

ISSUE 3

LOTUS-EATER





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ISSUE 3

PROSE

DANIEL ROY CONNELLY	4
<i>Cooley's Walk to the Station at M..., 1989</i>	
PATTY SOMLO	7
<i>The Rug</i>	
SCOTT ARCHER JONES	14
<i>Mailbox</i>	

POETRY

CHRISTINE BRANDEL	20
<i>Discussing a Poem</i>	
RICH BOUCHER	21
<i>There is Fruit in the Garden Here</i>	
<i>Giving First Aid to the Scarecrow</i>	
ANNE BABSON	23
<i>And the Glory of the Lord Arrangement</i>	
ROBERT BOUCHERON	24
<i>Cathy Invites a Friend to Tea</i>	
<i>Duncan Is Now Following</i>	
KYLE HEMMINGS	27
<i>The Entomology of Hope</i>	
<i>The Little Girl Who Cried Heart</i>	
FREDERICK POLLACK	29
<i>The Salesman</i>	
<i>Composed During MRI</i>	
DAVIDE RONDONI	31
ZACHARY BOS	36
<i>Savoir-Vivre</i>	
HEATH BROUGHER	39
<i>The Beautiful Clusterfuck</i>	
EMMITT CONKLIN	40
<i>Prestly Beggar's Inning</i>	

INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

KENTON CROWTHER	42
<i>Three Examples of the Higher Balderdash</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS	47

Prose



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Cooley's Walk to the Station at M..., 1989

Cooley had passed a fitful night in the airless guest house. Awake at dawn with queasiness, he pinpointed his discomfort to a shellfish *canapé* at last evening's reception. In the gloom, he changed into his light cotton suit and paid the owner 1000 Rupees cash for his one-and-only night's stay. As day broke over the town of M..., tentatively, briefcase in hand, Cooley commenced the 1-mile walk to the town's railway station from where the 6.37 express would take him home to Mumbai. All around him open sewers filled the air with the stink of effluent. His eyes burned and his head buzzed. Cooley felt a struggle coming on.

He hadn't bothered to bring a change of clothing for his first representational visit up-country to the local Honorary Consul's bungalow. The journey only took four hours and there was nothing in M... to keep Cooley there other than the buffet dinner arranged in his honour to meet the local Brits. *Quick in, quick out. Twelve hours and home to tequila on the terrace.* Thirty businessfolk had come to meet Her Majesty's latest Third Secretary (Commercial), to exchange pleasantries and advice on UK companies setting up in India. His right hand had been grasped by ad men, bankers, beer makers, pharmaceutical managers

and a team of pale-skinned lawyers from Nantwich. Snacks and scotch followed a delicious hilsa curry, which, with the enlightened chatter and promises of tickets to the cricket, ensured the evening was, for Cooley, a polite success.

Two crows picked at a rotting mouse on a roadside pile of potato peelings. Cooley glanced dispassionately at nature's pillage and checked his Bangkok Rolex. If the train was on time, he would be on his way in 10 minutes. More importantly, his first-class ticket would give him access to his very own European-style toilet, which would likely prove a luxury. Halfway there, the dirt street broadened into clusters of bodies still sleeping under the clearing sky. It was already warm. Crows hovered and ricked in the air. Cooley's neck was sticky. He was running a slight fever and he gnawed his lower lip in protest. The smell of sandalwood and carrion was thick. With luck, he'd get a bottle of water from the dining car.

As the station came into view, Cooley felt his stomach tighten and lurch. Having recently seen from his terrace in Bombay many heavy skies break into violent storm, Cooley knew what to expect, but he hoped nonetheless that his

own pendulous cloud would hold tight for the next ten minutes. On the bright side, his driver, Raj, would meet him at Victoria Terminus. By midday he could be as ill as he liked in the comfort of his three-bedroomed city-centre home. A speeding Ambassador car spluttered past, kicking up dust and spitting out its grimy exhaust. Cooley felt his stomach shift again. He quickened his step. *Please God, be on time.* From a hundred yards away, moving on unsteady feet, Cooley picked out a large tent on the station forecourt. Busy with the first birds, its ancient owner, stick thin and stood tall, was hanging a selection of brightly-coloured shirts along the front of his make-shift store.

Cooley's sphincter opened then and there. It pinged like a flicked rubber band. His mouth opened wide as everything instant and unstoppable rushed from his fundament down to his feet. Anguished and dizzy, he crouched over the roots of a Banyan tree to retch, his mouth sumped in bile, his only pair of trousers soaked through with hot diarrhoea. A thick line of flowering papayas led away tall and straight either side of the railway line. Smoke rose from their vanishing point and a loud whistle shrilled its alert. *Thank God*, thought Cooley, *Thank Jesus Fucking Christ*, as he brought himself back to his feet.

Even as the gods punish, they restore. As Her Majesty's Third Secretary (Commercial) stumbled ill and cursing

towards the station forecourt, the tailor was pegging three pairs of trousers to a line at the side of the tent. The 6.37 eased to a halt, the driver let off the engine's steam which hissed and billowed around his cabin. Cooley ran towards the tent as best he could, gesturing desperately to the Dockers he was wearing, and then to the selection of replacements right in front of his teary eyes. *Quick, Quick, one pair of those, one pair, that pair, ek dum jaldi!* The tailor picked up on his customer's distress and was keen to prove his efficiency at this time of obvious need. *Yes, Sahib*, he said, unpegging the order, *Ready, Now, Coming, Quick as a flash!*

The old man skipped out the back of the tent as a sequence of doors on the train slammed shut. *Now, Man! Please! Help me!* The distressed diplomat pulled from a soiled pocket his ticket home and a wad of wet bank notes. In a trice, the tailor returned carrying a brown paper parcel, skilfully wrapped and bowed. The guard shouted *Come aboard! All aboard!* as Cooley let fall two hundred rupees which made the tailor's eyes shine like a moonlit Ganges. Cooley grabbed the parcel and hobbled quickly to the platform. Picking up the notes, the salesman shouted *Thank you kindly, Sahib. Tip-top day to you!* before slipping them into his dhoti and sitting down well satisfied on a three-legged plastic stool.

Cooley boarded the carriage opposite the entrance just as the guard blew

a flawless whistle. As the train pulled slowly away from M... the young Englishman made his way through the busy second-class compartments, leaving a trail of pinched noses and silent disdain. As Cooley staggered through the first-class coach, the train picked up speed. At the final compartment he saw a hand-written 'Reserved' sign above his name. *Privacy. Dignity.* He threw open the double doors, tossed the parcel onto the plump seat, parted the curtains and pulled down the window. His eyes were full of tears.

Out over the sun-swept plains Cooley vomited *de profundis*, his heaves spattered down the length of the carriage. He leant back in, slipped off his shoes, ripped off his soiled trousers and underwear and launched them into the Indian countryside. *God, the relief.* As he rocked from side to side with the train's acceleration, Cooley took up the brown-paper parcel again. He tore into it like a five-year old birthday boy, all the while sweating feverishly. He hurled the wrapping out of the window and watched it chase his clothes across the fields. Looking down upon the one saving grace in his day to date, Cooley saw that he held in his hands two crisply starched white shirts.

Four hours later, at a swarming Victoria Terminus, Raj spotted his boss striding with purpose down Platform 23, his rigid face tilting slightly to the massive iron rafters. Raj was bemused

at why his boss should have two white shirts tied around his waist in place of the usual western apparel, but by now becoming used to Cooley's quirks, made no mention of it as he took the third secretary's suitcase and gestured towards the VIP car park.



The Rug

The rug lay in a dark corner of the hotel's garage facing in the general direction of Mecca. Saeed had bought the rug during a twenty-five percent off sale at Cost Plus World Market. Made of red, green, blue, yellow, black and tan cotton rags stitched together roughly, the twenty by thirty-inch rug sported a narrow nylon label with the name *Bolo Chindi* on it and the simple fact that the rug had been made in India.

On an April afternoon three months after he began working as an attendant in the parking lot, Saeed unrolled the rug and laid it atop the concrete. No one would notice, he figured. The rug was small, the corner dark. Few cars parked close to that corner because it was the furthest distance from the elevator and the walkway to the outside.

The idea for the rug had come to Saeed several days before, when he was meeting with the refugee program counselor. Her name was Anne and Saeed considered her to be kind, though he didn't believe his meetings with her once a week made the slightest difference in his life.

That morning the rain was coming down hard, as it did nearly every day. Saeed, who refused to think of this place as home, had left his soaked black umbrella in a tin bucket next to the front door.

"So how are things going, Saeed?" Anne asked, after Saeed sat down at the table across from her. The lights were way too bright. They hurt Saeed's eyes.

"Fine," he said, as he always did, because explaining how he really felt would have taken way too much time.

"Everything okay at the job?"

"Yes."

"The apartment working out all right?"

"Yes."

"Is there anything you need?"

"No."

Then she moved on to the question that each week gave Saeed the hardest time.

"How have you been feeling this week?"

Unlike the previous questions, Saeed didn't answer this one right off. First of all, the question could not be dismissed with a simple yes or no. Second, and more important, Saeed didn't feel much of anything anymore, not this week or last week or the week before that. In fact, Saeed couldn't foresee a time when he would ever feel anything again.

"I don't know," Saeed finally said. He mumbled the words, mostly because he knew they weren't sufficient.

Those words couldn't begin to explain how bad it felt to be where the sky



was always gray and Saeed worried that his feet would never dry. Those words couldn't touch the deadness in his head, the lack of sleep, or how heavy his body felt getting up out of bed or when he walked.

"Can you find any feeling in your body?" Anne asked him. And then, before Saeed had a chance to respond, she said, "Let's try doing a little breathing."

Saeed would never have admitted to anyone that he liked this part.

"Close your eyes and try relaxing your fingers," Anne said.

Saeed did as he was told. Already, he started feeling better.

"Now let's make sure we're grounded. Check and see that your feet are flat on the floor. Back straight. Shoulders down. And then take in a deep breath. Watch the breath as it flows into the nostrils, down the throat, into the lungs, then the belly, thighs, calves, ankles, feet, and all the way out to the big and little toes."

As he did every week, Saeed lost himself in the breathing. This, of course, was the point after all. To take his mind off the swirling thoughts that made him unable to live in *the present moment*, as Anne liked to say he should. Instead, Saeed stayed stuck in the past, back home. Yet even there, he couldn't let his mind remember because there was only the killing and suffering and all the reasons he'd had to leave and come here. And none of that he wanted to remember.

Anne seemed to think he should grieve, that he needed to remember, before he'd be able to move on and live in

this moment. Saeed couldn't tell her that he hadn't found a reason to live in this or any moment. The best he'd been able to do was put one foot in front of the other, get up each morning and pray. Go to work. Go home. Turn on the television. Sleep. Get up again.

This day, when they were talking after the breathing and before Anne softly said, "We're going to have to stop now," Saeed felt a sensation close to sadness. Anne suggested that he find a little something, a photograph, anything, he could take to work, something to remind him who he was. The following day, he went to the Cost Plus World Market because the only cup he had for coffee had broken and he needed to buy another one.

On the way over to where they kept the cups, he passed the rugs. *TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT OFF SALE*, the sign said. He stared at the rugs and heard Anne's voice quietly telling him to find something to take to work, a reminder of who he was.

"Can I help you?"

Saeed didn't know if the voice was talking to him but he looked up. A young woman with smooth straight blond hair and white teeth was smiling at him.

"Can I answer any questions about the rugs?"

"Oh, no, no," Saeed said, ashamed that his longing had been so obvious.

"Each of the styles comes in three different sizes," the woman said, even though Saeed had told her he didn't want any help. "The sizes and prices are listed here."



She pointed to a square white sign.

"Today only, everything's twenty-five percent off the listed price," she added and smiled.

Saeed didn't know why but he now found himself calculating what twenty-five percent off the price of the smallest rug would come to.

After he paid for the rug and saw that the white paper receipt showed the twenty-five percent discount he'd gotten, the pretty woman who'd helped him rolled the rug into a narrow tube and tied a bright red ribbon around it. The following day, Saeed arrived at work early, pinning the rolled-up rug with his elbow tight against his right side. Before entering the ticket booth, where he would spend the next two hours until his fifteen-minute break and then return for another two hours until his half-hour lunch, Saeed skirted the edges of the parking lot where the light barely reached.

The concrete floor appeared permanently scarred, with gasoline and oil, of course, and substances Saeed didn't want to consider. Along the walls, though, the floor looked cleaner. He tried to imagine the direction of Mecca, because he'd found a place in one corner that looked the cleanest and where no one was likely to notice the rug.

He undid the bow that nice young woman had tied and thought about how kind she had been to him and her pretty smile. Then he unrolled the rug, placed it on the concrete and smoothed it down.

A maid named Lydia Sanchez spied Saeed the next evening as she walked to her car. She was in a hurry to get home, as her mother had been watching the kids and would be tired by now. But there, in the corner of the parking lot, Lydia spied a tall skinny very black man, bent over on what looked like a beach towel or maybe a small rug.

"*Enfermo*," Lydia whispered. *He must be sick.*

Yes, Lydia needed to hurry but she also had compassion for children and the elderly, animals and the sick. She dreamed of one day becoming a nurse, if she could ever get a green card. The man looked like one of the parking attendants. They were all black, with the blackest skin Lydia had ever seen, and she'd heard they came from the same country in Africa. One of those places where people were fighting all the time, so the parking attendants were forced to flee and become refugees.

The short, slightly pudgy maid walked to the corner of the parking lot, instead of climbing into her car as she'd intended. As she made her way there, she tried to find the English words she needed, but at the moment, the Spanish words kept pushing them away.

Just before she reached the corner, the word came to her.

"Sick?" she asked the man.

He didn't answer right off and Lydia started thinking, *Who should I call? Who should I call?* She was in this country without papers, having gotten the hotel job with the use of a phony Social

Security card. She could dial 9-1-1 and then hop into her car and drive off, before anyone arrived. That's what she could do. But first she bent over and asked the man one more time.

"You sick?"

This time, the man who Lydia could see now was long, long, long and thin, like spaghetti stretched out, and his chest rose up. He looked at her while he still had his legs folded underneath him on the rug.

"No, no, no," the man whispered to her, as if his condition was some sort of secret. "No not sick."

Lydia wanted to ask what he was doing there, practically laying down in a corner of the parking lot. He wasn't homeless, like all the people that sat on the sidewalks for blocks around the hotel. Lydia recognized him from the ticket booth, saying *Hello* and *Thank you* to her when she handed him her pass, driving out after work. Yes, she had always thought he appeared to be a nice man and wondered sometimes what he thought about living here in this country. How different it must have been from where he'd lived in Africa.

"I thought you being sick," Lydia said now.

"No, no, no," he said again and then surprised Lydia by adding, "Just praying."

"Praying?"

Lydia let the word hang in the air as she thought about it. Lydia prayed at church every Sunday morning and at night, before climbing into bed. When one of her kids was sick, she silently

asked God for help. "*Por favor Dios*," she would mumble to herself. She prayed, yes, but never in a million years would she have gotten down on her knees in a parking lot, closed her eyes, folded her hands and whispered the words *Por favor Dios, Please God*. It made her heart ache thinking about this man and what terrible sickness or hurt, tragedy or pain had brought him to this place.

The man was waiting for her to say or do something. Lydia could see that. What could she possibly say in the face of such suffering?

"I hope God answers your prayers," she said.

Most of the time, the rug lay in the corner of the parking lot, as if it had been abandoned, like the cigarette butts and used tissues and crushed cans scattered here and there on the stained concrete floor. Other than the maid, no one noticed the five foot ten and three-quarters slender man, with high prominent cheekbones and close-cropped wooly hair, who knelt on the rug and prayed in the general direction of Mecca. The man, Saeed, understood that this simple act might be seen as threatening to some, and for this reason he put the rug in the darkest, most remote corner of the lot. It was worth the risk, he soon discovered, because in moments of prayer, for the first time since leaving his country, he started to feel whole.

Nevertheless, the maid felt burdened by the knowledge of the African's suffering. She couldn't keep what she'd

seen to herself. And so the next morning when she arrived bright and early to work, she whispered the news to another maid, Esperanza. Of course, Lydia changed the story a little. She said that the African man was praying because his wife was sick. He was asking God to make her better.

The story then went from Esperanza's lips to the ears of another maid, Carmen. From Carmen, the tale wound its way from room to room and lower floor to upper floor of the hotel. Eventually, as such stories do, the tale made it all the way to the hotel's kitchen. A dishwasher named Eduardo heard it first. By this time, the African man's wife had died.

Being a man, Eduardo had trouble hearing of the African's suffering and not doing something about it. When he told the story to Efrén, another dishwasher, he added, "Maybe we should take up a collection for the African."

Having little extra money and not yet moved to part with some for an African man he had only exchanged a handful of words with, including, *How you doing man*, Efrén said, "What is money going to do now that his wife is dead?"

Eduardo, who everyone in the kitchen knew would have given his last dollar away if he thought someone needed the money more than he did, said, "He can use it to help pay the bills."

The story spiraled around the kitchen and then bumped out to the dining room on the lips of the busboys. In a sense, it was as if the tale was making

its way around the entire world. Having begun in the parking lot where all the employees had originated in Africa, the story shimmied into the hotel rooms, settling down for a few minutes with the maids, who hailed from Mexico and Guatemala. The tale was passed on in Spanish to the dishwashers and prep cooks and afterwards to the busboys. And then the busboys, in broken, heavily accented English, told the waiters and waitresses, from France, Italy, Great Britain, Ireland and Canada. By this point, the African's wife was long dead, and his three young children had no one to take care of them during the day, while their grieving father took people's money for leaving their cars in the dismal lot.

Saeed, of course, knew nothing about any of this. The return to prayer, along with his weekly counseling sessions, watching the breath traveling through his body, until it connected with that well of sorrow and loneliness, fear and rage, lodged in his belly, had begun to lift Saeed's spirits up. At the same time that his mood began to lighten, the world around him seemed to respond. Other employees who had previously tossed him a quick *Hi* or *How's it going*, when handing him their yellow staff passes through the half-opened windows of their cars, suddenly began addressing him by name and taking an interest. "How are you doing today, Saeed?" "How is everything at home, Saeed?" "Is there anything I can do to help you, Saeed?"



The unexpected interest and hearing these strangers address him by name caused Saeed's heart to open a tiny bit more each day. At first, Saeed simply responded, "I am fine, thank you." But after his heart began to crack open a bit more, he turned the spotlight of his interest on others. "And how are you doing today?" "What is your name?" "What country do you come from?"

The rain continued to pound the pavement, the hotel roof and the roof of the building where Saeed rented a one-room studio apartment and heard music and a couple making love and another couple arguing and a baby crying through the thin walls and sirens wailing all night, up and down the wide, yellow-lit boulevard. Rain kept making brown muddy puddles in the potholed roads and cracked sidewalks, forcing Saeed to leap across, in order to keep himself from sinking. He stopped carrying an umbrella and simply yanked the hood of his waterproof nylon jacket up, as he'd seen all the local people doing. The rain didn't make his forehead feel stuffed with cotton, as it had before. And he began to think, *I don't mind the rain so much anymore*, and even found the sound of it tapping the windowpane at night rather soothing.

A building supplies saleswoman attending a construction conference in the expansive Douglas Fir Room on the hotel's main floor and staying in a teensy room overlooking the alley, miles from her Asheville, North Carolina four-bedroom, three-bath home, noticed

Saeed praying in the general direction of Mecca. It was a Tuesday afternoon, and at that very moment without a bit of warning, the sun had shot out from behind the clouds. The woman whose name was Shirley Clooney had just stepped out of her rented Ford Taurus, the same make and model of the car she drove at home, when she spotted a dark-skinned man lurking in the corner of the garage.

On seeing him, she clasped her oversized black patent leather handbag tight to her chest, while her eyes darted around the parking lot, in search of the elevator. Her brash red hair shone under the garage's fluorescent lights and her swollen feet ached in a pair of new black leather pumps. Her heart rattled high in her chest, as she fiddled with her phone, ready at any moment to punch in the pre-set number for 9-1-1.

Shirley could see now that the elevator was closer to the dark lurking figure than she would have liked. Her feet sounded like bullets tapping across the concrete floor, walking as fast as she could, wondering why such a fine hotel didn't have security guards, at least one, in the garage.

As she got closer to that dark corner, she saw that the man was not, in fact, lurking in wait to rob her. No. He was, what, laying down on a little beach towel or rug? Shirley looked more closely. Then she mouthed the words. *Oh, my God.*

It was just like on TV when they showed the mosques, filled with men, all men, Shirley thought. Up and down. Praying to Allah.

Like a bomb, the information exploded across Shirley's mind. A man in the hotel garage praying to Allah means only one thing. Don't they always pray before blowing themselves up?

Shirley picked up the pace, her heels rat-a-tat-tatting faster across the stained concrete floor. Breathless, her heart pounding, she hit the elevator button almost hard enough to break it. The door instantly opened. As soon as the door closed, Shirley punched in the pre-programmed number for 9-1-1.

By the time the police cars arrived outside the garage in a wailing symphony of sirens, along with the bomb squad in a huge white truck, Saeed was back in his booth collecting tickets, running them through the machine, giving back change and saying, "Have a nice day." Police officers in black helmets sprinted past the booth, not bothering to even look Saeed's way. Saeed couldn't have said how many ran past in their dark blue uniforms. But relating the story later to anyone who asked, Saeed said, "Maybe fifty."

The next thing that happened was that officers stationed themselves on both sides of the ticket booth, talking with the drivers and looking into cars going in and out. None of the officers said a word to Saeed, who continued taking tickets and money, and occasionally Visas and Mastercards, and sometimes giving back change. Under the circumstances, Saeed thought it best not to tell anyone to have a nice day.



Mailbox

By six a.m. he strode back and forth in the road. Behind the gate and the small patch of yard, he could see the lights in the kitchen, and in the next room the candle burned on the dining room table. That's when he knew. She always lit the candle when sentiment swept over her, a sentimental mood that led to the giving of herself. Led to surrendering herself to a male. To him.

Being there in her road, being disguised must have been a plan, but he didn't know who had made it. He wore the new coat and the hat he hadn't put on for years. The muffler circled his throat dull and black, anyone's scarf. The gloves rode his thick fingers, black and fleecelined. He never wore gloves. Even the breath, someone's breath, swirled out gray and ghostly, exiting the scene up into the first light of day, wreathing him in a disguise. He should walk down to the end of the lane and back; he should maintain the disguise with lying steps.

Back, back, like he was reeled in by a string she held. His steps stumbling a little against the grade, he caught a glimpse of her through the sheers, at the table. There in front of the candle, she was writing, writing. On paper as white as the curtains. In front of the candle that should have been lit for him. He halted in the road peering into the

room, beside himself with anguish. He could see his breath, as gray as the winding sheet around a corpse. He rubbed his frozen painful face, his shoulders hunched in the sharpness of winter. He was dead cold, but his blood hammered, his pulse jumped. He felt his eyes were starting out of his skull, that his head would soon explode.

It was a letter that should have been written to him. He could see her fold it in thirds, saw it as it slipped into its paper reliquary. She had written a letter, in that delicate, scratchy hand of hers, bowing down her face to the paper that lay before the candle, a candle that should have been lit for him. He watched and she addressed it – she looked up the address, not a known address like the one she had so often written this year and the last and the one before that. Not his address.

Soon, he knew, she would make another cup of tea, from the limp teabag she had already used. She would have a small carton of fat free yogurt, a piece of toast. She would prepare the day, and coming out to the small silver car waiting on the street, she would stop at the mailbox and place the letter there. It would lie in wait for the postman, an intermediary of focus, of infatuation, of love. A letter that should have been his.

His eyes knew her intimately, the black hair, the white chalky skin, the eyes so dark. His eyes fondled their way over her long muffler, the short jacket, the jeans slightly too tight where she carried extra pounds he loved. The door of the car slammed, cutting off his adoration, blocking her from view. She drove away and he emerged from behind the blue spruce. The chill seized him now – his teeth chattered. Involuntary twitches raced through his shoulders. He clamped down on all muscles in his body to stop any trembling. In the watery light, in the sad winter of his love, the letter called to him. The tomb shaped opening of the mailbox gaped black in front of him, the envelope lay white and waiting, the space small and intimate. The letter leapt across the space as his fingers approached it, at least he felt it did, offering itself into his hands. He slapped the door shut, dropped the flag. He glanced up and down the road, guilty, secretive, caught in his own act.

On the envelope she had inscribed a name, the name. He had the name now. But what had she said? Did she use the same words, the same motif, the same song she had once used for him, in the beginning three years ago? He marched to his SUV, the letter held firm inside the coat against his chest. He dropped it on the console and he traveled home. Its white form lay there in the corner of his vision, waited for him. At his breakfast bar, he shoved aside unread papers, a stack of mail, a coffee cup that dropped to the floor and – unbidden, unnoticed –

broke. The letter, white against the red tile, named his rival. He knew now to hate a man named Jeremy. Fishing a six inch deboning knife out of the wooden block, he teased the letter open.

The letter confirmed it – she was in love. He trod on the broken cup, kicked pieces aside. Something awful should happen to Jeremy; he felt it, down to the very core of his hate.

An old woman lived on the corner – Neighbor One. She had an overactive fox terrier that she wasn't walking. He offered, she accepted, deal struck, but his bank account of virtue did not increase. He would take the little beast out twice a day, up and down the block, past the mailbox, past the table and the candle. After dark and without a dog, he could return, to wait for Jeremy. How long would it be, days, a week before her arms opened in welcome for Jeremy?

He sidled up to her mailbox, opened it and rummaged it while the terrier sniffed at the post. Piss ran across the ground and under his shoe. Down the lane they went, the dog darting to the right and left as he strolled, all slow and innocent. As the terrier rushed up to the leash end, he delivered satisfying little pops that jerked the animal, the oblivious animal straining at the lead. When he reached the next box, he opened it also. Why not? They had committed the odious crime of being her neighbors. He found a statement from the bank and an envelope from a mortgage company – they dropped into the copious pocket of

his pea jacket. At the next residence he purloined advertising supplements that he deposited further down on the other side in the fourth neighbor's mailbox. Neighbor Seven provided two personal letters and a catalogue in a brown paper wrapper. He slipped it halfway out – a catalogue for male latex clothing. He gave it to Neighbor Eight's mailbox, down at the dead end of the street.

He found it a pity the lane was so short, he so enjoyed the series of senseless, petty acts. He returned up to the corner, dumped the dog on the grateful old woman. She bent crooning to the long-haired little rat – he considered kicking both of them. In the SUV, he filed his new mail in the console, cruising home with a smug feeling – now he would put a voice on Jeremy, having his letter, having his secret words, having his balls.

At the breakfast bar, he discovered Jeremy's letter to be as bad as he had feared. He didn't want to read it, to cut at himself with their happiness, but he had to know. Jeremy's words scrolled out alternately fawning and snobbish, both self-denigrating and boastful. Worst of all, Jeremy was all charm. It came clear now she had to have Jeremy, and Jeremy had chosen to have her. Jeremy would keep her. He might even consider her a long term investment. Marriage, like getting a dividend check.

He opened the cupboard over the sink and fished down the bottle of vodka. The icebox disgorged a carton of orange juice. He found a pack of magic markers

in a drawer. He took the yellow one and, reading back through the letter, marked over her name everywhere it occurred. The first vodka had disappeared – he made another. Now he seized the red marker and defaced each mention or insinuation of intimacy, of possible physical involvement, of the whisper of two pale bodies tangled in a dark room somewhere. A third vodka and the black marker. He obliterated every I and My and Mine in the letter. With the brown he blotted out every promise and blue every compliment. Slapping the letter on his cutting board, he pinned it to the wood with the boning knife. Murderous.

Collapsing onto the stool, his forearms on the countertop, the glass corralled by the circle of his muscle and bone, he reached out and fiddled with the bank statement, the mortgage letter, the two personal letters. He slit open the first. The bank statement was bleak, at least in its balance, and the mortgage letter posed a threat based on two missed payments. Maybe this family was so poor he could pay them to kill Jeremy and have no bothersome questions, no shocked moral superiority. But to have Jeremy dead where he couldn't see it, see it happen – no. Suffering welled up out of his hollowness – self-pitying tears sprang into his eyes. He scrubbed at them with his fists.

He followed with the personal letters. One was from a mother to a son. It had some anguish, not like his agony, but some. The Son was not to worry: his father would soon come around. No one

could be angry forever. The money would soon be back and everything would be alright. In the meantime, Mother enclosed a check from her hobby account.

This would have been irritating if his heart had not been so broken. Now he had to repair the envelope and return it to the mailbox. He teased open the second letter, just in case. Father had written it, in parade ground cadences. It directed the boy not to call, not to write, in fact, to never come home again. The Son was cut off, and if he didn't like it, maybe his prissy little boyfriend would support him.

Jeremy's arrival still hung waiting like storm clouds, and the delay shoved him close to desperation. A couple of nights she didn't return home before his late rounds, but each morning he caught sight of her in the kitchen, making her way alone into real life. A snowstorm blew in and blew out – he left his tracks up and down the lane, with a lacework of dog prints that laced through his in an arabesque of deceit. The letters from the mortgage company turned more demanding. He witnessed a fight between the Son and the Prissy Boyfriend. The boyfriend left and Son closed all the house blinds, stopped going out, seldom checked the mailbox. He understood the Son's need to hide shame and despair away. Darkness and distress.

Soon, he felt too obvious in the lane, even with the frequent changes in coats and hats. He picked up advertising fliers at the supermarket and, carrying a

shopping bag, trudged up and down the lane stuffing them into the mailboxes as he stole the mail, or returned it. He pawed through everyone's stuff, but only Two, Four, and Seven held any interest for him. The rest were a sea of dullness, unredeemed and mind-numbing. But not Neighbor Two – Two was hopelessness, like him. After several notices, Two lost the nice car, not their junker. By chance he was loitering two houses away at a mailbox when two men drove up: one unlocked Two's car and then they both drove away.

Neighbor Four trudged out to the mailbox to ask him not to stuff in the fliers. He already knew that her medical insurance had lapsed. Her son shuffled along by her side. Down's Syndrome. He gazed down into the round face, the jowls, the limpid brown eyes behind bloodhound eyelids. If he had Down's – now, it would be rough, but he wouldn't dream of ways to kill Jeremy.

Neighbor Seven, the Son, huddled in a chair in his living room and drank, covered in a blanket. The drapes were never drawn: the Son didn't care who knew. Maybe he should loan the Son the small revolver he now carried. Suicide wasn't so bad, if it was quick. But maybe murder was better. Maybe murder would make that upwelling of feeling, the anguish that he wasn't good enough for her – maybe killing would make that stop. For a moment.

He confessed to himself. She didn't live in her house anymore. Sure, she visited



it now and then to pick up the mail and to check on it, but she lived elsewhere. With Jeremy. No sacred missives went out from her or any carnal notes arrived from Jeremy. He was as bedeviled by the lack of their cloying intimacy as he was relieved he didn't have to live through every coquettish phrase with them. He should have written down Jeremy's address.

Neighbor Two received a threat from the Public Utility – power would soon be turned off. Neighbor Four's son had nasal infections – she was visibly upset. She tramped out to talk to him for no reason, and mentioned he could start leaving the flyers in her box. Neighbor Seven, the Son wrecked his car while drunk. The old woman with the terrier told him the boy now wore a tracker on his ankle and couldn't leave his yard.

On Tuesday the Son killed himself with pills, lying naked and alone in a bathtub. He was floating in stone cold water when they found him on Wednesday, but the anklet still worked. On Thursday the boy with Down's, angry over something, hurt his mother, pushed her down the steps. On Saturday the Neighbors Two left in a rickety minivan, abandoning the house and all its things to the wolves of finance.

On Monday the realtor stuck in the sign in her lawn.

He couldn't even remember her face. But he could remember how it felt. How all of it felt. He could remember how it was to be loved. And he knew the misery of not being her love.

He tugged the boning knife out of the cutting board and made the first cut, an experiment, across his bicep. It hurt like hell and seeped a little, a drop running down to his elbow. Then he sliced the outside of his forearm, into skin she had once caressed. The two inch long incision sprang out in bright red song.

Poetry



Photo by Giuseppe D'Antonio
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DISCUSSING A POEM

Another poem about the bad husband, the one with the beard
said. It could be a sister, suggested another one with a beard.
Or a lover, said the one who always insisted on saying the word
lover just to make people feel uncomfortable, which he did
for other reasons. The sounds sound good, said a girl pretending
she understood a world she didn't. They decided an image symbolized
a heart so they dissected it. They scribbled their lines and words
over the poet's until finally they asked the professor for his take.

The poem is about my dead wife,
the professor thought, all poetry is.

THERE IS FRUIT IN THE GARDEN HERE

All of the signs pointing the way to your survival are right there in front of your eyes, if you will only look for them. Conversely, if you don't look for these signs, then they will point the way to your destruction. For example, there is a sign scratched into the tree by the general store that means *leave quickly; a judge lives here*; you have to see the tree in exactly the right afternoon light to notice it. Another sign is carved into the back of the Wilkinson's barn; this one means *a brutal man lives here, tell him you were in the Army*. You'll know this sign because it resembles a letter Z inside of a box. Continuing along, you will see that there are two signs scrawled onto the wall in the cellar of McGillicuddy's Saloon; one means *a doctor will take care of you for free here*; the other sign means that *everyone here will tell you to go to Hell*, with the possible exception of the doctor, who, as the sign says, will give you medical care for free. It will take courage to recognize these signs for what they are, and it will take strength to do as they tell you. The rains will fall on you as hard as they fall on everyone else, no matter how hard you pray; all the signs pointing the way to your survival are right there in front of your eyes. *There is fruit in the garden here.*

GIVING FIRST AID TO THE SCARECROW

Came home that afternoon, after work,
an hour after the punch of the clock,
after a long drive home.

Closed the door of my car behind me
as the cool Fall air embraced me
there in my driveway.

Saw my scarecrow, upright on my front lawn,
saw that he lost his left hand sometime between
this morning and my arrival home.

Had to give him some first aid, my scarecrow,
had to get some straw from the shed
so I could make him a brand new hand.

This is what fathers without children do.

AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD ARRANGEMENT

*And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together:
for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

ISAIAH 40:5

It sits in bud form, bound up darkly. It waits
In its shell, roasted, ready to be cracked.
The egg, the start of all feathered things, lies
Inert, undistinguished, barely warm, the same
Shape as a zero filled in, ready to pop. It is on its way.

It is on its way. In the age of the microwave,
One forgets the watched pot never boils. The
Bubbles will rise as soon as He sabers the cork.

It is on its way. The ground stinks of manure.
Don't be fooled by acrid air. That's the smell of
Delicious things waiting to rise up and ripen.

It is on its way. She's not getting chubby.
That's not a sign of any couch-potato sloth.
She is great with child. Yes, child, she is great.

CATHY INVITES A FRIEND TO TEA

Cathy invites a friend to tea
in the narrow house with the tiny porch
and window shutters that fold in the jambs,
the house she shares with Jess, a cat,
in Old Town, the Hysterical District,
as Charles, her cousin, says.
The sort of place you couldn't buy today,
a jewel, it would cost a fortune!

Fortunately, she inherited
much of the furniture, the drapes,
the Persian carpet, hand-knotted,
the bronze floor lamp with the fringed silk shade,
the tall case clock that nobody winds,
the painting of Vesuvius
rising over the Bay of Naples.

The armchair is a nest of pillows,
embroidered with flowers in scratchy wool.
Cathy worked the flame stitch.
The friend prefers an angular settee
on account of her back.
She brought a magazine
which has an article that may
possibly be of interest.
The day is fine, the tea is fresh.
They agree on so many topics,
and yet the friend can scarcely breathe.

Jess stretches a paw and yawns.
A shame the friend must leave so soon,
as Cathy hoped to read aloud
from a manuscript in plain sight.
She would like to wave the pages

in the air like a crazy lady.
She plumps the pillows, brushes crumbs
in the palm of her hand and makes a fist.
The taste of tea stays on her tongue.
Another time—
that's what they always say.

DUNCAN IS NOW FOLLOWING

Duncan is now following
Annabelle on Instagram,
Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Pixz,
and other social media.
He downloaded photos and copied posts,
created links and stored data
in folders labeled Personal,
With Friends, Wet Dream, and Unto Death.
He hacked into her email,
has all her vital statistics,
birthdate, address, last movie seen,
and tips on personality.
You might say he's obsessed.

A geek with glasses and matted hair,
Duncan knows that Annabelle
would never in a million years
give him the time of day,
much less engage in intercourse,
which can mean chat.
Curvaceous, blonde,
She is his ideal woman,
especially in the bust department.
She hangs with jocks and girls like her,
who talk about themselves.

Once at an outdoor concert,
a band she likes, though Duncan thinks
they're too derivative,
in the crowd of bodies slick with sweat,
unobserved by security,
he got so close
he could have touched her hair
or whispered in her perfect ear:
"I'll always love you, Annabelle,
I'll always be near you."

THE ENTOMOLOGY OF HOPE

She fears worms in her wigs and insinuates mothballs in the armpits of strangers. During sex, something sheds a fake wing. Crickets hide behind windows, waiting to chirp a self-righteous chorus. She's one up on the Krumps who live down $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of a block. Husband and wife feed each other spider-spittle then vanish for days. She, on the other hand, never hides lice in a deck of five one-eyed-jacks. Her mother taught her well, once locked her in freezer of fishy smells so she could come out all girly-goop, cocoon-closed under the threat of edges. She glided on anti-soul, the instincts of a wistful queen bee. Her father left after a diurnal dementia ended mother's heavy-handed hotcakes, ants floating in the batter like sprinkle. Mother's new futuristic lisp was a prophesy, a see-all under shades of discarded detail, or as father liked to word it: a god-dam dope-out. She died single-handedly with her arms pointing towards a bifurcated limbo. Thank God those days are buried under molehills, even ones with leaky eyes. Each day, the odds decrease in increments of colonies that a man will love her for her batty remote-antenna head, the dent in her rhymes, the accidental toxins in her soup.

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO CRIED EARTH

The little girl made a clump of dirt and hard mud, shaped it into a sphere that she called earth. She poked tiny holes in it that resembled craters. Turning it in her hand, she decided that it resembled the moon more than it did the earth. Her father was an ex-astronaut who knew all about the hierarchies of space and oceans, or how light-rays, gamma-rays, affected humans, could make them feel hopelessly small and inert. He kept an expensive collection of telescopes in a closet. One night, with the moon hidden under her bed, the little girl figured she could reach it by dreaming. She was not a logical child. She struggled with arithmetic. But she showed a special talent for diving into pools and floating on her back with eyes closed. In playgrounds or in parks, she could become a loose arrangement of dots fading towards the perimeter of anyone's vision. At weekends by the sea, she became a vanishing point for those afraid to get their feet wet. One morning, her parents discovered that her bed was empty. They searched from root cellar to third-story balcony. In the attic, they listened to falling shingles while their shadows remained still in near-crouching positions. That night, it was a full moon, valleys so far away that they could be mistaken for smiles, craters for eyes, a white-yellowish glow, an almost human face.

THE SALESMAN

A customer, anger the platform
that runs all his programs, says
No and hauls his momentous
ass out of there.
Your glance, at a friend-competitor
across metastasizing Auto Row,
shows only pity
for the clunker now leaving
Visitor Parking, renewed motivation,
love for a small new wired sapling, and
disdain for whatever calls these things despair.

Invisible to others under
the local plaster sky and flat
horizon, a dam looms.
What seeps and threatens is, however,
an ever less accommodated, more
accommodating self.
The cars move in and out in herds.
All are pre-owned, whatever they pretend.
The grilles that once looked wide with awe,
then pursed and mean, now grin
back stupidly. Like words.

COMPOSED DURING MRI

A colleague is about to celebrate life.
The cameras are in place. The poetic
blogosphere, as infinite as zero,
quiets so as not to distract him.
He suspends horror and history
(he conceives them thus: horror/history) –
brackets them, as in Husserl's
phenomenological reduction –
to perceive the life beyond.
He thinks of himself thinking
as a woman must to have children,
to believe in their absolute
necessity. An ambrosial
freedom from maleness/violence courses through
my colleague, who may be a woman.

He or she soars from the tunnels
where we fight over bits of rat meat
(which is how he or she thinks
I see things). Enters the realm
of essences, seizes a leaf, flakes of seafoam,
the patterns horses or lovers make,
brings them back in cupped hands
and shows them to me.

*Dauid*e* Rondoni*

The builders of swimming pools in the Po Valley

raise their blue and empty tanks
against the low dusks
on the expanses of wheat, they raise them
like dreams

they write “swimming pools” on large billboards and seat
somewhere in their cars
or in the half-light in their house

and keep watching for hours, enraptured
in an unreal bliss,
those odd doors of heaven,
among the roads that come
and go. And then go
to never come back.

I produttori di piscine nella pianura padana

alzano i loro vasconi vuoti e azzurri
contro i tramonti bassi
sulle distese di grano, li alzano
come sogni

scrivono “piscine” su grandi cartelli e siedono
da qualche parte nelle loro auto
o in penombra nella casa

e restano a guardare per ore, rapiti
in una felicità irreale,
quelle loro strane porte del cielo,
tra le strade che vanno
e vengono. E poi vanno
per non tornare.

[First published in *Apocalisse amore*
(Mondadori, 2008)]

*To one who often wanders around the university area
in Bologna, his hands shaking*

He screams like a dog, wanders around and around
puffs of lime cover him
with dust on his shoulders
and on his cap too tight.

In the city of many trams
he pulls his aim pacelessly,
giving his breastbone to the wolf shadows
and his longbeaked laughter
to the women who swish their skirts among the *porticos* –
he wants to bite the light
that swarms on his face.

He enters one of the large halls
where God hangs on the cross
he crosses himself with swift moves
and then very slowly.

Nature
is absent from his case,
she has delegated him to a few elements
to chemical trifles, flashes.

Molecules inside him unbind
like clouds over the hills,
he has burns of quartz
and alcohol
the pupil always bright,
his movements
imperceptible.

He only is
what happens within.

But before the hands and the tongue
stop in a counter-blast of wind
(before the hands)
before the voice's pushed to the scream
and the beaked gazes,
before, before...

*A uno che gira spesso in zona universitaria
a Bologna, le mani che si agitano*

Grida come un cane, gira gira
lo impolverano i soffi
di calce sulle spalle
e sul troppo piccolo berretto.

Nella città dei molti tram
tira il suo passo senza direzione
dà lo sterno alle ombre lupe
e il lungobeccato riso
alle donne che sgònnano tra i portici –
vuole mordere la luce
che gli brulica sul viso.

Entra in una delle stanze grandi
dove c'è Dio disteso in croce
si segna con mosse rapide
e poi lentissime.

La natura
è assente dal suo caso,
lo ha delegato a pochi elementi
a minuzie di chimica, a barbagli.

Le molecole in lui si slegano
come nubi sulle colline,
ha bruciature di quarzo
e di alcool
la pupilla sempre accesa,
ha movimenti
inavvertibili.

Lui è solo quello
che gli avviene dentro.

Ma prima che le mani e che la lingua
si fermino in un contrario di vento
(prima che le mani)
prima che la voce spinta al grido
e che gli sguardi a becchi,
prima, prima...

You will be surprised perhaps
today that I tell you

there is nothing pure left in my life

but a burning point
that unfaithfulness has polished like a sea stone.

And that is not the will to live.

Stupirai forse
oggi che ti dico

più niente di puro è nella mia vita

se non un punto ardente
che l'infedeltà ha levigato come un sasso marino.

E che non è la voglia di vivere.

[Poems on pp. 33-35 first published
in *Il bar del tempo* (Guanda, 1999)]

SAVOIR-VIVRE

I

leisure that
no human will
can hasten

RICH

before us
in the place
of broken treaty

WILKINS

IN NOVEMBER IN VERSAILLES. The guided tours
flow and clot in the mirrored halls, splashing
tiny novae, “clic,” “flash,” “clic,” over the antiques,
waving selfie-sticks like belligerent wands

or like battle-standards stripped in a battle-
clamor of their war-banners. You and I, honey-
moonning, stood apart, against the walls, struck
dumb a bit; self-immolating martyrs on the pyre

of art appreciation. We gazed at the ceilings,
the figured plaster, the gilt torchières, seeking
the remnant signs of the vanished age of taste
and unconscionable and ruinous splendor. After,

out of doors, walking through ordered gardens.
I fancied I caught a memorial stench of ashes
on the wind from the south, caught lightly up
and flown out of the pit of the burnt castle

at ancient Meudon. I fancied I smelled oak-
pollen on the wind from the north, plucked
from the tree-tops of the forests of Fausses-
Reposes and Marly. We strolled flamboyantly

row by row down the hedge-bordered paths, maze-
dizzy, unapologetically beloved. Did you notice

the tourists we passed? We never spoke of them,
even in the sarcastic way we sometimes do.

For my part, I did notice faces that reminded me
of people I knew, this one, or that one, people
known in that moment by not being there with us.
Among the statues winter-wrapped in canvas,

beneath the autumn light breaking the sky
of glass into splinters of bright grayness,
this unusual idea seemed victorious to me:
“You lose.” My hand now in none but yours.

II

la nostra ora
scatta inavvertibile
affilato raggio
nel labirinto armonico
QUASIMODO

IT WAS A SPOILED SENSE of having overcome.
“You lose, I win,” I addressed the absences
hovering in the air. Saying so, I felt familiar
with the shrouded statues, like I might share

some understanding of their sightlessness.
The suffocating focus it gives to a season
of contemplation. I wore a black wool coat,
you wore a navy cape, and a silver sequin star

pinned to a black band in your hair. The grounds
around the palace were thick with pheasants.
Alert French crows posed atop lightning rods
bolted along the palace roof. I found finally

a sense of dignity in my collection of years
of what I unrepentantly believed to be unluck

and unearned despair. I found in them a joy
the way a boxer celebrates a bruise, the way

a blacksmith wears proudly the burnt hair
on his forearms, his singed brows and scorches.
Pain underpins every joy the day touches.
Ivy shaking in the wind, tourists roving,

our laughter ringing. Because we felt allowed,
we stood on the stone benches and declared love
new-made to be better than the old. Like guilt
the sun around the edges of the fountains glowed.

✿ *Heath Brougher*

THE BEAUTIFUL CLUSTERFUCK

All in jumble,
dissimilar pieces strewn together,
tangled veins and wires;
life lost and born;
today came loose at the seams,
after the tumult, it laid down
torn jagged remnants twisted
asleep together in a cluster—

a mountain of miscellaneous
piled far into the sky
looming motley in the sun shining;
things alive and things dead,
a haphazard landscape, yet somehow,
all the same {Dust} in the end,
and all a mangle of beauty.

PREASTLY BEGGAR'S INNING

A sick leash, washed and once klept errodental from its oner, skuttled for licks of her life long befour deckheart screamed "No more! I kan't though still I tri!" Seddled but sadly, many deaders went on heggling, then heiding, finnally bursting bubbles blown from the soapoletickal osheen, they squandled up heilodon thirstax. Aye, I eye(!) this bullboy's brickoaxis falleng again (Hohoho! might I be fined again!), a siff he wast never once born beforth this ceromental eralogue (angfore watt? Two make me sinsilly?).

Livia song worning from the loockout: Groanupts! Now crossing the horizant, now slipping me cysters, now!but!holy!thee!never buggling me emberse! Who's nanny could posebleak hellp! Hear wee err, hear wee err, so immanually corched top this speedspinningspinspeeding rooktowertorch! But butt buttt thothese treeleeves loglost, treblevees but wan remane! Will but wonus: Bring haghairs and schine-upsheeoopshees, jubilee natashands cindoors of cindease! Relise from the brigh souse-numbers then allfinnallivigannshe (ich ruf zu dir!) might reinaimas! Imadjinn no more, weedit out ourselves, then ohope theard beafreest foureverendeadeverest!

Interviews & Reviews



Photo by Giuseppe D'Antonio
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Three Examples of the Higher Balderdash

In any Encyclopaedia of World Literature these works would count as minor if not trivial, but in my opinion they have as much power as many an epic vouched for by the English teachers.

Two of these works can be hard to obtain. One quite high-priced edition of Henry Miller's *Mezzotints* comprises only eight of the thirty-five items known, though they are all said to be on the market somewhere.

The *Mezzotints* are prose sketches of characters, scenes, situations, art works, etc. Henry Miller paid to have them printed up on pieces of coloured card and then peddled them, with his wife's help, in Greenwich Village.

The titles alone bring back the atmosphere of the period (the 1920s), and of Miller's street-oriented mode of life at the time: "Dawn Travellers," "Dance Hall," "The Houston Street Burleskers," "Make Beer for Man."

Each sketch could be no more than 350 words long.

Details about these fugitive bits of Milleriana can be acquired from biographies of the man, especially Jay Martin's *Always Merry and Bright*. Martin quotes some wonderful passages, particularly from "Dance Hall."

The book *Letters to Emil* has a boisterous entry dated August 28, 1924 which Miller later adapted to create a Mezzotint about the Bowery Savings Bank.

These fragments point to a collection of arty, self-conscious pieces that have a tang of the gutter. Glimpses of a baroque elegance alternate with passages that express a drawling crudity which seems up to the minute even in the 21st century.

The *Mezzotints*, with their pasteboard hues and piercing insights, rival the prose poems of such artists as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Leonard Cohen.

A scholarly edition should be made available. They could be turned out on tinted

cards so as to be more or less indistinguishable from those which were peddled in the Pepper Pot and other dives. It is said that June, Miller's wife, got good money for them and the subscriptions rolled in.

If only the artist who wanted to bring them out in an illustrated edition had not taken his own life before he could do so!

Though I only know these sketches of Miller's from traces of them which are scattered in other publications I possess, I am fortunate enough to have on the bookshelf both of the other two masterpieces I am dealing with: John Lennon's *In His Own Write* and Marc Bolan's *The Warlock of Love*.

John Lennon had published some of his paragraphs of wordplay and inane humour in a Liverpool music paper, but they would never have appeared in book form if the Beatles had not become stars. Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape knew a publishing phenomenon in the making when he saw one. He realized at once that these could be compiled into a best-selling volume, and he contacted Lennon.

Lennon was amazed that an intellectual like Maschler was interested in his scribbblings, and happy to go along with his flattering offer. The time was right and the wind set fair to launch a book by the "literary Beatle."

Along with its follow-up (*A Spaniard in the Works*), *In His Own Write* has become a classic, particularly amongst those who retain the spirit of the "eternal student."

In His Own Write was put together from literary squibs that Lennon had lying around, interspersed with his drawings. When a second book was called for he had to create it out of nowhere, as it were. So *A Spaniard in the Works* might have been expected to show the strain. But no, the two demi-mondes create a seamless whole.

The sketches and poems of John Winston Lennon ("I was bored when the Nasties boomed Liddypool") are light as air but I would not let anything take their place on my shelves.

In "Treasure Ivan" we have: "One day, however, Small Jack Hawkins was just happening in a barret of abbeys when he overheated Large John and several other saviours planting to botany against the Captain."

The above is a mild example. Elsewhere it is even thicker, this word-stew smacking of the Goons, Edward Lear and the patter of surrealistic music hall comedians.

The third gimcrack masterpiece I would recommend is Marc Bolan's poetry book *The Warlock of Love*, which is often listed on eBay. A fine copy with dust wrapper can easily fetch three or four hundred pounds.

Whenever was so much flair shown in throwaway gems and breathless page-long epics? You would search long and hard to find the likes of the jewels he scatters in the dross. They clearly bear the influence of Shakespeare ("could Hamlet have known"), Villon and Chuck Berry.

Even though the dyslexic Bolan had the help of June Child, his first wife, with his manuscripts, the spelling and punctuation is erratic.

His work is memorable all right, with lines like "roes running and stags sunning," or "the sparrow with his wing tucked nowhere except round the blizzard North Wind."

Never mind "the rustling forest glades of Esher," *The Warlock of Love* is a wood it's wonderful to delve into.

"Our bed of love is like a glove," he says, "/tender and warm, that we creep into/ when the eye of noise whines/like a bird of prey."

Surely, this London lad drew his inspiration from deep and exotic wells.

He loads it on, of course, and doesn't know when to stop, and the poems usually succumb to the glut of their own imagery. The ode on page 51, however: "At leafy dale/the mammoth snail," follows (poetic) logic and makes sense (in its own terms) and should be welcomed by any fair-minded student of British poetry.

These three authors may have achieved far more than they intended. I would suspect that all of these collections were slung onto the paper with an air of hilarious panache, after wedging the tongue firmly in the cheek.

Ironically, this boldness in itself helped them create something marvellous and, I would say, imperishable.

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CHRISTINE BRANDEL is a British-American writer and photographer. In 2013, she published the chapbook, *Tell This To Girls: The Panic Annie Poems*, which the IndieReader described as a “well-crafted, heartbreakingly vivid set of poems, well worth a read by anyone whose heart can bear it.” To balance that, she also writes a column on comedy for PopMatters and rights the world’s wrongs via her character Agatha Whitt-Wellington (Miss) at Everyone Needs An Algonquin. More of her work can be found at clbwrites.com.

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DANIEL ROY CONNELLY was the winner of the 2014 Fermoy International Poetry Festival Prize, a finalist in the 2015 Aesthetica Magazine Creative Writing Prize and the 2015 winner of the Cuirt New Writing Prize for poetry. His recent work appears in *The North*, *The Transnational*, and *The Poetry Shed*. He lives in Rome.

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FREDERICK POLLACK is the author of two book-length narrative poems, *The Adventure* and *Happiness*, both published by Story Line Press. A collection of shorter poems, *A Poverty of Words*, appeared in March 2015 from Prolific Press. He has many poems in print and online journals, and is an adjunct professor of creative writing at George Washington University. Poetics: neither navel-gazing mainstream nor academic pseudo-avant-garde.

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PATTY SOMLO has received four Pushcart Prize nominations, been nominated for *storySouth* Million Writers Award and had an essay selected as a Notable Essay of 2013 for Best American Essays 2014. Author of *From Here to There and Other Stories*, Somlo has two forthcoming books: a memoir-in-essays, *Even When Trapped Behind Clouds* (WiDō Publishing), and *Hairway to Heaven Stories* (Cherry Castle Publishing). Her work has appeared in journals, including *The Los Angeles Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Under the Sun*, *Guernica*, *Gravel*, *Sheepshead Review*, and *WomenArts Quarterly*, and numerous anthologies. Find her at www.pattysomlo.com.