, *Mythic Delirium* and *Weird Tales*. Lee lives on the west coast of Florida with his wife and daughter.

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sweatshirt to all outside-out, we end up pulling one sleeve through and then the other so that we just reverse the situation. Or chasing an inside-out sleeve around in circles, trying to put on a button-down shirt or jacket. Put socks on inside-out, then shoes, then remove shoes to fix sock, then put shoes back on again.

4: Dealing with spattering grease while frying bacon. As officers told their men during artillery bombardment, “be still, men. One place is just as safe as another.”

3: Badly conducting classical music on the radio. OK, maybe this is just me, and my dad and my friend John and Major Winchester from MASH. Note to self – why don’t public radio stations have donation-gifts of CDs called Bach set box-sets? Inquiring minds want to know.

2: When a simple bite begins to pull out all of the insides of a sandwich, draping it down your chin and onto your shirt. There are two choices here – to gnaw away at the dangling food like a shark until you have far too much in your mouth and must swallow half-chewed turkey and provolone with mustard on whole-wheat, or lean over your plate and just let it all fall out of your hands and mouth so it looks like a Pollock painting, and then try and salvage a meal out of it after you wipe your face and hands with a fistful of napkins.

1: Pretending to not be asleep during the sermon at church. Opening the hymnal and looking down at it, and then closing your eyes, like you majored in the music theory of psalmody. Or folding your hands in front of you, because there’s an immediate prayer you’d like to get to the big guy before you forget...

#### **Funniest word in the English language:**

5: Olfactory – because noses always sniff out when you live next to an old factory – get it? Yes, I sell my jokes to all the other dads in the known world.

4: Fatuous – the best insult of all, because it also sounds like you meant to say “flatulence.” All fatuous people reek of flatulence, either real or imagined, in my opinion.

3: Prestidigitation – Like a drunk person explaining what they do at work. “I’ve gotta go, guys. I’m giving a PowerPoint prestidigitation to my boss in the morning about this – *bic* - quarter’s region seven sales numbers.”

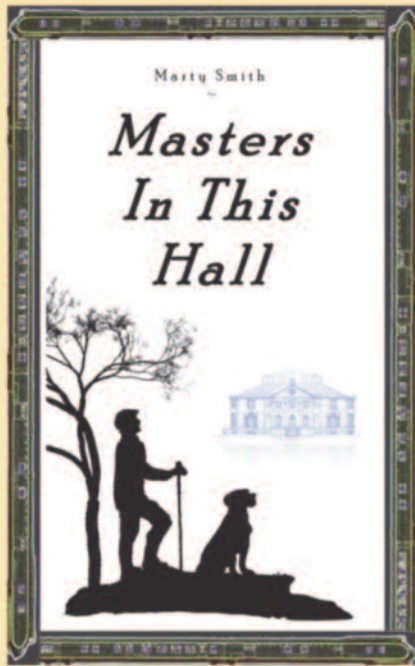
2: Moist – nothing says *eeew* like this word. I’ve sent a note to the Oxford English Dictionary to have this word stricken from the language. No good can come of it, neither my efforts nor the word itself.

1: Underpants – arguably (really? By whom?) the best word to use in a children’s book. Guaranteed (again, by whom?) to get a chuckle from the grade-school crowd. Come to think of it, I want a tee-shirt that says “underpants” on it – because that’s just silly.

Well, that’s it for now. Oh, one more thing: the etymology of the word “grade” is interesting – it comes from the Latin *gradus* which means “step” or “stride.” Yes, that means a unit of measure, but it also means just moving forward. Taking a step, not thinking about how many or how long or who’s farther ahead, or behind. Take a step. Take another. Write a page, and another. Day after day and you have a story, a novel, a book.

**Garry - chief@blotterrag.com**

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A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...



Blotter Books presents:

*All Tomorrow's Parties*

by Marty Smith



(publisher & book reviewer, "The Blotter Magazine;" contributor to the "Urban Hiker;" former host of "New Frontiers" and "Laugh Tracks" on WXDU - FM, Duke University Radio)

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