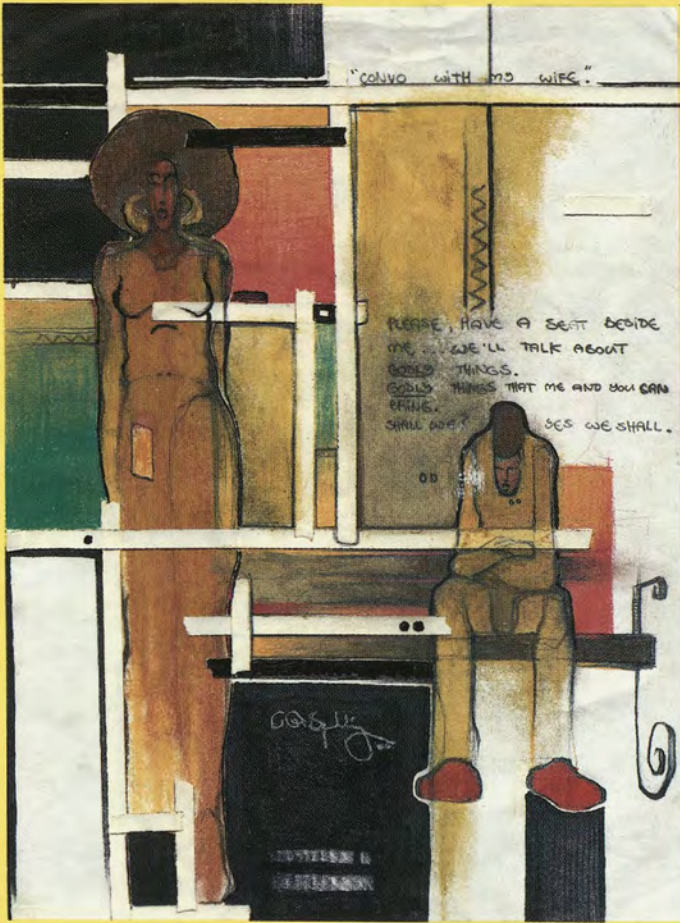


genesis

volume XXVIII



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Spring 2000

Front Cover
Best of Issue-Art

Convo with my Wife
Albert P. Spaulding Jr.

From The Editor's Desk:

I'm never surprised by the quality and quantity of work submitted each semester, and this issue is no exception. I would like to take a moment to thank all of you who took the time to submit to this issue. It was especially nice to see some examples of genre work this time around, but as ever, there is never enough space for all the work we would like to print. The editorial process is always a painful one due to the loss we feel when space and budgets come into play.

With this issue, my term as being a member of the staff ends, and as such, I must make the call heard once more. Please, if you are interested in seeing *genesis* continue, consider joining up for a round of duty this fall when new meetings are announced. For every pain that you will endure, two joys will fill your life.

And as the old must be replaced, the new cometh forth. As of this issue, *genesis* will be offering up a new award for the best poem by a female, in addition to those already offered for overall best of issue in poetry, prose, and art. This new endowment is called The Pilar El-Dib Award for Best Woman's Poem and is named after one of our past editors. Look forward to more info on this award in the future. Thanks goes out to Deanna Long for offering this twice yearly \$50 endowment. Hopefully in the next issue, we will be able to get an article from Ms. Long about her reasons for setting up this award.

A personal thanks goes out from me to all the faculty, friends, and family that have made this issue possible. You know who you are, you hear from me enough...

genesis

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I'd cut me a man, I would.

Out of Paper.

Crumbling him up when I am mad

And then smooth the wrinkles to soothe his heart.

I'd draw his faces on.

Erase.

Draw his clothes on.

Erase.

It could be fun, it should.

Talking to him through my pencil,

the lead running all over his body as I write

my dreams on his lips and fingertips.

A never ending conversation.

That would be nice.

no more pocketing pieces of crumbled churches
i'm not posing in this garden for you
but for the sun
catching the lens of your camera
but for history
recording the last movement of my hands
the last motion of my hips
the first moment I realized
i could no longer exist in a canister

in your pictures i'm suspended
behind the trellis
but beyond the fence
like waiting for a conversion,
a flash of light, my wings.

So it has come to this inevitable conclusion,
That I am in a state of confusion.

However my mind is made.

So why confusion, I'm rather aware.
My heart had never really been there.

An unusual condition that I knew quite well.
Only one regret - I could never tell.

Am I relaxed?
Do I care the least?
Have I seen the day this curse has ceased?

I should not prolong, for its been long waiting,
Don't drag me down, don't drag me out, don't keep me deflating.

When I found God, I saw he was nothing like me.
Why do I continue in this darkness when I know what can set me free.

The time has drawn, foreshadowed by fate,
To close this irreconcilable gate.

My Life is a Cliché

S.Renee Hesch

Born
Lived
Loved

Died

Schooled
Employed
Retired

Died

Dated
Married
Divorced

Died

Beggared
Invested
Profited

Died

Confronted
Questioned
Acknowledged

Denied

Waves of illusions
 breathe life into life
 thunderclouds paint
 innocents maturity
 landscapes shadow
 perspective
 shatter
 knowledge
 of aged mastery

Life

drop another chord
watch it float to the ceiling
another night of incense burning, smoke and wordless meanings
I kiss the thought of you tonight
a dragon in smoke sleeps
I rest the thought of you tonight and wish your soul to keep.
The incense burns the atoms left
from all the days gone by
all that matters is the meager days before we die.
So here's a toast to you, my love
my angel in midflight
and here's to all the time we'll spend in each other's night
and here's to all the times
when together we will lie
speaking of forever when we know we're soon to die.

black is just a deep, deep gray
as I am a deep, deep gray
do you want to see what this is like?
to see you would have to give it all.
give me your soul
I'll treat it well
and never lose it.
step lightly and slowly
taste the beauty of every shadow and flicker of light.

Sometimes I feel that everything's a dream
that it doesn't matter what I do or what I say
all of this will sink under the sands as I fail to catch them
even you are just a thought spinning in my head
soon to be lost and forgotten.

looking at you is looking into you
you glisten like a river.
watching you turn
I drink your motion.
I never want to hear of God again
the only thought, the only right
is in this moment, in our souls

A boy was born in remarkable times
And unthought of modern convenience
No major conflict required his arms
No great debate required his mind
So he went to college for no greater purpose
Than a faint idea of someday getting a job
But the boy didn't really care what his occupation would be
There was nothing worthy of talents such as his
He could tie his shoes and play video games
As well as many other amazing things that his ancestors
In their log cabins and igloos never dreamed of
Eventually he met a girl
But she was little help
She asked the boy to settle down and raise dingoes with her
But that didn't seem right
The boy knew he had a higher purpose
He dreamed of hand grenades and strip clubs
He lusted after books and watched films about Wookies
He attended the Church of the Holy Coat Hanger and tithed his 69 percent
He even bought a cat and named it Morris
Somehow though, the boy was still not content
He lacked the purpose of men like Paul Reubens or Cher
So he went out and bought a gun
Then drove to the nearest government building
Where he boldly walked in and shot
A sinister looking Coke machine
The boy destroyed several Coke machines that day
Before the military-industrial complex tracked him down
And locked him away in a minimum security facility
But he was happy to serve his sentence
The boy was proud of himself
He had done something original
He had made a difference in the world
And when the world had forgotten priests and hermaphroditic porn stars
They would still remember the boy
The boy who went around shooting coke machines
The boy who finally found a purpose in life.

Lightning quivers
in the morning of the damned
Nature's offspring shivers
taken from the land

Peace and tranquillity
are but a dream
Warmness and hospitality
are not what they seem

American dream
lobbyists paid
Join the team
the media made

The truth is what they say
You hear what they want
For silence do they pay
And dissenters do they hunt

The few control many
The many control the few
Don't have a penny?
They all control you

Price of bread went up
Wage of man went down
Booze overflows from the cup
spreading all over town

Corner gun merchant
having a sale
Outside the circus tent
see you in Hell

Wage earner kills
wage payer
and writer of bills
When politics fail

The rich don't have a prayer.

Untitled (World)
Maggie Gordon
6X9



I'd like to buy the world a carbonated beverage

Ryan Dillman

I'd like to buy the world a carbonated beverage
and furnish it with affection
to further assimilate myself
into the cola generation

I'd like to always know what the real one is
so I won't merely obey my thirst
or perhaps give in to the pepper
because that would be the worst

there's a new storm rising
from a surge of infant energy
give the royal crown
to the one with the most tenacity

do I got the right one baby?
hey it quenches like no other
drink, enjoy, it's the pause that refreshes
take the taste test me cola brother

buck tooth bottle opener
dancing polar bears
pop culture icons singing
another splitting hairs

raindrops keep falling on my head
and in the morning I see the dew
it's crystal clear and caffeine free
I've got to have it, how 'bout you?

Fiction the only alternative to society's reality.
Bitter in taste to the realist unlike the tangible bliss that appeals to me.
Like lost memories overtaken by unnatural tendencies.

Forced upon over time, through inescapable tradition.
As if it was the correct decision to accept life's mission.
Such a long and unforgiving race that is.
Rushing though infinity to a transparent finish line.

With so many wrongs, and so few rights.
Question thee not, for I know not.
But may we exchange hands and not struggle alone.
For with each other we will not sing in dark tone.
But heal every atom and every living bone.

So many paths, hindered in contradicting truth.
While being led without clues.
So I love what I want. And hate what I have.
So small in history. Giving birth to misery, emmerging relentlessly.

Totality is reality and glowing eerily.
truths are in dreams, and dreams are nonfiction.

there are chamois-colored prints everywhere in the spare room;
sooty smudges fringe a particularly large one (a victim
 of the open air fireplace on cool Sundays and company)
last year it was all those muddy apricot, raised, conical
objects (very disturbing) and tondos that BLED mauve tears
 all over the kitchen and sunporch
I don't think she was happy that year
when she had our baby her paintings were wild swirls, but in
peaceful pastels (I thought they had a sort of numbing effect
 if you stared at them too long)
but now its gorgeous bubbles of the most splendid light-catching
lapis, the palest azure, crystal droplets
 sitting about the formal living room
and a relief of non-obstrusive chamois-colored prints that don't
seem to mind the sooty open air fireplace
 and company in the spare room
I think she's content this year.

Vampire Death
James J Comerford
5x7
Black and white
Gelatin silver print
1999



At Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St. you can get a Zombie
five kinds of liquor,

layered and thick

Thick is big at Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St.

the air is thick with cigarette smoke,

the girls wear their makeup thick,

especially their lipstick,

Red and thick

The atmosphere is thick too,

charged I mean,

electro-phied but cool,

especially when they play it HOT!

Black is also big at Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St.

The musicians are black,

the tablecloths are black,

the black lights ain't black but they got 'em

The bar's black.

They got this bust of this black chick behind the bar - Nefertiti, they tell me.

Egyptian I think,

but definitely black.

Yeah, black is big there. So is brass and glass.

Brass rails on the bar,

brass trim on the chairs,

brass plated signs they put on the tables that say

"RESERVED"

And the glass, Man!

they got these clear glass candleholders on every table to help light the place

though it's still pretty dim

in Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St.

And behind the bar they line up the glasses in these neat little rows,

hundreds of 'em

Shot glasses

and martini glasses

and beer glasses

and high-ball glasses

and glasses I don't know what they are!

Yeah, brass and glass is big there.

And the chicks-Man!

Let me tell you about the chicks

at Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St.!

I'm in there one night

and these two chicks come in

and Shorty *himself*

leads 'em over to one of those tables

with the brass plated signs that say

"RESERVED"

and let me tell you they were *soooo* hot. They were *soooo* cool!

Black cocktail dresses with those spaghetti strap things

and black high heel shoes

and thick, Red lipstick

that stayed on the rims of the glasses.

after they sipped out of 'em

And they just sat there

and smoked their cigarettes

and listened to the guys play

and rocked their long legs to the music

and one of 'em, one of 'em

asks me if I had a light,

just like that,

just sat there

and smiled,

well she kinda smiled at me,

just sat there and smiled

and asked me if I had a light.

And I said "SURE" I gotta light!

Why wouldn't I gotta light?

I mean I'm right here at Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St. ain't I?

Do I have a light?

Anyway they ended up leavin'

but Man!

They were hot!

one night,

one night I was in Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St.

and the cops came in,

-*whole bunches* of cops,

I mean a couple of precincts anyway

and they came in the back door

and the side door

and the front door

and the back door

back where I was at

and one of 'em knocked me into the sink almost

and I said "Hey man!"

just like that, I said, "Hey man!"

and he didn't say I'm sorry or nothin'.

And anyway they ended up bustin' Shorty and the guys.

Shorty says "why?"

and they say cause of the dope

and Shorty says "Hey, he's the only dope we got around here!"

and he kinda laughs pointin' at me.

And I wasn't mad or nothin',

Shorty kids me like that sometimes.

But he was laughing kinda nervous

and the guys was nervous too.

You could tell.

Anyway, they closed it.

I mean they closed Shorty McGuire's Black Majik Blues Bar on 142nd St.

Did I tell ya you,

you could get a Zombie there?

Five kinds of liquor,

all layered and thick!

Okay, let's face it. We've all been there: looking into a blank white void, praying for the words to fall out of the sky. Writing the World's Greatest Love Poem. Or the Cleverest Quip Ever Written in a Greeting Card. Or maybe, The High School Essay That Will Show That English Teacher Once and for All. It strikes me, as I sit here, how "wired together" all of us really are when I realize how *many* of us have sat here. Waiting. Thinking. Hoping. It's not supposed to be this difficult, they tell us. You just sit down at the computer and write. Create. So here I am, and I'm supposed to craft the Timeless All-American Short Story, and that's what I try to do. I've headed to the nearest "computer work stations," and now I compose like a fury. Hah. More like staring into space *wishing* I were composing. Usually when I get here, my mind, having decided it wants nothing to do with a lot of finger-tapping exertion that looks to me too much like a manual labor, goes on vacation. You know: Hawaii, Timbuktu, Mars; anyplace but here and now, in the time-to-catch-your-thoughts-on-paper "computer lab," as we so lovingly call it.

I never stopped to think about why they call them computer labs, though it seems they're the same at almost every University. I found this out one summer night while attending a "summer institute" that brought together twenty-four students from around the country to digest a lot of information on one subject or another and then to try and spew it back on paper. Naturally, we would all wait until the day before a paper was due, then head down to the nearest computer lab (which was of the twenty-four hour variety, and thankfully so, since many of us waited until 2:00 a.m.) to compose. Anyway, as this particular multi-collegiate crowd walked into this particular lab, I thought about making some kind of speech, or announcement, or apology, as though to beg forgiveness for the sweatshop-like atmosphere, when I noticed my fellow classmates' eyes had a kind of glazed over the way mine do each time I walk through one of these doors. And I realized that not only had each of them been in one of these labs before (frequently, if their robot-like walk was any clue), but also that there was something in the atmosphere that seemed almost to anesthetize us, or hypnotize us; and I finally caught on that we were not the scientists in these labs; we were not the doctors; not the surgeons operating at these endless rows of infernal electronic workstations; we were the patients. These were labs for the dissection of our minds via computer, and yes, we were the subjects.

Now, it's easy enough to visualize the kind of place I'm talking about, if you picture thirty or so desktop computers lined shoulder-to-shoulder on top of the white counters (or off-white, if you're using color samples), each with an armless swivel-chair parked in front of it; thirty computers, thirty monitors, thirty mice staring at you from on top of their little red living-room-rug mousepads. Two-dozen-and-a-half keyboards to measure the twitches your fingers make when you sit down in the lab to have your know-how measured, your creativity level examined, your wavelength-output measured. One printer that coughs out the results every time you are bold enough to *think* that what will print out will somehow be measurably better than what you *know* you just typed in. One special desk with a mauled sign, "consultant station" hanging above it. A few odds-and-ends vestiges of the classroom the "lab" once was: chalkboards, a pencil sharpener, a pipe running along the wall for hanging up coats, a roll-up movie screen. A few newer accessories that prove this lab means "business:" a file cabinet with

the sign, "do not store anything in the cabinet," a wall sign, "do not write on the chalk board," and a second one: "not responsible for clothing left on the coat rack."

You begin to see the point. This is where so many erstwhile college students from across the country come to create. Or at least, come to have their creativity tested, or laboritized, or lobotomized - whichever it is they do here. Now, I'm not really complaining. After all, there is always the home computer. But sometimes, as a place to compose a creative piece of writing, home is about as nurturing as a woman with a rolling pin and an angry cocker spaniel named Curly, remembering you promised to play with him today, standing in the doorway - her with a list of "jobs-to-do," him with his hundred-forty-two most favorite toys. So here I sit, this time in a stark empty lab, thinking about how much I hate writing alone, trying to have a one-man confab on creativity, or at least to write a piece of fiction, and since my creativity was apparently surgically removed from me moments after I walked in (although I think they do it with electronics these days), I guess this is where I'm stuck for a while. Pretending I can write.

Sure enough, my mind immediately wanders away from the fiction at hand to take a holiday. Supposedly, I start thinking, I'm going to look back on these as some of the best, most creative days of my life. I guess they (you know, the powers-that-be, the people you blame everything on --*They*) think I'll remember school as some sort of paradise: lounging around, reading (writing) leisurely, grapes held aloft by nubile servants (preferably not named Hugo) clad only in silken robes cut off above the mid-thigh. Beach just below my vantage point, waves roaring in the distance. Wild animals, tame only in my presence, lounging at my feet, a Bengal tiger contentedly chewing at a tuft of fur between the toes of his left forepaw. A familiar face steps from behind one of the many Greek columns that ring the semi-shaded olive-grove glade of eternal Mediterranean warmth, cooled just slightly by an incidental morning breeze with the ever-so-faint promise of a light thunderstorm (arriving each day at just the moment I've stepped inside for my afternoon nap and ending, skies clearing, by the time I arise, refreshed). He steps across the grassy knoll that separates us, a living saint, aged, wise, and kind, and sits on a bench nearby (and of course it goes without saying that he plays the lyre), remaining patiently, attentively throughout the day in the event my studies bring me to a question I cannot answer.

Enter reality, as I look up from typing another lackluster paragraph of prose only to realize I'm still right here, only now two dozen other would-be scholars and writers have lined up side-by-side with me, all cattle at our knowledge-troughs. I start thinking about how much I hate writing around other people. I feel like calling out in mock welcome, as a crush of rush-hour typing coalesces around me, "Welcome to the pantheon of higher learning, the University Computer Lab, where inspiration is our middle name!" Not content to mire myself in ordinary misery like every other lost soul typing a paper, I seem driven to drift into time-wasting fantasy after fantasy, which only serves, when I return to find myself still perched on a swiveling plastic piece of low-tech upholstery, to underscore the mechanistic reality of the two dozen Internet oracles chattering at their victims throughout the room. The familiar white floor tile with the arbitrary dull gray pattern, I notice, is designed to look like arbitrary gray dirt, which is supposed to keep you from realizing you're sitting a foot-and-a-half above arbitrary dull gray dirt, at least unless you're a hopeless enough case to stare at it until you realize what it *really* is, in which case they don't really care *what* you think (probably, *They* hope you'll remember it as marble, forty years down the road when they ask to be included in your Last Will and Testament). I suppose the twelve-year-old lab consultant (the one pursuing his Master's in Computer Sarcasm)

who's playing the computer game below the "no game playing" sign will be the wise old sage of my blithering, drooling, eighty-five-year-old memories.

Ahem. Maybe I'd be better off to think of my *future as a writer* and finish this story before I worry too much about my *future thoughts* surrounding my *past* as a writer. Ah, the flights of fantasy of a young author (yes, *young*. this is *my* dream, remember?). I always seem to imagine, when I consider a future for myself as a writer, one of those easy scenarios Hollywood portrays with a cheesy cheerfulness: the novelist supported on the grounds of some mansion, great vistas both inside and out through which to search for famous phrases; a rustic cabin in the woods-make those Redwoods-with a month's food in store; some oasis of a motel and diner where I find myself *self-stranded* with no one who doesn't matter but nights and other respites spent with someone who *does*; or one of those writer's colonies where eight or a dozen minds converge to blend, separate, retrench, and write in a sort of continuous workshop, only to emerge as the Next New Wave of American Authors. And then I think of this Eden, this nutrient of creativity, the very hotbed of writer's workshops in America, this cinder-blocked-and-ceiling-tiled holding pen, and my bubble is necessarily burst, leaving me longing for a really groovy job, like taming Bengal Tigers with too much fur between their toe (wishing I hadn't passed up that brochure about becoming a sarcastic twelve-year-old computer consultant, when I was eleven).

So much for my future. Maybe if I try shutting out this hundred-four degree, twelve-hundred-Gigawatt room, I can just grasp a single fond memory of my *past* days spent here pounding out gibberish about vital subjects like, "Wizened Sages as Supplemental Fill in the Dietary Strategies of the Tigers of Classical Greece." Hmm...there is *one* memory I can't help but remember fondly. My first workshop, where thirty or so of us would-be Writers (with a capital 'W', you'll have noticed) gathered together to share our wares in wary anticipation of the adulation of our fellow writers (small 'w' intended), even while hoping to benefit somehow from constructive criticism. Never mind how it is we thought we could get frank criticism from the adoring, prostrate-with-gratitude devotees of our fantasies. That's another essay. Anyway, this workshop took place in what might have been any one of the many golden oases for writers that proliferate on campus: you guessed it-the University version of the writer's-dream-come-true-hostel, the state-of-the art (if we're talking about finger-painting) Computer Lab.

Like any other, it was a virtual Center for Literary Creativity, itself as extraordinary a concoction of blandness muted with boredom electrified by high technology as the one I'm sitting in now. Somehow, the word "institution" just blares at me every time I visit one of these PC Pantries. And I'm not just talking about the institutionally of the room, although the paint is genuinely *Institutional*-with a capital "I". Rice Tone, Pearl Stone and Silver Lining. Sounds like a wedding in the clouds, you're thinking. Wrong. This is what they call the paint they use (recognizable as off-white, off-off-white, and murky off-off-white). I'm dead serious about this, too-I just looked at the cans-they're actually repainting the lab I'm working in, and they're using the very same colors they used last time, and the time before, and every other time since the colors were concocted in Athens in 532 BC so that Sophocles himself could stage a play about two dozen young writers chipping away on their stone tablets lined up in a small room.

You see, it's the very same color they use out at "Happy Valley Farms" where my Uncle B-B-Bert is tucked safely away. Which brings us back to institutions. To be honest, I don't even have an Uncle B-B-Bert. But psychological instability-I mean, creativity-being what it is, all I have to do is sit in one of these labs for a few minutes and I begin to *think* I have one (for that

matter, all I have to do is sit in one of them for a few *hours* and I'm ready for Happy Valley myself, but I'm sure you've already noticed that). Creativity, beware the heavy wet blanket of these misbegotten rooms.

Anyway, my memory is of a debate in my freshman composition class (a user-friendly name for thirty-five students packed into one of these rooms with a teacher who must have needed the money badly). We were attempting to settle on a definition of creativity. Hardly a lovefest, it degraded into a battle over what was art and what was not, what "create" really means, and whether or not works that convey destructiveness can be called creative, insofar as they seem to celebrate the opposite act. The American Flag was waved and trampled (and some guy in the back sang "God Save the Queen," a song which may argue for banning creativity altogether). Needless to say, we didn't settle the issue, nor did we even come close. But I remember feeling personally passionate about the idea that creativity, as embodied in any work of "art," must be driven by some *imperative*. It struck me—at the time, at least, probably just the heat of battle—that without the driving force of some need, creativity doesn't occur. Did the Athenians sculpt the world's largest equine statuary for kicks? Absolutely not, I argued to no one but the wall. If they hadn't run out of Miracle Whip (which the Trojans, ever the convenience-store titans, had a monopoly on) they'd still be home carving little boats out of Ivory soap.

Now, this argument was lost in the near-melee that had been going on around me, what with the passion running red and the temperature rising. So I ducked my head under the desk, wary of the sharp objects and heavy book I feared would soon be flying, and held my own private symposium on the subject of Creativity in the Computer Lab. Might as well start at the beginning, I told myself. That was either the Big Bang or Creation, depending on who you asked, and since we'd already shied away from the idea of things that go "Bang" as creative acts, that left me with only one choice: the big 'C'. I asked, as I pondered my navel, "what does the Creation of the Universe have to do with creativity in the classroom? This, I thought, was really deep (so was my navel, but we'll come back to that later. Meet me in the closet). Certainly there was some *imperative* to Creation, and it strikes me that it might seem to have been an awfully reverential beginning for a one-man confab on creativity, but considering the open warfare erupting all around me (and the fact I was on my knees already), I thought a little prayer might have been in order.

Concerned that my time left on earth might have been just a tad shorter than I'd calculated before I ventured inside to the computer lab that day, I did a quick survey of the less heavenly "creators" of record. The list was short: Man. That is of course, unless I included *procreation* as a sub-category of creation (and I'll admit I've had a few such encounters that qualified as pretty creative), in which case pretty much every living thing is creative in at least this one sense, I thought. About this time, a mind-reading Biology major happened by and began lecturing me on the number of species that reproduce *asexually*, trying to thwart my argument by asserting that *these* living things merely duplicated themselves; that there was no creativity involved, just so much cut-and-paste. Of course, I got rid of her by accusing her of being the one that had been peaking into the boudoirs of several species in my neighborhood. Besides, I was afraid to draw the whole asexual side of the biological spectrum into our little academic fray—imagine being chased around the computer lab by a gigantic fungus. So I quickly tabled the motion to include the act of reproduction in the definition of creativity, and hastened to move to less, shall we say, *functional* acts of creativity.

Which brought me back to man (or woman, I was obliged to say, since sexual tensions in the lab had risen with a divisive gender battle over who had designed the first fig-leaf evening wear, Adam or Eve). Humans (there, that's better) *alone* engage in creative acts. Granted, there was a kid in my third grade *art* class named Hugo who was possibly only half human, but no one ever accused him of creativity, I thought, especially upon overhearing some of the arguments going on in that room, including the somewhat passionate argument that there is no such thing as creativity, only mimicry (which fails to explain the rather unique presence on Earth of Hugo). Anyway, creativity, I thought, is as unique to humans as intelligence, although I was beginning to seriously question the intelligence part. Show me first, I thought, *one* human who knows the way out of this room, and we will talk about intelligence.

So I surmised, without even getting help from the ever-present twelve-year-old, that creativity is uniquely human and perhaps arises out of some need. A bit less than definitive, but a good beginning. I would have taken the easy out at this point and looked into Webster's Dictionary for an answer, but the only copy in the room was busy fending off a heightened attack from the female side of the gender war, and I refused to leave the relative safety of the underside of the instructor's computer desk. So I decided to stick with what I had and craft a definition out of these meager pieces. I asked, "What do creativity and human imperatives have to do with each other? What does that have to do with these confounded computer labs? And why am I hugging the bottom of a desk asking myself questions, when I could be safely in bed watching 'I Love Lucy' reruns?"

Setting the third question aside for a time when I might safely calculate the distance to the door and the time it would take to crawl there, I addressed the first two. Most of civilized life is mundane, institutional maybe. We place stone tablets in little rows. We put people in front of them, and they make marks in little rows. Two-and-a-half thousand years later, we put computers in those same little rows with the same people making the same marks. A dreary existence, but a necessary one, lest we go back to the times of Bengal Tigers squaring off against paste-eating cavemen named Hugo. And yet we strive for some improvement in our routine, We look for something, anything that will break through these artificial bland rice tones of our existence. we make something up (fiction) or exaggerate the heck out of the truth (creative nonfiction). Either way, we create. And life seems a little more interesting, at least enough to get through another day.

It seems "nothing in the world is better for thee, creativity, than me" (sayeth the computer lab, a Quaker). Maybe because it adds immediacy to the long-term need of a grade; maybe the boredom, the blandness, the Pearl Stone helps foment the need for comfort (like the need to avoid people armed to the teeth with large books). The need for a window view can be a great motivator. Maybe the whole purpose of regimentation, structure, discipline, *monotony* in the atmosphere enclosing the creative process is to force us to look *inward* through a window to find the components from which we create: truth, fiction, or a little of both; to find the uniqueness which is us. Perhaps the monitor screen we stare into looking for answers is really a window-a window through which the world sees *us*; a window we tap on, like Morse code, sending our faint little message into the ethernet. Tap, tap, tap, on the keyboard, looking through the glass, reading our own little message to see if it is intelligible, sending ourselves a mailgram-by-print-command, just to see if the mails still really do come through, to read our own letters before we send them out, *to find out who we are before we share ourselves with others.*

Maybe institutionality makes it safe to do so. It never is easy to type those little words out, knowing that you're putting a piece of your inner self onto the screen for others to inspect, dissect, analyze, and criticize. Like opening your mind up for others to examine-an intellectual pose *sans clothes*. Talk about a window. They can see *everything*, if you let them. And so you hide behind the electronic dressing screen, trying on different outfits, accessories, looking through-or into-the looking glass until some strange combination strikes you as *decent*. By which I mean, at least not likely to get you laughed at. Like a short story about a guy named Hugo, who tries to eat everyone's paste. Which leads me back to where I started, writing in the computer lab. That is, if you call this writing. Or to where I *finish* writing, another short story completed hours later, drained, hungry, thirsty, tense, butt sore and brain dead, but a little more sure of what I might find inside myself, a little more hopeful that someone else might care.

The key, I've found, to surviving the computer lab (which for most of us means emerging with our paper written *and* our minds and bodies intact, gender wars or no) is to think creatively, and remember a few pointers: never taste the paint, no matter how convincing Hugo is. Never *ever* let your Uncle Bert help you write your paper (especially if he's dressed up like Sophocles again)' Avoid Biology majors. Anyone who spends that much time peeking through other species' windows looking at *asexual* relations belongs in Happy Valley. remember your first imperative-know your way to the nearest door. Remember that for every young writer who winds up in his own personal Acropolis, twenty-nine of them go down in Apocalyptic flames, unable to get a clear view of themselves through the screen. Remember to tap every now and then. And pass the sun block, young Sophocles. I'm going to catch a tan while that twelve-year-old reboots my stone tablet and formats my papyrus. Memories, anyone?

Untitled (Woman)

Maggie Gordon

6X9



Carol Durbin

I drive down a long dirt road
And dust billows in my wake.
Out the window July has browned
The grass absolutely,
And night is coming at my heels.
The incense of summer air,
All hot corn fields and elderberry blossoms,
Languid stream beds and dew,
Makes my head reel with memories
Of seventeen and hungry, angry and alive.
Those summers ago when
At that age
Awe comes with so
Many different faces,
And youthful passion
Rakes across the heart.

something stole my passion
clothed in black on tiptoe
passing fog
deep in night while I slept
hole in the morning
like a vacant lot
and there is no ecstasy in my sighs

personification

Lisa Barton

my anger is a high-heeled bitch.
she smokes unfiltered camels
with long black holders
and monogrammed silver case
jewel-encrusted filigree
(no less)

power walks with her powerbook
cappuccino in one free hand, cellphone
under pointed chin

exhales volcanic ash in puffs
plans takeovers on lunch hour
(sly seductress on weekends)
tearing through men like
sheet of paper in her organizer
(bachelor #3 penciled in at 4)

gets invited out to spare pain
avoidance of her revenge
friends are the ones who bend down enough
to kiss her ass
shine her shoes
check her pulse
just to make sure

the one who must win
paid everyone else to lose
with grace
and applause
but I can't stand her
she's nothing like me.

City old with mud and blood,
built on wood of ancient sailing ships.
The trash piles on the curb.
Piss rolls down the gutter,
stinking in the heat.
The heat inspires murders,
beatings, rapes,
and insanity.
The memory of slavery,
only yesterday.
Black men and women,
run sweating in tuxedos,
serving wine and oysters,
to Sah and Mam.
Found later in
corners of alleyways.
Eyes white, knowing secrets
old as the vines
climbing brick buildings
and cemetery stones.
Dealing white powders
and voodoo.
Shining electric sex
walks through the street,
corrupt as the police and politicians.
Transvestites walk arm in arm,
in high heels,

screeching at boys,
and whispering to each other.

Still, there is love in the town.

For the city, for the people.

For life.

And death.

Love of miracle meeting.

Love of the sun as it falls from the sky.

I'm here with a woman,

grasping at my hand in the cobblestone streets.

Smiling at me,

Saving me,

from drowning here.

New Orleans, Halloween 1998.

This tale of woe, as yet untold,
Concerns the one I yearned to hold.
Forbidden fruit, still ripe on the vine.
I sold my soul to taste Her wine.

With rapturous torture She invaded my life;
Nights filled with pleasure, days fraught with strife.
Appearing at night, bringing devilish delight,
Eyes closed with slumber she'd come within sight.

Waking at dawn to find She had gone,
My tortured soul became her willing pawn.
For the torment endured, I gave my consent
To the nocturnal nymph of nocent intent.

Demonic princess in angelic form
Arriving at night, retreating at morn
Leaving memories of lust in my head to swarm.

To touch her, to taste her
To smell her scent;
For want of these things
My sanity went.

Though chaos reigned my sanity's restored
But I shall never forget the one I adored.
Things are as they should be, and yet, it still seems,
She shall ever remain the girl of my dreams.

In one breath

As the weakened frame surrenders

To the might fist of the present,

Whispers rustle in the cornfields

Unearthing relics

Deeply rooted in the soil.

Minds, waken briefly,

Hurriedly

Skimming familiar scenes

Leaving

Faint impressions

In the deep black dirt.

Planted seeds finally sprout

Plowed fields murmur restored hope

Tales passed on

To the innocent ears of sorrowful hearts.

Days of cranked ice cream

Rides of hay

And games made of old

Are planted in a box in my attic.

Tiffany Kyser

An abstract light shines,
uncovering the woman, the center
of birth.

Doors to the womb open,
close,
with the kiss of sun's rays,

the lips of the woman shines,
there are many, like the invisible layers of her soul, covered by the skin,
the lips, the abstract light.

Diane M. Johnson

Stingy-skinned girls
washin' they hair
in an ol' chipped was basin
makin' fun of my
nappy, iron-red hair tied
with a shred o' gray ribbon
and my funny mulatto eyes
they tease me because they don't know they poor

Grimy-skinned girls
scrubbed once a week
with lye soap but they skin
is still off-color as mine,
its in they pores

I run past with my homemade dress
flappin' my knees

The two of them laugh
when I run past because they don't they poor

Mama told me long ago, but they don't know they poor.

Snapping Turtle in the Sun

James J Comerford

8x10

Black and white

Gelatin silver print

1999



deep in the southern woods and weeds i'm pissing on a tree
at the edge of 100 acres of your inherited land. i'm playing your second wife
and paying monthly installments for time life country classics.
napping on a screened-in porch while you and your hired hand
drink pabst blue ribbon and draw up plans
to build the rest of our dream house from scratch.

you make a career out of uglying the fingers meant for touching me.
watch you twist electrical wire, carry in buckets of drywall and plaster
and tear apart ancient rock formations to build our floor just like you've imagined --
so the stream runs right through our living room.

i pretend not to notice the thick veins in your forearms.
or our makeshift shower without walls. waiting naked for a bucket of rainwater
to warm in the 6 o'clock sun and you to pour it slow through the frame
of our soon-to-be master bedroom window down over me
and even from here i can smell your body
like wet plywood and maker's mark whiskey.

and like a good wife, i bring drinking water from the spring, tend a garden growing
your favorite foods -- summer squash and cantaloupe. i scrub blood stains
from the tree stump where you gut and scale blue gill. i think about the moths collecting
and dying in the porch light, the taste of dust behind my teeth.

evenings you make homemade candles in empty cans of orange juice concentrate
and hum the chorus of "lay lady lay" over and over until just before bed
when you interrupt the dirty part of my dimestore romance

ask me to please rub vaseline on your back
so the red ink in your tattoo won't fade.

and I do.

like a good wife, I'm content with the life we've carved out of McIntosh mountain.
pictures advance and flicker in filmstrip light --
skinny dipping under sawmill bridge, counting cattails along rattlesnake lake,
and squandering every penny of your inheritance
on live bait and dandelion wine.

before newswweek ran the cover photo -- the fireman and the dirty baby limp but alive, I pushed through double newsroom doors shaking slightly.

enter the editor in gray jeans with gray beard and old tyme portrait mustache not smiling at my ponytail, my brown suspenders, my red binder with bylines clipped crooked.

he's scrolling through news stories on the a.p. wire, not thinking about the humidity, the rain still stuck to my glasses, my timid handshake, the holes in my résumé.

he's not noticing the way i am moved by the carpeted cubicles the color of seashells but not the flashing pictures on t.v. --

a woman pinned below a concrete pillar forced to rip off her own arm, and below that a Ryder van turning the corner

he doesn't care about the spelling test I flunked on-site, the trapped white space in my layout, the way i don't cringe at adult language

i'm hired because the editor's preoccupied, sapping mental pictures of the words he'll write tomorrow, hunt and peck hunt and peck a bombing in the heartland and babies trapped inside

and crying and crying and crying - we're preoccupied
and no ones sees clark kent distracted.

clark kent watching the controlled bouncing and sway I make, the sway in the way move across the room with application for summer employment, with my new hips and eyelashes

and kent has never felt real shrapnel before; i make him dead and born all at once.

he is dust and bone till i come
carrying wood glue and patience.

he rewards me with marriage vows
and one mile of chain link fence
around a crumbling A-frame house.
we take pictures on a hobby
horse, abandoned, on the front porch.
we play soccer with the unclaimed
roses in the backyard. we let
the roof turn to mush and cave in -

our children uprooting concrete
in the driveway are beautiful.
we won't repave those cracks; our backs
aren't made to bend over blacktop
steaming in july, but to lie
listening to the weather change.
he tells me "someday it won't rain"
and i believe his promises.

on and on our footsteps bleach blue
from the kitchen tiles. our bodies'
run-off rusts rings around the drains.
we exhale deeply and the house
looses. insulation bulges
from every ceiling. wallpaper
bubbles and slides down. visitors

comes and the doorbell buzzes loud:

“lord lift us up where we belong.”

we’re happy in this misery.

i’m not disturbed by the numbers
peeling off the mailbox. or the
tall compost pile stinking out front
because each morning i watch him
glide from the tv to the bed
from his shaving cream and shower
into the rain. and every night
he shuts tight the windows, plugs rags
under the doors, rolls over and
loves me like a shovel in sod.

i tell him i’ll always be his basement bulb swinging

i tell him i’ll never crack.

1

No one told me what it was all about.
I wanted to touch Farrah Fawcett
magazines in Dad's top dresser drawer,
or ask about the missing pages
in Mom's diary. I was punished
for playing dress up with my brother,
taking pictures of his tiny feet
in open-toes shoes, his knobby knees
peeking from the hem of my church skirt.

And on family road trips I noticed
condom machines inside shell station
bathrooms, but did not ask questions
though I sometimes peered inside the box
marked feminine napkin disposal,
searching for some answers, some reason
for the Swedish style massage tool,
why its vibration in the bedroom
blurred the T.V. screen in the basement.
or why I felt delightful shaking
when I pressed and held the D flat key
practicing for my organ lesson.

2

I did not know anything until
that first double-date to the movies,
the flickering of half-reality

of imitation - my fingers slick
from the popcorn butter, discovered
the inside of new thighs, discovered
new ways to become an insider.

Michael Coatney

Well, I guess every town's got one. Some story's almost bigger than the town itself. One that's been told and retold more times than the town's got people. Most times, it's about a fella bigger than life. Sortalike, "Paul Bunyan," or one like that. This one's about the same. I guess you'd call it a legend, in a way. See, Blackbeard was the biggest man ever lived around here. Big enough to hold the whole town right in the palm of his hand. So big, I guess he was just about the best thing the town ever had. So I guess he became a legend. That's how big he was. Too big, maybe. Well, this is the story of how a legend died one day.

Never have heard exactly who gave him that name. Blackbeard. You'd almost think he liked it, too, the way he stared at you when you called him that. And it wasn't just the beard. Big, rough, bushy thing hung halfway down his chest, half again as wide, and just as full, sure enough. But no, there was a certain way about him. A mean kind of look and a sort of baleful glare like a mad bull that just never left his face. Everybody in town knew him, at least by the sight of him, as he walked up the shoulder of the road to Joe's Bar after work each day. Blacker than pitch-tar on a roof, he was, coming out of that foundry every day. He was like the trouble every man in town wanted to be. And you see, that was the funny thing about old Beard. See, just *telling* a fella from another town about him made you feel like you were just as big. Even if you did embellish the facts every now and then just a bit. Well, that was up until that boy come along, changed things. Took a long time to quite feel right about things again, *after*.

See, guy like Beard kinda gave every other fella in town bragging rights. Like, as though you knew him- personal- like you were his friend. Starts out, one guy saw him kill the snake that sank it's fangs into his arm. Next thing you know somebody else saw him bite off the snake's head and tie his own wound off using the dead snake as a tourniquet. Rattlesnake they say. Eight-footer. You know how that goes. Shoot, rattlers don't live anywhere near here - not within a hundred miles. Anyhow, town like this thrives on stories. Never been much money, so sometimes only way a fella can build himself up is to tell a story. First thing a man's had a woman three ways to Sunday, next, he's had her sister. *You* know. Shoot, people been telling stories in these hills longer'n there's been hills. But Blackbeard was the biggest of them all, at least until he finally met his match.

Came down from one of them backwoods families. Folks said his momma was half-Indian and his daddy was really three-quarters grizzly, but that was just to scare the kids to keep away from him, I think. Had the worst job in the foundry, and people said it made him crazy. Took a great steel scoop, must have weighed a hundred

pounds, and scooped the slag off the top of that molten steel all day. Did the job of *two* men. That was before the automatic. Fellas said come lunch he'd just go straight for a jug of water - never even ate anything - just drank down a whole gallon of water every noontime. Then he'd let out a belch you could hear half way across the foundry, dump a pail of water over his head, and go back to work. Every day. Well, now, we all had it pretty rough in that foundry. But you didn't complain, see? That'd make you out as less than a man. And it wasn't right to carry on about how hard you worked, 'less you wanted somebody to say you were bragging about yourself. So what you did, you told all about how hard the *next* guy worked, and that was how you made yourself look big. Big like big old Beard, see what I mean? See, Beard was like a landmark, like Punxsutawney Pete. Only bigger. No way was a little upstart kid gonna take that from us. He was just too big. Only thing *worth* anything most of us ever *had*.

Oh, he was tough, too. Never had a woman, either, far as anyone knew. Oh, someone said he fell in love once with some pretty little thing had a preacher for a daddy, next town over. You heard right. In *love*. But the story goes, girl's daddy just wouldn't have him. They say she got the Beard in bed, got him to propose and everything, but the preacher run him off and sent that sweet thing back east to her sister. Some even said old Beard went and carved him up for that. Said he plucked that preacher's eye right out with a carving knife. Now, some say it wasn't true, but there *was* a fella at that Baptist church wore a patch on his left eye for years, till he died. Who knows? One of those old hill feuds, *I* thought. Wasn't hard to imagine that the big guy just never got over her, though. Never smiled, never laughed, never just had any fun at all. Anyway, wasn't anybody's business. Still, made a good story, it did. Big, bad Beard. Ever tell you he and I used to go fishing together? Yep. Never said a word. Just stare them fish right out of the water. Caught him once a fourteen-pound smallmouth out of Tarnee Lake with nothing but a string and a rusty bent nail. I was right there with him. Weighed it myself.

Yes indeed, he was big. Big as any man could make him out to be, if it would help a fella make *himself* look bigger to his friends. Like, "hey, old Blackbeard was in my shop yesterday, bought *eighteen* jars of pickles" - like that. Or like, "yeah, old Blackbeard 'n me go way back - ever tell you 'bout the time we went bear huntin' with nothin' but knives?" *You* know. Everybody did it - town like this, a man's reputation was all he had. Local boys'd help you climb a notch or else they'd kick you down one or two, if they had a reason, or sometimes even if they didn't. Wasn't a mean town, exactly, just hard scrabble. So you'd tell a tale now and then, keep your reputation up.

So the Beard come out of that place, he did, every day at three-thirty with his coveralls coal black from the middle of his calves all the way to the top and beyond, right up to his beard and onto his face to the line where his helmet left the top of his forehead white. He was fierce to think about and even fiercer to look at. All six-foot four, three-hundred forty pounds of beef. They say it ran a hundred and twenty degrees down below, even in winter, and no one else would even work down there. No one ever did mess with him, either. Never. Not until that boy come along.

Just couldn't let things be. Called him Diggitt. He'd wait on the far corner back for old Beard to come out the side gate and he'd just kind of slide around behind a post office box or lamp pole and sneak a look or two at the big guy. Never had any trouble like that until his aunt moved him into town. Little diggit. Story goes, they called him that since his mama died when he was six and they caught him out by her grave one night trying to dig her back up. With his little shovel and bucket, the kind you take to the beach.

Tenacious little guy. Should have known right off that spelled trouble. Had them great big doe eyes, kind was made for flirtin' with, but he only had eyes for that big bear of a man. Looked like he was star-struck, or something. See, he was just about the one thing no one knew quite what to do with. I mean, imagine, here he is, starts following the Beard around town one day. Before you know it, what's the big guy supposed to do? Bounce him on his knee at a table up to Joe's and buy him some Lemon Chiffon ice cream? Not Beard. We're talking the toughest man in twenty-two counties. Now, if that Diggitt was a grown man, he would have known better. If he had a daddy, his daddy would have known better. Shoot, couple more years, why he'd been big enough you could just give him a food swat or two, you know, a good kick in the pants, tell him to keep away - mind his own business. But he was just a little sprite. Wasn't but a bean pole. So we waited.

Well, Blackbeard didn't act right away like he noticed that boy. Or at least he didn't say anything. Not that Beard ever said much of anything, anyway. Ask him if he wanted another beer - he'd just kind of, well, stare at you, like he always did. You'd *give* him a beer, is what you'd do. He'd drink it or not drink it. If he had to talk, and that was rare, it was usually no more than just a word. Like maybe, you'd say - real cheery -, "Hey, Beard!"

He'd say, like real down low - like, "Yeah." Kind of like that. That's all. Well, the boy shouldn't have been surprised but this, either, since he was just a boy, after all. In those days, fellas pretty much expected a boy knew his place and kept to it. Now, if he didn't, that was another matter. Mostly, somebody's kid got out of line, you'd just sort of tell his daddy, or if it got real bad, maybe just kind of cuff him on the ear. Kind of - like that, you know? But now, the Beard just wasn't somebody supposed to have to mess with things like that. I mean, suppose you got the King of England up on his throne, and some little mouse starts running around the room. Well, you can't just leave the thing running around, pestering the guy, while he's trying to do his thing - you know, being *King*. So you've got a guy who comes and does that for him, see? But no one's supposed to *see* the guy come and do it, else it looks like the King wouldn't, or *couldn't*, do the job himself. I mean, he either looks like a wimp for having someone else do it, or he looks like a weasel for squashing that poor little mouse all by himself. Great big King, couldn't let the mouse be, you know. So, middle of the day, King's got to ignore him, see? Try to act like he doesn't notice, then night-time, somebody takes care of the mouse. Lickety-split.

Well, maybe easier said than done. See, Diggitt was pretty quick on the hoof, and he never did let anybody up too close. Pretty flighty, he was. Oh, he got all over town.

Mostly hung around with the women. Didn't mind anyone worth beans. Wasn't really surprising, though. Little Diggitt never spent much time home at his Aunt Ellie's, she being pretty old, and all. Great Aunt, I guess she was. Midwife to most of the women in town, even when she got along in years. Every time a baby come along, woman'd say, "I ain't having this hear baby till you go get Ellie, that's all there is to it. And they'd ride out and fetch back from the next town, least until she moved here with the boy. Best seamstress in town even then, too, but darned if she didn't have to hold the sewing right up to her face to even see it. Not much of a cook, though. Probably why Diggitt was so skinny. Anyway, pretty near every woman in two towns was her friend, so you had to watch your step, and that meant you had to go easy on the boy, She made a good home for him, too, but she was just not as good as a real mother and father. Just the same, she insisted the boy should live with family, and she was probably right. Give him something to latch onto. And it worked, at least until he was about ten and started following the Beard every day.

Little Diggitt just wouldn't let him be. Maybe since the boy had no mama he just wasn't right in the head, but he just got to watching Beard every day. The whole town just about held its breath and the Beard just kept on walking. But Little Diggitt just got braver. We'd get on up ahead of the Beard and say, "shoo, boy, now let's get along with you, hear? You let him be. He'll hurt you now, you hear?" Pretty soon, he started following along as the big guy ambled up the street. Beard on one side, Diggitt on the other, always a block behind, peaking out from behind a pole, but always there. Other boys'd hide out and laugh at him, but as soon as Beard came on up the street, they'd run off, and the boy would just keep at it. Now, this was a worrisome sight, since no one wanted to see the little guy get hurt, but truth be told, he had no business being there. What was a fella to do? Boy had no daddy, so everybody just tried to look the other way. Wasn't anybody's business. Least, until they realized he just wasn't going to stop.

Now, people started to talk. You couldn't help it, since everybody pretty much stayed on the opposite side of the street, away from the Beard, and there was Diggitt right in your path, eyeballing the guy. "Git," you'd say; "GIT!" Kind of clap your hands at him like he was chickens, but he'd just scamper on ahead, draw up behind a bush or a pole, kind of peek out. Playing a made-up sort of spy game, or soldier game, or something. But you knew he was on some kind of collision course with the old grizzly bear. And what was the Beard supposed to do? Somebody was gonna have to lose, and it wasn't gonna be the Beard.

Up till now, there was no harm done, and the Beard was just apt to keep his mind in his own business and his face straight ahead as he walked, but that fool kid started carrying a stick with him, playing like it was a gun, and he'd hide behind a tree, bide his time, slide around it, take aim, and then-well, he'd just scamper on to the next hiding spot. You'd try to tell him, "*go on home now, boy, that's enough now. Go on to your Aunt Ellie's - everyone did, since the whole town pretty much looked after him-but he'd just keep on at it.*"

Well, didn't make a whole lot of sense, but then, on the other hand, maybe it did. Some people said he must have thought the big guy was his daddy. Others even went so far as to say Blackbeard was, but no one ever really could have known for sure who it might have been. Except the daddy, maybe. Well, and the boy's momma, for sure, at least until she caught pneumonia and died all of a sudden. Least, that's how Ellie told it. Or so they say. Well, people talk. You know. Ellie *did* move in just after that one-eyed preacher died. Maybe the boy was the Beard's and he just didn't know it. Or maybe he knew the boy was his son, and didn't care. If he was, you'd think Ellie'd know. But I guess she'd said she didn't. Or maybe the Beard even wanted the boy to be his, but was too afraid it was someone else. Come to think of it, maybe he'd of liked to have a son, but you want to know the truth? I'd don't think he knew *what* he thought. I mean, it wasn't like he had ever done anything *but* be the biggest, baddest, meanest thing in town. Shoot, that was what he was, and by golly, that was what he was going to stay. Lord knows, a boy ought to know who his daddy is. But some things, you can just take too far. It's true, he got enough teasing from the other boys about that. In fact, some of them had taken to teasing him that he finally *had* found the right guy. Maybe that's what put the idea in his head. Bad idea.

You see, once a boy's got it in his head to go looking for his daddy, nothing's going to stop him. Not a thing. So he just kept at it until he'd started getting away up the street ahead of the big guy. Then he'd poke out from a wall or from behind a tree, take aim, fire, and skittle off to his next little spot, like he'd have a little fort or something there. That Beard would just keep walking, same as he always did, those giant hairy arms just hanging from his sides like two telephone poles, his lips parted in kind of a pained expression that just showed his yellow teeth, until he got all the way to the bar. Then he'd go on in, like he did every afternoon for years. Then that boy would hang about outside just until somebody made a move up his way, and he'd run on home. Oh, and we'd go on up and talk to Ellie, we'd say, "Ellie? Now, don't want to go and get you all riled, but that boy is fixing to get himself in some deep water, and you ought to be told."

She'd just kind of squint up at you from her stitching and say, "Well, now, just what kind of trouble is he getting into? Stealing?"

And you'd try to answer but-she's sharp, mind you-she'd say, "Knocking over somebody's fence?"

And now you'd be feeling pretty ridiculous but she'd just say, "He didn't kill somebody's cat, did he?"

And, well, you'd just say, "Well, no, I..." And that'd be the end of that.

Well, that went on for only a few weeks when the boy started crossing to Blackbeard's side of the road. Now *there* was trouble. No one knew what the big guy would do. Talk got worse. Would he hurt the boy? Some of the fellas started speculating just what he'd do if that boy got too close. They'd say, "who could blame him, anyway, if the fool kid didn't know not to mess with him? Well, we worried, but the boy just kept right on. He'd park himself right behind a big old oak and wait until that grizzly was right abreast of him, then poke his stick out and take fire. Still, the

Beard didn't do anything. He'd just walk on by like nothing happened. Of course, you could put the biggest, meanest dog in town on that road and the Beard would walk right by him without a flinch. Once, when old Jake's big Shepherd came down with the madness, the dog and that bear of a man found themselves squared off over the same spot by the side of the road and neither one was going to move. They say the Beard just looked at him and snarled once and the dog ran off. And no one ever saw it again.

Now, this was all just getting to be about too much. I mean, it got to where people just didn't know what to say any more. Dumb kid was getting to be nothing but trouble. Some folks would just shake their heads and walk off, like maybe the problem was just going to go away. But the boys, down at the store? They'd started saying things like, *just let that old Beard get his hands on him, that'll fix his wagon*. Or like, maybe old Beard'll just carve an eye or two out, like it was funny, or something. Wasn't very funny. I mean, what am I supposed to say when I go down to pick up lumber down to Bartersville, in folks say, "Well? How's that old Blackbeard? Is he really so tough he can stand a hot ingot falling right on his forearm, and not even brush it off."

I'm supposed to answer, "Oh yeah, he's such a tough guy, he went and carved out a ten-year-old's eye, just for looking at him sideways." Well, you see what I mean. Something had to stop, and it had to be that damned Diggit.

Well, the boy raised the stakes even higher. This time, too high. One day he positioned himself behind that big wooden Indian just outside Joe's and waited. He was so quiet you wouldn't even know he was there, except he'd peek out now and then. The whole town just held its breath. Blackbeard came up the road and all the way to the bar and you could even start to hear those few voices up and down the street, like "Kick his little behind, *good*, old Beard" and "Do him like you did his *preacher gran'daddy, Grizzly!*" and maybe a woman here or there kind of just clucking under her breath or maybe one of them just kind of saying "oh just let him be," but you knew it was gonna happen, and it was gonna happen *soon*. That grizzly bear just went on up to that bar, ready to reach out and grab for the door, when, at the last second, the boy jumped out in front of the doorway, took aim, and *this time he had a real gun*. Might have been just an old rusty thing of a .22 he'd found in Ellie's attic, but it was real enough. And all that grizzly did was just to curl his lips back in a snarl, jut his head forward, and open his eyes so wide, his eyeballs bugged out at the boy like they were going to pop.

But that Little Diggit just stood firm! Brave, dumb, or blind, I don't know which, but he just stood there right in front of that hulk of a man, looking down the barrel of that gun, and *bugged his eyes right back*. So the Beard just looked him in the eye and said "Who you eyeballin', boy?" Then he let out a great big old growl, like a real Grizzly. And Diggit dropped that gun and took off like a jackrabbit with his tail on fire. Now I can just about tell you how much air whistling through peoples' lips you could hear all up and down that street. Why, there was one fool even threw his hat in the air, like some kind of election returns were in. But what happened that day, I mean to tell you, was some kind of relief. And all that Beard did was pick up that gun and bend the barrel with his bare hands, and then he left the rifle back behind the Indian, leaning against the wall, and went inside the bar. Sat down and drank his beers, dozing off and

on, just like every other afternoon. Like any other day. Just like nothing happened, nothing out of the ordinary at all. He'd usually have four or five, maybe six shells of beer on a hot summer day. Then he'd leave some money on the bar and walk home. This one wasn't any different.

No one saw the boy for two whole days, and let me say, we were not unhappy. On the third, he was back, watching the big guy from across the street again. We could not believe our eyes. What was it going to have to take? It took maybe fifteen minutes for just about half the town to be looking out from up and down the street, women peaking out from their curtains, most of the men just about ready to take a belt and strap that boy's bare back.

The Beard came on up the street from work, sure enough, and went on inside the bar. Now here's where the boy took a real turn for trouble. He went and followed the big guy on into Joe's. See, on a normal day, there'd be maybe eighteen, twenty men in that bar. But this was a hot afternoon in August and it was a Friday. So you know there was thirty or so men in there. At first that boy just stood inside the doorway, blinking in the smoky yellow light, mincing his fingertips together. Everyone in that bar just looked, not sure what to think, almost in a daze, like they weren't seeing what they were seeing. They just kept on talking, but kind of lowered their voices, looking at him, like as though some kind of strangers had just walked in. And you know, I was standing right there myself, just at that doorway, I was so amazed at what I was seeing. And I think that everyone in that place, had this not been a ten-year-old boy, would have stood up and cleared those tables and chairs from the floor in a second, they were so ready that day for a fight. Little Diggitt just sort of stood there. Then he looked around the place and everyone sitting in Joe's that day stopped talking, for just about a few seconds. The boy looked over toward the bar at the great mass of a man seated there, his back to the door, and he backed himself over to the corner farthest from it, way on back into the recesses hidden by the shadows back next to the storeroom door.

Well, he had guts, that's for sure. A few people chuckled, two or three slapped bills on the table to pay off bets they'd already made about how long he'd stay, or whether he'd run, or some such thing, but quite a few more started to clamor quietly for the Beard, elbowing each other, winking. But the hulk at the counter didn't move, and before long, everyone went back to their talk. It wasn't usual to let a boy come into the bar, but Diggitt pretty much got left alone to do whatever he wanted, so what was anybody going to do? At this point, it was a foregone conclusion that the boy was just going to have to get it the hard way, and nobody but the Beard was going to have the privilege. So Diggitt stood in that dark corner, watching the Beard, for almost an hour, to the tune of occasional snickers and guffaws and elbows in his direction as the men all limbered up, but he just stood. Never moved, never took his eyes off the big guy. Well, it's hard to say if that Grizzly Bear knew the boy was inside. He never turned around, but then he never did move much anyway. Usually just sat up there and nursed his beers, napping.

Now, the boy might have known that Bear was asleep or he might not have. What he did, though, he did with spunk. He walked up to the guy just as steady-quiet,

mind you, and slow, but steady-as a cat. And he peered around that blackened hulk of a pair of overstuffed coveralls from just three feet away. He was almost at the stool next to the Beard, the stool no one ever sat on. There was Blackbeard, half-empty glass of beer in front of him, his huge face propped up on one hand, elbow on the bar, sound asleep. And that bar became the quietest place in town. The boy edged in closer. The grizzly didn't move. Closer still-no movement. For that matter, no one in that entire building moved. Or talked. Or breathed. And with that, Little Diggitt climbed up and dropped something-plunk-right into the big guy's drink!

Like a ghost, he was back to the corner before anyone could make a move, though the whole place had stood halfway up out of their chairs. Then everybody simply froze, eyes toward the bar. Even old Joe himself, stationed at the far end, stopped wiping the glass he was holding and just stared toward the glass on the other end of the bar. Old Beard's head sagged down a little, and then his whole body jumped just a bit—like a person does when he wakes up with a start. Next he picked up that glass and lifted it to his mouth, then he stopped, and then all hell broke loose.

He dropped the glass and *screamed!* Not the great, big, old guttural scream you'd expect, but a sort of high-pitched shriek like a woman would make if she was to find herself utterly terrified. And it wasn't just a short little thing, either. He let loose a solid fifteen-second-screech that might have outdone the plant's lunch whistle. I dare say there has never been on this Earth before or since, anything that would have done more to curdle a man's blood than that big guy's scream. No one moved an inch. In fact, we were all so surprised, I don't think we *could* have moved. When he finally stopped screaming, he reached down and scooped up out of that beer the small object of his most obvious affection, what the boy must have dropped in and old Ellie must have saved all those years -his grandpa's yellowed old glass left eyeball.

Well, you might just as well guess that this must not have pleased old Blackbeard one little bit. He set that thing on the bar in front of him and finished what little was left of his beer. Very, very, slowly. This time, trouble was-a-coming, because this time, the Beard's very manhood was at stake. You'd think that boy'd been caught with another man's wife, too, the way the men had started to curse under their breath, disgusted, angry, almost violent. But the Beard didn't say a word. He put the glass down and turned slowly on his stool. Each man in his turn, every one of them standing in place at their tables and everyone-to a man-looked straight at the floor. The Beard took one long sweeping look around the bar until he came to the last man-whoever it was-and then he scanned his way back to the first. All at once, he looked over to the corner in the shadows where the boy had glued himself, eyes bulging, like paper to the wall. His eyes bugged out and so did the Beard's and that old grizzly stood up and his eyes rolled back a little bit and he looked like he was going to explode in a volcano of black ash and smoke and seething lava like the Great Zeus himself and the he just turned toward the bar and slapped his right hand down on it so hard you would have thought the place would cave in.

And he laughed. One giant, rolling belly-full after another. Over and over and over. And then he started slapping the bar with both hands, still bellowing with great,

deep, huge lungs-full of air, massive heavings of laughter that were so fabulously rich with the hoarseness of his years at the foundry, you'd think it *was* the roar of the Great Zeus. Not content to laugh alone, he turned to the crowd inside the bar and slapped his huge paws down onto his pork-barrel thighs and threw his face forward and whooped even harder, eyes bulging, threatening every man in the place, as though to say, "Hah! The joke's on me, now we'll all laugh, and then won't nobody ever mention this again!"

Now the fellas started to force a little laughter, too, and elbowed each other and laughed some more. Every one of them was scared to death, but they all played along just the same. Before long, they were all gasping about as badly as *he* was. Scared half to death, but laughing just the same. Hysterical was what they were. And that just seemed to set him off worse. Now he was clutching his arms around his sides, doubled over almost in half, tears streaking long white gashes down his big black face. Back around to the bar he turned, slapped those hands back on the top, doubled over again, still at it, rolling thunder upon rolling thunder. Somehow he managed to get his butt up on the stool, and he slapped his hand down on the stool next to him.

And every one of those old boys at Joe's that day might have thought twice about it, but Little Diggitt just stuck his fingers between his teeth and walked on up. Again, that grizzly slapped the stool, still laughing, sucking in those great gasps of air and letting loose again, and he put the eyeball on the edge of the bar where it stared out, waiting to greet whoever took a seat. Well, everyone in the place had just about thought they'd seen and heard it all, when the Beard swiveled around in his chair and made his fatal mistake. He said, "come on up here, boy, and set down now. Why'nt you tell us who your daddy was. Bet you ain't even *got* a daddy, like a real boy has." And he gave a great big wink to the rest of the boys. And he went right on laughing. And so did they. And so did I. Longer, louder and wilder we laughed, two of the men even losing themselves so much in the moment, they went and slapped old Beard on the back. And he didn't even mind. For a minute. He knew he had kept control, and that was all that mattered to every single man in that room. It was like their champion prizefighter had just won the big fight.

Big mistake. Little Diggitt ran from that bar so fast they must've thought they wouldn't see him for another two weeks. But before the laughter had died down, and with Beard holding that glass eye up to his own like he was looking through a jeweler's glass, in came that boy again, and this time he was on the other end of a serious piece of business. He had brought that rifle inside the bar, and now stood poised like a marksman, feet spread, left elbow dropped, right one extended-and more than one-man must have wondered if he had learned this stance from a magazine-his eye lined right up with the sight. Now there was silence again, but just for a moment, when all at once the men started to laugh, even as the Beard stood with his mouth hanging open.

"Take him down, Beard!" One man called out, while the others at his table laughed, pointing at the boy.

From the corner came a mocking, "You gonna let him do you that way, Beard?"

But mostly, from nearly every corner of that bar, came cheers and jeers and whistles for the Beard to take his antagonist to task. "Grab the gun" - "give him the boot, Beard" - "smack him around a little bit" - "show him what for" - "little runt" - and on it went. Well, the Beard took one step forward as he looked around the bar nodding his head, smiling self-assuredly, when a cracking shot rang out, followed instantly by a high-pitched yelp, followed by dead silence, except for the clutter and clamor of a few falling chairs, wood splinters, and broken glass, and the acrid fresh smell of burnt gunpowder. For a few seconds, no one moved. Next, everyone looked where the blast had come from. The door. There lay Diggitt on the floor, the rusty old .22-he must've loaded it with ammunition-barely held in both hands, the end of the barrel propped on the seat of the nearest chair. His entire face was a mass of blood, for the rusty old gun, barrel bent from his previous encounter with the big Grizzly Bear-had he pulled the trigger on purpose, or nervous in the beer-choked haze of the bar, had he just done it accidentally? -had exploded. Now everyone looked at the Bear. Frozen in place, and staring at the boy, eyes wide, the big guy stood frozen, a look of horror on his face.

No one could have known if the Diggitt meant to pull that trigger or not, but one thing you can bet on-that night, the ceiling of our little world began to fall in on us. Well, just as quiet and steady as could be, someone moved in, trying to look the Diggitt in the eyes-now both just pockets of blood-and said, "give me the gun, now, boy." Well, Diggitt held that gun in both hands, with both his little forefingers through the trigger guard, refusing to let go, even as he seemed to struggle to breath. This time, the Beard reached down, held out his hand and repeated it, but this time, with the slightest waver in his voice as the little fingers tightened around the trigger guard. "Give me the gun now, son," he said, and took a step closer to the gun. "Son, I..."

But in response, almost so quiet you couldn't hear him, little Diggitt said, "Stop!" The place went quiet again, even as hands and arms brought in napkins, tablecloths, anything to bind up the wounds, stop the bleeding, with one large tablecloth slipped under his limp body, but Diggitt wasn't done. In a breathless whisper, he said, to none and to everyone, "You be my Daddy?" His fingers, now stripped of the gun, tightened anyway, trying to feel for it in the empty air. The Beard just blinked. And as we bound that little boy's wounds, waiting one last second to rush him to the doctor, straining to hear his words and straining even more to see if there was any humanity left for an answer from the man we had stripped completely of it to make him our timeless champion, we heard nothing more from either of them, but we couldn't pry their now welded fingers apart, so tight was the Beard's grip on Little Diggitt's hand. Then we rushed them both up the street, where the doctor confirmed hours later, as we nursed our own wounds of disjointed pride and failed manhood and guilt and wrecked, worthless blind ambition, that Diggitt would be able to keep just one of his eyes-his left-and that most of his scars would one day heal.

We didn't move for quite a while and it seemed like somehow the street was no longer the same one we had walked up earlier in the day, and certainly none of the reasons we had for moving up or down it seemed the same any more. And we wondered about the Beard. We wondered what he would become now. We wondered,

if he would try to go back to being the only kind of man we had ever let him be, or if there was some way, too, for him to start over, even as we wondered if there was some way that we could.

When the Beard finally came out, he walked as though he were a ghost. It seemed that his feet didn't even move, but somehow he moved finally toward the bunch of us still standing by the street. And the Beard looked at all of the men from the bar and they all looked down at the street like they knew their champion was dead and like they could no longer look him in the eyes for knowing they had put him there and for knowing they had taken it away. And then so did he. And he stammered just a bit and then he said- still looking at the pavement - "He asked if I's his Daddy."

And we knew this already but we didn't know what to say about this any more than we knew what to say about any of what had happened. And old Blackbeard, lifting up his fist so that we could see he was holding-still carrying it since the bar-Little Diggitt's granddaddy's glass eye; he said, almost in a whisper, "I told him yeah, I guess I am your daddy *now*, son."

Contributors

Lisa Barton is a little teapot, short and stout. Lisa also thinks Elvis Costello is a genius of modern music. Best yet, Lisa graduates in May (yippie).

Michael Coatney is both a Communication Studies major and an English major, and is completing the requirements for an Honors diploma. He is very active in community service and philanthropy, and has brought us--his associates, friends and family--nearly two dozen awards, grants and scholarships since he arrived at IUPUI. He says we are worth it, and we believe him.

James J. Comerford is a Senior English Major and Philosophy minor.

Matthew Davis is a native of Cromwell, located in Northeast Indiana. He is a senior in the School of Journalism. He played intercollegiate baseball at IUPUI for three years and has worked for *The IUPUI Sagamore* for three years as well. He currently is the managing editor of the school paper and plans on attending law school in the fall of 2001 where he will study media law.

Ryan Dillman is a senior majoring in English. He's a transfer student from IUK, and this is his first semester at IUPUI. He hopes to work in magazine publishing upon graduation.

Carol Durbin is an Anthropology major with a focus on archaeology.

David Dean Elery is returning to school after an absence of fifteen years and is a sophomore business major, minoring in philosophy. Isn't life cool?

Maggie Gordon is studying photography and French. Maggie also loves comparing different cultures and thinking about how they fit into the world.

S.Renee Hesch is currently a junior English major doing the balancing act between single motherhood, college work, and writing. Her goal is to graduate from IUPUI before her oldest son starts college. In her spare time, she is working on completing her first novel.

Diane M. Johnson is an empty-nester. That should say it all.

Mario Klunge loves sports, fantasy novels, and video games. He plans on majoring in New Media.

Tiffany Kyser enjoys playing basketball on the women's basketball team at IUPUI. Favorite show is "My So-Called Life". She has been writing since the age of nine.

Ron Ping is a professional student who has been involved in anthropological studies since his early teens. He is also a full-time Social Observer and Freelance ne'er-do-well and is currently doing missionary work in Liberal Political Thought in South-Central Indiana.

Albert P.Spaulding Jr. is a 21 year old art major.

Michael Springer is 18 years old, and is currently attending IUPUI. He graduated from Broad Ripple High School last year, where he took a class on creative writing. He has also been published in two poetry anthologies, and has won an award in a Purdue contest for high school poetry.

Erin Teegarden has been rejected by some of the finest publications. She has been rejected by many of the finest men. She is 22.

Invitation to Future Writers, Artists, and Editorial Staff Members

The Spring 2000 Editorial Staff of *genesis* would like to invite all IUPUI students to submit works in poetry, fiction, nonfiction and art to *genesis* for the Fall 2000 issue. Students may submit works up to a year after graduation. To insure impartiality, Editorial Staff Members are not allowed to submit their works. As *genesis* is a student publication, faculty members are not allowed to submit. Previously published works cannot be submitted as well.

Guidelines for all Submissions: Do not place your name directly on your submission, as the writer/artist is to remain anonymous during the judging process. Include a cover sheet with the title(s) of your submission(s), your name, address, telephone, e-mail address, and a short biographical sketch. Limit ten.

Writers: Submissions should be double-spaced, and of 2,500 words or less. Hard copies only—we do not accept submissions via e-mail or on disk. Written submissions will not be returned.

Visual Artists: Please identify your submissions by title and the actual dimensions of the piece. All mediums will be accepted. Your original artwork or slides will be returned.

Please send or deliver all submissions to:

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Department of English
Cavanaugh Hall, room 502-L
425 University Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46202

genesis is seeking new board members to participate in all stages of the journal's publication. Interested students should contact the Editors at genesis1@iupui.edu.

genesis-the origin or coming into being of anything:

development into being especially by growth or evolution:

the process or mode of origin <the ~ of a book>

<the ~ of a pattern>