



August 2022

The Blotter

magazine

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

www.blotterrag.com

G. M. SomersEditor-in-Chief
Martin K. Smith..Publisher-at-Large, Treasurer
Marilyn Fontenot.....Director of Development
Laine Cunningham.....Publishing Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Marketing Advisor
Richard Hess.....Programs Director
Olivia Somers..Social Media and Art Director
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Subscriptions Contact:
Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Advertisers 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

919.869.7110 (business hours only! – call for
information about snail-mail submissions)

Marketing & Public Relations Contact:
Marilyn Fontenot
marilyngfontenot@gmail.com

COVER: “Extra Paint” by Bea Somers

Unless otherwise noted, all content copyright
2022 by the artist, not the magazine.

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



Council of Literary Magazines & Presses
www.c l m p . o r g

“Neither a Critic Nor An Editor Be”

I spend my time reading others’ writing. This is a joy. For me, that is. I suspect that it isn’t always a moment of confident pleasure for writers to submit their work to be considered for publication somewhere. There are many expectations to be met, on both sides. The writer, for example, has an idea of what it takes to be a contributor; what they bring to the table, the time and effort and skill/talent/inspiration that is required to create, and they release their work accordingly out into the world as something more than just words in the right order. An editor has, or should have, a not-so-secret list of guidelines that meet what they are looking for in a submission, a time allotted to the task – yes, task – of reading submissions, and preconceived notions of quality. This list is often, at least to the writer, something between a map with no coordinates and a Gordian knot, not fun for anyone to analyze, unravel or defuse. To the editor, however, it is a fairly clear picture in their mind of what their journal looks and feels like, and how an accepted submission should fall into that picture easily, like a carefully carved wooden peg sliding in a similarly shaped hole.

There is fine reward when everything comes together. Publication. Pain of many and various sorts when it doesn’t. Rejection is hard enough. Making of it a line in the sand is worse.

The process and all of its wishful thinking on the part of both parties leaves much room for conflict, of course, a sort of cold wariness between authors and editors. How to please those...ediots at literary magazines? What don’t they see in my 1600 well-crafted words? Or, on the other contentious hand, a brand-new way to show dialogue between characters? What can you actually be thinking? I cannot figure out this POV, so how can my readers? Please give me something new and tasty using off-the-shelf ingredients.

Yeah.

Add to this all of the real restrictions on word quantity (not word length, for crying out loud - feel free to use longer words, unless you think the editor suffers from

Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia.) subject matter, triggers, style prompts, what was recently published, what has already been accepted and committed, and language. As in foul, or any other so-called inappropriateness. And the general contentiousness of anything that requires judgment. The idea that we are in competition

with each other in everything we undertake.

I think that writers and editors spar with each other, in very slow motion and at a safe (?) distance. And thank goodness, too. If they were in the same room, it would be trouble right here in River City. They think they don't get along with one another. Editors think writers are the problem with writing and writers think editors shouldn't exist, because they...get in the way. So, what can be done about the technicalities of a one-way system? Isn't it a one-way system? Is the power of the publication process entirely in the hands of the publication?

I'm not sure anymore.

Carefully reminding ourselves that editors are allowed to run their publications how they see fit, and that writers are necessary to provide "content" (a word no one likes, I know) for said publications, one would think that this symbiotic relationship would be more amenable. That we could remove the concept of "power" altogether from the so-called equation. Social media (a misnomer, I feel) shows this to not be so, and hasn't helped clarify anything. The writer is a petulant diva working in a vacuum. The editor is an out of touch critic of art with no skills to speak of. The rife tribalism of confirmation bias that the screaming platforms foments fans the flames of publishing culture-wars. Some would say *as well it should*. If there needs to be a revolution, the person once said, let it begin here. But...

My older daughter says that I need to stop doing that. Making an argument beginning with the word "but." That little word implies that I have the floor (I guess I do) and that anyone is interested in my point (are you? Perhaps. Perhaps not.) I may, but who cares? We live in a world where people like me have had their say for so long that we might actually have answers to problems, but no one is listening. They are exhausted with the ancien regime. We've lost our right to belabor the world with our opinions. I get it, I really do. Which still doesn't matter.

So what is left to say? Viva la revolucion!

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.



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.

Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Magazine 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

Desperately in need of some stranger's

“Afternoon Update, a stream-of-consciousness essay”

by J. H. Herring

Sitting here in the half-lit hospital room at 5:00 am, unable to sleep for yet another consecutive night, trying not to disturb my roommate, trying to ignore the pain, cursed with an extremely unreliable internet connection — this draft I’m writing now may not reach you for hours — and not really in the mood to read anyway, I reluctantly turned my attention to the lavish TV offerings.

This was a mistake. Or at least a miscalculation. I was prepared for the usual fare, infomercial after infomercial, all of which, for some perverse reason, Susan finds conducive to her sleep at home. So, having a little familiarity with this kind of programming, I was ready for the guy in the bad toupee pushing investments in precious commemorative coins, the over-muscled 42-year-old exercise enthusiast, with her “see how young I am? I’m wearing a ponytail with these yoga pants!” while she tries to cajole her audience into ordering the latest ab-crunching gizmo, and such like. I was even ready for the inevitable Plexaderm infomercial, touting the wonders of the cream you apply under your eyes to get a quick (and not very long-lasting; funny how their spiel is all about how

fast-acting their product is, but not a word about how quickly the effect wears off) “facelift.”

No, what I failed to take into account was that we have a couple hundred channels at home, but the hospital’s Dish service (almost as reliable as the internet connection here) has, at most, 12 channels.

Why should that matter, you ask? Well, I suppose I had thought that such poorly produced and poorly acted shows were to be found on only a small number of the available channels. This may or may not prove true in the end, and three or four channels (out of a couple hundred at home) is not that big a deal. But three or four such channels out of 12 — that’s different.

Not really interested in hearing their sales pitches, I scrolled through all 12 channels a few times, and found not one, but TWO different channels running those Plexaderm skin-tightening Infomercials AT THE SAME TIME. Someone, somewhere, needs to pay a little more attention to what programs run in which markets, and when.

Bored with the surfeit of under-

eye creams, I continued my search for something even close to marginally watchable. Alas, the next infomercial along was hawking robot vacuum cleaners, the kind we were introduced to long ago in the form of the iRobot or Roomba, a circular, motorized, whirring device that periodically embarks on cleaning missions all over the house (or at least that floor of the house . . . Pretty sure these things don’t climb stairs. . . Do people with two-story houses buy two of these beasts? Or do they carry one up and down stairs? The question is not as simple or shallow as it might seem — the critters “know” enough to return to their home base and dock, to get juiced up again before the next cleaning run, all automatically, so you can more or less “set it and forget it,” provided everything goes as planned. But how could it “decide” it needed to be carried up or down stairs to reach its dock, waiting patiently on the OTHER floor? Is anyone working on this?? We cannot allow a staircase gap! Our competitors will breed more prodigiously than we will, and will therefore be able to impose THEIR robot vacuums on all the rest of us!)

Sorry. Very, very tired.

Anyway, these robotic vacuums are smart enough to avoid objects in their path, and will (with a little “training,” I suppose) “learn” the layouts of various rooms and will retrace their paths as needed to be sure the whole of the floor (minus the “learned” furniture) is swept before it’s done. They’re smarter than they used to be back in the early days, not really surprising; one model will even empty its innards of the dirt it just collected, once it arrives back at its dock, into a larger reservoir you only need to empty once a month or two. Progress, to be sure.

All of this I had at my mental fingertips when I arrived at the channel with this program on. They were selling their brand of robot vacuum, something called the “Shark.” But not just any “Shark,” no no! This was the Shark AI with Laser Navigation XL! This is, if you believe the hype, much more advanced than the benighted competition. It has that “AI” in its name, so they say in the infomercial, because it’s imbued with, or incorporates, or is somehow possessed of genuine AI. They conveniently fail to mention anything further about this, not bothering to explain, for instance, just HOW the device uses AI, leaving this observer to doubt the claim from the get-go. What use would AI (as I understand the term) even be to a vacuum cleaner? What could it do that an “ordinary” robotic vacuum couldn’t? What kinds of

decisions might a vacuum cleaner, any vacuum cleaner, be called upon to reach, and presumably act upon? No, I reluctantly decided that this too was just hype, the manufacturer no doubt relying on the flash and dazzle of the term “AI” and confident that the target audience would neither ask for nor understand a proper definition of AI, let alone demand a satisfactory “explanation” of how THIS device incorporates any kind of AI at all. Oh well, so much for truth in advertising.

Now what about that laser navigation? I suppose using a laser to closely measure the distance to an obstruction makes a certain amount of sense, but I’m pretty sure old-fashioned sound/sonar would get the job done just as well. But that’s not as flashy or cool as using a LASER! And wait a minute — wasn’t this thing supposed to have “learned” the layout of the room? If so, why does it need to “navigate” at all? Or take active steps to get around in the room, instead of relying on its internal map?

So many questions.

I remember a toy car being sold when I was very young, advertised heavily during the Saturday morning cartoons. The voice-over proclaimed that the car’s thrilling audio effects were desirable because the toy had real “sonic sound”! And oh yeah, it moved,

cleverly employing “kinetic energy”!

Those were the days.

I would say they don’t make ‘em like they used to, but clearly they still do. Tune in some morning at 4:00 or 5:00 and see for yourself. Shouldn’t take much searching of your channel line up before you too can bask in an authentic piece of American advertising. Step right up, folks. It doesn’t get any purer than this.

Save me a seat, and pass the popcorn. ❖

two by Margot Block

“So You Would Remember Me”

you speak using words that tumble down directly into my grasp
your meaning is stretched then abandoned in my hands
oh what I have wanted when it makes no difference to you
my heart echoes in my old shoes
while my heart is in the middle of the desert
when there are no last chapters to be written first
while embedded feminism is whispered like gold
you say that is the jungle in my heart
as if I would bow down in subjugation
and your death is my last wish
dried face paint on my left thigh
I tried to warn you I would not be indifferent
and you said there was no magic except in your eyes
you said it was you who blessed the sun
here in the intermission and knew you were forgiven
sanity was only a question with ten paragraphs of explanation
and my white door swinging
I rise above as you smoked me your tears off the belly of the serpent
I call to you and in this language nothing is profound
so you would remember me as I turn to ash

“Shallow We Are”

we are island
my soul delayed
the search for Mount Everest
in it for the long haul
how was it that the call of youth abandoned me
here desperate, stretched
wires crossed from the very beginning
when your child asks you why
do you defy every inherited answer
do you uncloak the rising unraveled vision
taught by the engraving in your hands
as young as they may be
discerning and definite words follow me everywhere
while your shadow
your pain reminds to us
shallow we are
the message
the lesson is fleeting
and we meet again
next century or next decade
to repeat it all

two by DS Maolalai

“A taste for cocaine.”

friends come together,
like glue on a vase.
and it's strange how long journeys
and far-off locations
don't alter people
the way they do vases
packed thickly without enough straw.

and fallon's been australian
a year now or longer,
with quite a pretty girlfriend
and a pretty good job,
and somehow he comes back
and things are the same
as they were, discounting the development
of a taste for cocaine. but the thing is,
he hasn't changed otherwise,
and even the drugs
are just emphasis.

we sit in the bar on d'olier
looking at o'connell bridge – see the northside
open like a funnel for history
and laugh as he talks about things
and remembers things
which happened.

we consider rounds, discount them, buy drinks
for ourselves. nothing much has happened –
nothing ever does. one year to another
birds fly south
and north. they nest
in the same places. drop shits
on the same dented cars.

"Fruitflies gone wild"

the household is abundle
with bottles now. between you, me
and chrysty, me and chrysty
got engaged on the weekend;
now, despite quarantine,
we've thrown open our home

and white wine collapsing,
leaning in stacks
on refrigerated shelves,
in the manner of uncared-
for castles. tipping bricks,
cracking eggs, bruising apples –
dropping blocks off
like parcels at christmas.
and reds too, all warming
on top of the radiators
with bottles of both
boxed to spare in the hall.
and we've gathered some beers,

and a small case
of whiskey. it's becoming quite difficult
to justify costs, and also
they've wriggled
in everywhere, like fruitflies
gone wild over carrots,
banana peels, oranges,
though they're clean
and stand beautifully
in high, plummish
stacks. picking one

to try it, I see
my reflection
shattered in the top
of a carton. six figures
blink back at me
from round and darkened circles
as if they were standing
at the ends of deep pools.

"The migrants."

by DS Maolalai

Jan 2020

turning a corner
in kilbarrack/raheny
and finding them settled
out, plump as dairy cows.

sitting about
they wobble,
grazing on road-
side grass verges
underneath bus stops.

sitting about
like flowers in blossom,
or a field of stumps
and the absence of cut
trees.

their necks
so long, their eyes
so dumb
and colourful.

these sacks
the grey
of railway bridges

with necks
which strut
so clumsy,

which run
and fly
so well.

two by Judith Sheppard

"Sonnet 1"

You should break the hard news while they're teething.
I wish no one had promised me the world.
A woman grown, a woman raw and grieving—
you should have hit me as a little girl.

I hate myself to love beyond my means
but all myself I've lost to her ensconce.
O, someone should have taught me not to dream.
How happier I'd be without these wants

For she is all, and I am far below,
her disciple was left undisciplined.
That bastard hope, untended to will grow,
my wide-net love of arrogance and sin.

And though this rage I feel that I should try,
the pain it brings is justice to my kind.

"Sonnet 2"

My lady friend, if for her I could be
a woman-love to compliment her grace,
Gods above would crumble in defeat
and bow in prayer before our great embrace.

My lady friend, she looks to me and sees
a woman who could make of her a home.
And I am touched to know that she believes
that I might be so noble when I'm grown.

A child sent to life while premature,
behind the rest will tremor all its life.
A woman-girl left fatally unsure—
a woman-girl makes for a lacking wife.

My lady-love, I know to be astute—
Don't wait behind for flowers that won't bloom.

“Enough”
by Judith Sheppard

it's the hitch in his voice (you're imagining things)
it's the illusion of choice and a hand full of rings
he rolls you an eye, and forgetting to think
says haven't you taken enough?

it's the sweat on your brow, no AC in his car
it's the way your legs shake walking out of the bar
it's a pause in the aisle as he flicks through the cards
haven't you taken enough?

it's the books upon books that are gathering dust
it's a warmth on your knee, it's your hardwon trust
it's the onslaught of pain you'll endure if you must
haven't you taken enough?

it's the only person on earth who you really would die for
(secretly, without the theatrics you're known for)
it's a knock on your door, rubber soles on your front porch
haven't you taken enough?

it's the months that pass by of emptiness and inaction
catching fire somehow, that same blaze of passion
that you felt years ago, the sting-swat attraction
he said, haven't you taken enough?

it's the tattoo on his arm making you feel insane
because he's changed in a year, and you just stay the same
it's learning to love the sound of your own name
somehow you still haven't taken enough

it's the one different color worn on the third finger
it's lasting goodbyes and embraces that linger
it's the woman who loves him, how you want to thank her
because you really have taken enough

it's the end of the night when you take off your skin
it's your greed and your gluttony, your two favourite sins
it's the way that you brace before you take it all in
taking, taking, enough

it's the guilt that you feel, just not enough to turn you
it's the fire you avoid and the fire you let burn you
it's your life, which you might finally take if you find you
still haven't taken enough

two by David M. Harris

“Seemless”

“Artless” can be a compliment,
or not. On screen, on stage
the greats appear not to appear.
Observe Brando, Streep, De Niro.
To be is all, the Method teaches, to seem
is only play. Are there characters
we know so well -- Hamlet, Hedda,
ourselves -- that we can play them
and put an end to seeming?

“To His Coy Lawn Ornament”

Earthbound, cast iron, straddling your broom,
and always facing southeast.
You ought to spin in the wind, but don't.
You only look like a weather vane, just as
you only look like a witch. I stuck you
in the lawn at my wife's request, my ex-wife now.
Feminist icon -- the witch, that is -- you may remind
my daughter of all the possibilities
from which your iron figure is precluded.
May my daughter spin and dance and fly,
when she has whirled enough and time.

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.

Big dog barking, at the end of a chain attached to its large leather collar. It pulls against this restraint, but I sense that it isn't going to escape and come at me. The stake in the ground is galvanized iron, with an eye-bolt through which the chain attaches. Something like a carabiner holds it there.

I assume the dog cannot undo a carabiner.

Oddity: the dog doesn't bark synchronously with the movement of its mouth. It is like the sound is coming from a long distance away from the dog, and is not reaching my ears at the same time the wave-and-particle-light that is me seeing the dog.

Disturbing. Like the dog having the head of a grasshopper, with antennae and mandibles and all the other strangely articulated mouth-parts. Just wrong. A dog should be doggish only, simple and slobbery and barking with corresponding canine motion. Affection or warning, at least that makes sense.

It is interesting to catalog what frightens us.

Jack - cyberspace

Contributors

J.H.Herring is the webmaster for *The Blotter Magazine* and *Corner Bar Magazine*.

Margot Block has been writing since the age of fourteen and has been published in *Zygote Magazine*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Juice*, *the Collective Consciousness*, *Voices*, *Grub Street Literary Magazine*, *Bakwa Magazine* and the online journals *BlazeVox*, *Kaleidoscope Online* and *the Bombay Review*. She participated in the high school mentorship program with the Manitoba Writers Guild, working with Canadian poet, Carol Rose. She won first prize in a poetry contest sponsored by the Writers Collective and an honorable mention in a poetry contest sponsored by the Lake Winnipeg Writers Group.

DS Maolalai has received nine nominations for Best of the Net and seven for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in three collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016), "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019) and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022) He is a graduate of English Literature from Trinity College in Dublin and recently returned there after four years abroad in the UK and Canada. His writing has appeared in such publications as *4'33'*, *Strange Bounce and Bong is Bard*, *Down in the Dirt Magazine*, *Out of Ours*, *The Eunoia Review*, *Kerouac's Dog*, *More Said Than Done*, *Star Tips*, *Myths Magazine*, *Ariadne's Thread*, *The Belleville Park Pages*, *Killing the Angel* and *Unrorean Broadsheet*.

Judith Sheppard is a 24 year old poet and fiction writer from the St. Louis area. She is a Webster University graduate with a grueling love for Shakespearean sonnets.

Until 2003, **David M. Harris** had never lived more than fifty miles from New York City. Since then he has moved to Tennessee, acquired a daughter and a classic MG, and gotten serious about poetry. His work has appeared in *Pirene's Fountain* (and in *First Water*, the Best of Pirene's Fountain anthology), *Gargoyle*, *The Labletter*, *The Pedestal*, and other places. His first collection of poetry, *The Review Mirror*, was published by Unsolicited Press in 2013.

ARI

PAPPALARDO

MINSTREL CLASS

“An eclectic fusion of indie-rock, pop, and jazz elements packed with lyrics about topics such as unrequited love, voodoo, ghosting, loss of innocence, and regret. There’s an enticing interior spark to Ari Pappalardo’s music; residual energy that lures listeners in by means of emotional authenticity.” — *V13*



**DEBUT ALBUM
AVAILABLE ONLINE
EVERYWHERE!**

