

# AGORA



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## **An Excerpt from the General Prologue of *The Coliseum Tales***

When that February, with its cold wind  
Pushes man to look for sport within  
Warm shelter, in a game called basketball  
Do men often indulge. That was all  
We had in mind as we made exodus  
To Charlotte from Atlanta by Greyhound bus  
To see the Hornets battle the Celtics.  
They had just lost to the Bulls and the Knicks;  
We hoped to fare better. Our trip was to last  
One day, leaving early and returning past  
Midnight. A diverse group made the journey.  
Though they'd never make the NBA tourney,  
Most were Hornets fans anyway. Here are some  
That gave me reason why they had come  
To Charlotte.

A LIBRARIAN there rode, erect in her seat,  
Hair swept under a hat, a sack at her feet,  
Which sat heavy with books for her to peruse.  
Novels over men as companions she would choose  
For words on paper proved better conversation  
Than chatter with men over trivialization.  
Pale was her skin; dark eyes had she  
That pondered prose and poetry.  
Her pursed lips and her tightened brow lingered.  
Wrinkled were her hands and worn her fingers  
From constant contemplation and writing,  
Her intellect and body as if fighting:  
The body tires, longs to please its appetites,  
But the mind continues to ferret delights  
From allusions, allegories, alliteration,  
From O. Henry plot twists and charact'rizaton.  
Writers of the age, she had read all men:  
Michener, Sheldon, and Clancy, to begin,

And, harkening to her southern ancestry,  
Steele, Chappell, Price, Jarrell, and Percy.  
Her words to others were few, tersely wrought.  
With southern inflection she spoke not,  
But with alto'd and rich audible voice.  
Her travels to Charlotte arose from her choice  
To write a poem. "Slam Dunk" she named it,  
Penned from observations where she would sit.

There was a BUSINESSMAN, who with him had  
A full briefcase. Fashionably was he clad  
For he was a textile magnate, owning  
Fact'ries 'long the east coast; he was phoning  
Them daily to check the rapid progress  
Of his sales of all kind of designer dress.  
He himself wore clothes of substantial cost:  
Armani, Gucci: such names were embossed  
On his coats. But, as work couldn't wait  
A day of travel to the Coliseum gate,  
He brought it with him, car phone and all,  
And through the trip did he receive a call  
Or two. He did not travel to the game  
For himself, that being a reason lame  
For ignoring work. 'Stead he came solely  
To satisfy his son, a lad of twenty  
Named Grant.

And Grant, his SON, sat one row back  
For on his father's row there was a lack  
Of space, with the papers and phone. Said he,  
"To the game he said he would finally  
Come. That bids me overlook the vocation  
Which follows him to every location."  
Like his father, Grant wore fabrics rich in  
Color, texture, and price. He had joined in  
A fraternity where others wore such  
Clothes at his college. He liked it much.

He went to a pros'prou college, Emory,  
Which I think, served rightly by memory,  
Is a school for students such as he  
Who can afford every outfit they see.  
I could sense a hidden disappointment  
At his father's broken appointment  
To spend time together.

Riding nearly there were TWO BROTHER:  
That was the relation they named each other,  
But they looked not alike, spoke not the same,  
I believe they did not share a surname,  
But for what they lacked in being kin,  
They lively conversed of that within  
The realm of love. O beauteous subject  
That makes the fairest and purest its object!  
And they uttered words not with manly boast  
But spoke and sighed with feminine jest  
And set about practicing wooing techniques  
On each other: pinching buttock cheeks  
And planting lips into kisses on necks.  
The driver saw this and, tempted to wreck,  
Swerved barely. But the two noticed not.  
Instead, they continued their practice  
Later to bring their goodly wives bliss.  
How wonderful their concern for love showed!  
Why more of us did not note them I knowed  
Not; for their acts were virtuous by far  
E'en if their manner was somewhat bizarre.

Conversing lively did the PROFESSOR  
Sit 'mongst many a list'ning passenger  
On the road to Charlotte. He told tale of  
His students, all of whom pass or fail  
In the end. Those, he said, who procrastinate,  
Spend all night writing, then turn papers in late,  
Seldom understand his anger. They cry

When he awards them a grade not as high  
As they had planned to beg for. But had he  
Practical uses for papers that the  
Students never requested back: he would  
Line his bird's cage, throw darts, ignite firewood  
With them. That way, the scholar ingenious  
Devised manners clever and devious  
To make use of cheap attempts at knowledge  
By the more lazy pupils at his college.  
He was a doctor of English. He taught  
The evils that material goods have wrought  
Against man — man's happiest in nature,  
Away from society's wealthy structure.  
"d'rather be outdoors," said he, "in the wind  
Than cramped under brick and wood within  
The classroom." Yet life's sad irony  
Held him in check: He would reject any  
Material comfort in place of simplicity  
In life, but his meager salary  
Was his patron needed for survival.  
How he longed for a worldwide revival  
Of Wordsworth! But to live in our present age  
Forces all people to procure a wage  
Sufficient. And that very thing did he  
Though, I believe, far from happily.

A goodly WIFE from Belmont town  
Rode with us, having last month come down  
With her husband to Atlanta. She carried  
All her clothes and possessions, tarried  
Not about expressing her opinions  
But swore not man would have dominion  
Over her again. She was married one year  
To this fifth husband, who preferred beer  
And football to their love. Or so said she.  
Upon their move south, in January,  
Sports he found in Georgia to be greater

In kind than in Belmont. He'd come in later  
And later, she said, until she could no more.  
She packed her things and bolted for the door  
And came hence, traveling to Charlotte.  
To see the Hornets play her motive was not,  
But to resume her goodly life alone  
In that town she had once called home.  
Her sporty husband was her final, she swore:  
He was her fifth, and she loved no more.  
Besides, she had a fair reason to quit:  
She was gaining weight, and the dress ceased to fit.

In the first row a BANKER traveled, too,  
Who sat in disquiet, his face full of rue  
And sadness. Young, he spoke little banter  
With us. He was troubled with the matter  
Of his car and its battery corroded.  
Beside the road, its engine near exploded.  
That way we found him, stranded 'longside  
The new-looking car which gave him brief ride  
Towards Greenville from Commerce. He was to engage  
His business there to win his wage.  
"Never acquire a German car," quoth he,  
"My Mercedes is cause of much misery  
To my banking, which its purpose and pith  
Is to earn the money I invest with.  
If any banker close to my station  
Wishes to have worthy transportation  
Let him aspire to credible goal:  
An Audi, a Saab, or maybe Peugeot.  
For bankers like me deserve a proud slate  
To show our net worth on a car's hood plate."  
Thanks he uttered for our troubles none.  
(Glad I was, when at Greenville, he was gone.)

A holy MONK, robed in piety



Sat alone for the trip's entirety  
In the back. He was a slender fellow  
With raven-hued hair, skin a slight yellow  
From dearth of sunlight. He was newly gone  
From his cell, having never been beyond  
The cloister in years. He would be there still  
If not for his abbot, who sensed his will:  
The monk longed dearly to see the Hornets play,  
Had always wanted to, yet would not say  
This in front of his master. The kind man  
Recognized this and made good his plan  
to send the monk away to the game.  
The monk was raised in a town by the name  
Of Belmont; to Charlotte's east it sprawled,  
That town which the monk had earlier called  
Home. His abbot agreed to let him roam  
Around the two cities near his home  
Before returning to Georgia. We asked  
The monk, were it not a difficult task,  
Could he pray for the Hornets? We did, too,  
That they might finally win, and not lose.

Camille Hopkins

## The Circus

And it came, in the field  
by the Dutchman's Creek, in the air  
that Autumn swelled with morning chill,  
rising hugely brown, the color of a beast,  
the reddish brown of skin beneath which blood  
beat a raging rhythm. It spread upward and outward  
fifteen acres, and the horses and the elephants, the  
zebras and donkeys  
circled slowly outside on tethers  
led by the circus people.

They walked the street, all the way  
to the crossroads, handing out tickets,  
promising things,  
bombasticating like no political campaign  
could rival. But they told the truth, they promised well.  
In the soon filled tent,  
the brass blew shrill, the creatures  
ran and roared, and  
in the middle, in the place between the lions,  
the clowns and juggling midgets,  
the huge, round woman sang  
something God had written.

I swear the tent did puff  
while she bellowed her German passion. When she finished  
there was hard silence,  
then applause, at first polite,  
but then we realized how wondrous  
it was, and we roared  
like the other creatures.

David C. Childers

## Season

Empty autumn sky,  
Emptied of leaves, clouds, winds.  
Polar blue. Still as an iceberg.  
Autumn golds rims it, burnishes it,  
Somehow seems to echo its depth,  
A weak tingle of the great gong  
That never began and never ends—  
Gold of old sun and ancient leaves,  
Four or five high, clinging leaves long dead,  
Like the heat of summer  
In the cold sun that won't fall;  
Gold of finish — not of death  
But of things brought to a close; gold of a long book  
Bound and gilded around the edges,  
or gilded with dust in an attic window.

A propellor snores against the zenith,  
Lost and invisible in clear infinity  
Like a starfish on the ocean bottom  
(Still ocean, empty ocean, polar ocean,  
Ocean without bottom)  
Sending its bubbles on infinitely long ascents  
In a kind of snore.  
Arms on sand crystals, blades on ice crystals,  
Turning in sleep upon their pillow,

Soon gone back to a dream of the womb,  
Or to an oblivious wait for the capture  
Of all the gong's echoes into its first note;  
A wait for infinite high and deep,  
Weightless ice and damp sand chasms,  
Old water and an old fire —  
Leafy graves and dusty attics —  
To close the circle from opposing curves.

What was supposed to have been important?  
Which book was supposed to have been a life,  
Or which life in which book was real?  
Was the year's sense in a summer?  
All books lose their leaves.  
Only the book of life is round.  
The gong is always in its echoes,  
All of it in all of them,  
Wrapping its voice around the rim of time.

John Harris

## My Mother, Saint Monica

My wife often wonders how I acquired a women's intuition, a sixth sense, if you will. I had recently predicted the Bakersons' divorce, five months before it was finalized in Clark County Court. That places me in the lead, my wife close behind with five, yep, five marriages she has successfully predicted to fail. You might think our idle habit quite odd-- moreover, sick-- yet we find pleasure in recognizing the warning signs of marital doom. I guess you could say it's a sense of accomplishment, we enjoying such a strong marriage of nearly fifteen years, a household full of beautiful children (if they want to be) and a still sparkling, maturing love life. Sure, there have been the usual problems associated with the ongoing strive for domestic security, and our marriage has seen its fair share of storms, but we remain invincible against the odds, not because of our deep, passionate love (although it sure as hell helps), not because of my lucrative income as a divorce attorney, not because of the fear of separating our family of seven, with number eight about to arrive; no, we owe it all to my father and the winter of '69.

That winter was the first my family spent in Vermont. The move had been sudden, yet my two brothers and I expected as much. That September, Dad arrived home to Marietta, Georgia, accompanied by not only a dishonorable discharge from the United States Armed Forces, but a rare and repugnant "social" disease. Although a mystery to me then, I later learned Dad had been fraternizing with a suspected Viet Cong spy. "You've got what!" I heard my mother sneer the first night of his return. Hence forth, she bedded in Sara's room, my then seventeen-year-old sister. Sara would later follow in my father's footsteps and earn the dual crown of most flirtatious and surest thing. The move to Vermont didn't go over well with Sara, and she desired to manifest her disapproval by frolicking with the varsity quarterback of the Marietta Tigers which produced more than a sectional title. Both ran off the Atlanta, where she's living still, with a Bob, or Ted, or some short-named, short-minded car dealer; but, that's another long story...

Anyway, it just so happened Mom's uncle Frank died and left her 200 plus acres in Little Falls, Vermont. Mom rejoiced at the power of her novenas. Salvation lay closer than she had expected. She had hoped the war would remove my father from his impulsive sexuality, but obviously not even Southeast Asia was safe from the likes of Bill Baxter. Mom spent her days tending Dad and reading up on sheep farming and relishing her child memoirs of the Green Mountains. She was the one who decided we'd move. "Bill, here's how it is: we're moving to Vermont, or I get me a damn good lawyer."

Dad knew she was serious mainly because she never cursed, yet also because Mom was a Catholic, a strict one and divorce was taboo with her. "Whatever you wish, Susan dear."

Despite his frequent drifts from monogamy, Dad remained respectful of Mom, somewhat obsessed and fearful of her devotion to Catholicism. Buck and I caught him one evening trying to say a Hail Mary and bashfully fingering Mom's mother-of-pearl rosary. On catching us spying, we received a healthy whipping, with all the fire of Bill's Baptist upbringing.

Thus we headed up North with all our earthly possessions which wasn't much considering Bob, of Bob's Pool Hall (a popular stop with my father), called up Dad's tab, a pricy endeavor considering he frequented it not only Friday and Saturday, but every night of the week.

My father was especially weary about the move to the colder climate, infested with "goddamned Commie-liberals sons-of-bitches." If three things were constant about Dad, they were his infidelity, his ability to continually impregnate my mother, and a sleuth of vulgarity continually dripping from his tobacco stained lips. Mom remained overjoyed on returning to her home land and a more traditional environment. "A place of morals" she would proudly say.

Settling into Vermont had a different effect on my brother and I. We had never been out of Georgia in our lives and were confronted for the first time with seasonal change and harsh ridicule to our then thick southern accents.

Things appeared to be going smoothly till about early November. The Indian summer had shifted to a omnipotent chill, an unbearable cold heard in the whiny screech of iron swing sets lightly following the dead winter wind. The town appeared more and more like the rotting hornets nest Buck and I found in our barn back in Georgia. We spent most of our time up on the hill, where Uncle Frank's farm house shared his final resting ground, only leaving to go to school.

One particularly biting November afternoon, Dad hauled us down to town to purchase snow boots at McCree's Shoe Store, a first for us all. As I argued with Dad, pleading for the genuine Davy Crockett leather stockings, Jimmy, my four-year-old brother, meandered outside the store into the street. A lava lamp at the adjoining store had caught his curiosity and just when I began to conquer Dad in my war for Davy Crockett, he turned to notice Jimmy going into the "pot-smokin'-freak store." Pushing past my beloved boot, Dad set off to rescue his youngest from the nasty liberals in the next store. Although my heart ached with the failure of filling bags, I followed in Dad's pursuit, hoping

to see a scene. Dad possessed a true gift for causing scenes, I fondly remember one fair back in Georgia in which Dad successfully singlehandedly left his brawny mark upon three distressed husbands.

"What's the idear, advertising your commie filth in this, a respectable town?" My father's word reached the sale person before his faming eyes focused on the whole of the store. He disregarded tie-dyes, sandals, and self-help books, before he was transfigured. Transfigured he was, as I was on peering behind Dad's protective coveralls, to behold the Madonna. The sucker that Mr. McCree had given me added to the bongo music as it dove to the Indian carpeted floor, my mouth suspended in disbelief at the heavenly figure before us. Father and son paused, the weak words thrown by the angry father whelped into a corner like a beaten dog. Gulping for air my father redirected his fury, now dead in passion.

"Why, hello there, I don't recall on making your acquaintance," Southern hospitality was a firearm to Dad. He could warm the frost off a widow's breast. My Madonna, doe-like, welcomed my father and me to her store, Contemporary Karma, and introduced herself as Elizabeth Parker, but we may call her Beth. Ah...Beth...the name galloped across my pulsating mind. I remained dumbfounded as Bill Baxter drew deep into his soul, calculating every play of the cards, every Georgian compliment, every turn of his smile. The two became engulfed in small talk. She and her husband and boy had recently moved up from Connecticut. He was worried about a deep freeze harming the crops, she asked him if he knew of a good place to gather mushrooms, he wondered if she had sampled Ben Snider's cider. The talk continued till dusk, Jimmy captivated in removing incense from their mason jar refuge, sampling each with a ruffle of his now running nose, me content to gaze upon the beauty, my Beth. My father and I departed Contemporary Karma, egos intact, him armed with her desire to meet the family, a possible dinner date, me armed with the crystal trinket my love daintily placed in my sweating palm on out retreat. I went to sleep that night a happy man, unaware my prize would be selfishly snatched by my own father, a man already blessed with a wife and a zoo of children.

The following weeks primarily were marked with a growing obsession with Beth. The Parkers lived conveniently close, and I took it upon myself to travel the piece up the road to their solar-heated home every day after school, braving the coldest of colds to find refuge on a plump African knit couch, gingerly sipping red zinger tea and helping Beth with Oliver, her three-year-old son.

Oliver was special Beth said, but I could tell by his thick eyes and chubby bodice that something was wrong with him. I later learned he had Downs Syndrome, perhaps the offspring of a trip on the notorious brown acid. Beth's "husband" Jona, spelled without an H, wasn't Oliver's father, nor were they actually married. Apparently, Beth took the familiar route of sister Sara, and although it wasn't the varsity quarterback in her case. How would a boy of ten know this, you ask? Beth relied on me as her sole contact with the outside world and would ramble on for hours as Oliver cooed and laughed, allowing a constant stream of spittle to make its home upon his chubby cheek. Jona spent the days working in the store or at a "society" thirty miles north of Little Falls.

Dad always made it a point to pick me up from Beth's. "It's really too late and too cold for you to be out, Max," but he didn't have me fooled for a minute. I was, as I am today, gifted in ready infidelity. Dad was hot on the trail of the Birkenstocks of Beth.

His pick-ups became longer and more frequent, such that I often snuck out the back, wounded by Beth's colt-like composure around Dad. Mom had begun to suspect something as well. I noticed her novenas had become more frequent and her look more distant. Sometimes, however rarely, I'd awake to her muffled sobs as she'd gaze about her robust reflection in the bathroom mirror, rosary permanently joined to the thumb and forefinger. I think she could tell something was different with this one. Beth compared to Dad's previous love interests was like trying to compare the Blessed Mother to Twiggy. Reserved in all, except her devotedness to crystals, Buddha, and the peace effort, Beth continually failed in consummating my father's growing passion. It was almost as if she was completely unaware of his shifty eyes and sweaty brow. Despite Beth's ignorance of my father's infatuation, the entire town of Little Falls seemed to be quite knowledgeable of the case, which was rather remarkable considering Mary Ann Johnson and Becky Lynn Holmeister and Ty Tzu remained unexamined relics in the life story of the Baxter family. Johnny MacIntire and Herbert Mallone, fellow third graders, even placed quarter bets on Dad and Beth sneaking out to the shady motel down on Route 74.

When Beth finally broke down and yielded to my father's hungry desires, the rendezvous was not to take place at Lucky Larry's truck stop and motel on Route 74, but at the suave Mountain Inn. I overheard Dad call Beth one night. Jona was traveling down to D.C. for a march and Oliver was being - "enlightened" in some shared childrearing farm up North. "8:30, Room 466. No, no, don't ya worry your purty lil' head, everything is set. See ya then...baby doll." My father hung up the phone with a disgusting giggle, the kind you hear from lovelorn men on seedy soap operas.



It turned out I wasn't alone in my cavedropping, the next morning, the tiny shrines to the holy family, statues of Saint Monica flanked every nook and cranny of our house. It was especially cold that December morning, the first morn in which longjohns touched my goose pimpled skin. The *Daily Chronicle* flashed headlines of ruined crops if the cold spell continued without an insulating snow. the weather perplexed Dad, but one could tell by the way he gulped down his corn flakes and slurped his coffee (extra cream no sugar), that this was a man inflated with anticipation. Upon kicking up his heels before heading out to check on the fields, a trembling hand leapt across his drained bowl of corn flakes, desperately tearing at my father's flannel shirt.

"Listen here Bill Baxter, the holy mother will be watching your every move today...Just you think twice..."

Mom's fortune teller threat startled Dad from his contentment. Nervously his eyes fled my mother's magician-like bind. But, alas! with every seek of refuge, the eyes of the Blessed Virgin sought him out from the window sill, from the table, from the cupboard, even the refrigerator, where a print of a coy Italian Madonna maternally gazed at my father. Dazed and confused, Dad bolted out the back door, and Mom, lips tightly pursed, bowed her head to the novena to Little Flower.

School that day was especially hard. Beth occupied my mind in such a fury, I remained powerless against the times tables, Dick and Jane, even afternoon recess, an event spent indoors considering the dangerously dropping temperatures.

When the final bell freed me, I raced home only to find mother deep in prayer, and the aroma of a hearty pot roast waltzing from the kitchen. Homework and chores slowly marched on like a marooned man in a desert. The hours dragging, dragging until 8:00 finally arrived. Dad stepped into the parlor, after dinner mints and Old Spice cologne raced to my nostrils, the smell placing me into reality. He was going to do it! "Honey, I'm going out for a spell...Ben Snider wants me to help him with the details for the Elks Club meetin' on Friday, won't be long..."

He bent to place a kiss of penance upon my mother's cheek. She violently turned away and resumed her meditation. Dad stammered towards the door, pushing it open with his massive shoulder. The door wouldn't budge. Desperately he tried again as my brother and I gazed on him like Saturday morning cartoons.

"Damn it, Max give me a hand!" Being the oldest, I am often called to assist my father with the strength only a ten-year-old could

provide. The door remained intact. Furious, Dad threw up the blinds in the front window. My family had the morbid practice of concealing every sign of daylight by pulling down the blinds. I believe the darkness reminded my mother of the musty church she attended, thus helped her prayers advance to heaven.

The shade flipped like a spinning yo-yo infesting the room with a strange halo glow. Mystified, my father peered out the window only to find the front lawn carpeted with a pristine white, and tiny angels rushing down from the sky, an army beckoned by mother's prayers. The rest of the household gathered around Dad as we witnessed our first snowfall, although Mom remained stationed at her "pew," a tiny smirk fighting to break through her reverent mouth. Our single care slept under a thick snow laced comforter. Driving would be a feat impossible save for an act of grace.

Thus, my father's desire was quenched by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Henceforth, he remained faithful as a golden retriever to my mother, developing a marriage even challenging to my own. The day of the first melt (we were snowed in for 8 days), my father gave his Baptist soul over to the Catholics, and commenced a church career that would have made St. Peter proud. Beth, consequently, happened to make it up to the Mountain Inn before the snow made driving impossible. It's rumored she spent her eight days exchanging karma with a young bell hop. My love for Beth left me like cold bathwater racing for the drain. I placed my efforts on taking notes on my parents re-ignited love, and CCD classes, where I met the lovely Christina Davis, but that's another story altogether...

Anna Tosick

### **rivery solstice**

I pulled the raspberry wagon past the  
broken window and the red bushes  
The tears of our soul  
plants happy bushes across our faces  
so that everyone will think we are happy  
Photosynthesis becomes the eternal consciousness  
spinning tops with whipped trees  
in a cannibal crumbs  
Checkered curtains hang in a fifties household  
smell like knowledge, don't it ( the wagon )  
These checkered bushes are our  
emotions

Darren Sorrels

reach into early morning as it were  
a new world, a first time again;  
with wide eyes run past fresh houses  
with open windows. some folks  
want to be seen, others shut up tight;  
you have to read them carefully.  
at dawn it's easier to see people  
in the nude; they haven't put on  
their costumes yet and are still  
coldwhiteskinned until they wake up.  
wonder why they have to hide away  
so much? bare skin is real;  
uncovered unchanged is bare but  
it's all too scary for most of them.  
what if everyone went about in the nude?  
not bare-bottomed, but from the  
heart up? it's nothing sensual,  
just that most of THEM see it as primal.  
but is it not odd that THEY are the best-  
dressed of us all?

what a waste of.

Brian Hedgepath

## Grandfather

You did not leave me enough time.

Two decades I waited  
to meet you. I got you  
after the fact,  
after the stroke,  
and by then you  
were gone. Left the  
house like a *Mary Celeste*,  
left no forwarding address

And someone said  
you didn't really like me.  
Fat, prissy child, I was —  
Slumped, smelly man, you.  
I got better, stronger, smarter,  
thinner, prettier for you.  
You held up your end, too.  
You forgot my name, and  
Grandma paid me summers  
to wash pee off the  
bathroom floor.

Living out your final years  
as a corpse. With my hand  
out to greet you, you  
stumble, caught by earth.  
A new patriarch, one less  
Christmas present, flowers  
next to marble on your  
birthday.

Talking to the stone with  
our name on it, I get  
the same old response.

Now, past deadline, I have all the time in the world.

Camille Hopkins

Reprinted from the *Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal*

Spent leaves  
Don't so much whistle  
As hum down, circling,  
Fingering air's insubstantiality,  
Athirst for epitaph.

Fall's pathetic finery:  
Time's never chastened appetite  
For self-extension, self-perpetuation.

Grasping, we clutch at empty space  
Frantic for reward,  
For shimmering signs  
It *must* be done, it *will* be told.

And all the while our words limp forth,  
Echoes where the hills to ring them back  
Have fallen long since down to dust.

William Lindsey

## Class War

Slick orator flashes his pupils —  
makes no commands,  
but silk smooth suggestions  
radiating glossy colors  
which milk alienation fears  
as the caste wheel drops another sect out.

Slave to the system,  
splashing in the mud.  
Mocking stares irritate the wounds  
and warm the heart with revenge.

Open the gates of restraint,  
feel the rush of pure hate.  
Internally hidden for so long  
the smooth sacks rupture  
uncovering putrid vengeance  
and fading delicate morals.

Urban vibrations infest  
the unsatisfied masses.  
Drooping authority  
restructures for war.  
Protecting their interests  
they race towards overkill.

Michael Lillard  
from 23 APR 91 to 25 Jun 91



### **The Old Man**

Cheers carry from somewhere in the park  
over the crowded rooftops to where  
the old man sits in late sunlight working.  
Something must have become clear.  
A game of some kind, no doubt.  
Yet his deliberate, delicate motions  
never vary as he assembles someones  
clock in a dark old shop across the road.

I imagine his fixed eye naming each part,  
blessing their thin and improbable  
junctures with each consummation  
until the whole impossible assemblage  
awakes and cries out. All of this  
would surprise him, no doubt,  
yet never deter those sharp fingers  
which will move the small pieces  
within and without long after  
he's passed from our restless attention.

Russell Fowler

## Untold Tales

There is a history here the newspaper  
never glorifies, like the robot who lived  
behind the abandoned steam power plant  
with Mr. Abernathy, a wonderful eccentric.  
If anyone remembers, they do not discuss it,  
how the robot did his shopping, swept  
the floors and washed the dishes; or  
the day the wild eyed druggist hired  
a pilot to fly him over the town so he  
could parachute drunk into the schoolyard;  
or the carnival down in the meadow  
with the fat German opera singer, and  
the delicate, dancing ponies. Why  
do they choose to forget so much? As if  
every day was dull, and time passed only  
in work, and church, and sports? As if  
Centaur never galloped over the little  
mountain, and green fire  
never touched our Winter sky?

David C. Childers

## Rhonda, Ray and Pedro

Ray had just opened his fourth Budweiser in an hour when he heard the key in the lock. The door swung open and an iguana, on a leash, entered the living room, followed by Rhonda. The iguana shivered in the air-conditioning and slowly blinked its big, dark eyes. Rhonda smiled. She had a chubby, friendly, blond smile. Five years ago Ray had found it charming.

"It's a lizard, right?"

"His name is Pedro," Rhonda said. "I'll be back in a second. There's more stuff in the car."

Pedro moved about the room with a slithering, side-long grace, investigating the VCR, the stereo, pausing before the television screen, where the President announced that everything was fine and would soon get better.

"Pedro," Ray said. "A lizard named Pedro."

Rhonda huffed back through the front door lugging a terrarium.

"You could at least give me a hand. There's some more stuff out in the car."

"Why did you buy a lizard?"

Rhonda carefully arranged the terrarium next to the bookcase.

"Perfect," she said. "Now we don't have that dead space along the wall. Besides, Pedro is an iguana. That's the proper name. Not lizard. From Mexico. The man at Pet World said that iguanas are clean and affectionate. Less trouble than as cat or a dog. He's so ugly, he's cute. Aren't you, Pedro?"

Pedro's long tongue kissed the air. Rhonda laughed.

"See? He's responding to me."

She went back to the car and returned with a ten pound bag of colored rocks, a lamp, a small cactus, and a miniature sombrero, which she placed on Pedro's head. A rubber band held it in place.

"There," she said. "All set for his new life."

"You came home with a lizard."

"An iguana. I told you once. They're thousands of years old. That's what the man at Pet World said. Much older than human beings."

"A goddam lizard."

"Well, you don't have to be so nasty about it."

"A reptile..."

"Reptiles are still animals."

"They lay eggs. Like chickens. What would you do if I came home

with a chicken?

Rhonda went into the kitchen, walking the quick walk of an angered woman. She yelled back at Ray.

"I would try to understand. Pedro's a *male* iguana. He can't lay eggs. They're clean animals, too. They hardly ever use the bathroom, and when they do it's only a little bit. The man at Pet World told me..."

"Lizard shit. We'll have these little piles of lizard shit."

Rhonda did not answer. Ray finished the beer and tried to watch television, where Marie Osmond described her new life in country music. Pedro crouched beneath the dining room table, hissing from time to time.

After dinner, Rhonda assembled the terrarium, spreading out the rocks, placing the cactus just so. Ray refused to help, watching her from the couch as he started a fresh beer. Finally, Rhonda finished her work and coaxed Pedro from beneath the table with a small saucer of specially prepared iguana food.

"There," she said, as Pedro moved about the terrarium, bumping his nose against the walls.

"That's great," Ray said, the first words he had spoken in an hour.

"He's only a poor animal. Mexicans eat them. Can you imagine?"

"A lizard taco," Ray laughed.

"I don't think that's a bit funny."

Rhonda left Pedro with another saucer full of food and kissed Ray on the cheek.

"Please, honey. Try to be nice."

"Okay, sure. Me and Pedro will just sit here for awhile."

Rhonda smiled.

"You'll really like him, if you give yourself the chance."

She went to bed. Ray turned off the T.V. and went into the kitchen for another beer. There were only two left, and he tried to decide whether he wanted to go down to the Handy Pantry for another six pack. Two would be enough, he decided. Two more beers, I'll go to sleep. Get up in seven hours. Go to work. Come home again. More beers. T.V. A Mexican lizard. And so on.

Ray returned to the couch. And so on, he thought. Sure, I'll go on and on. Pedro paced back and forth, sniffed the cactus, cleaned the saucer with his tongue. And so on. I'm watching a lizard in a glass box, Ray thought.

He lifted the terrarium lid and grasped Pedro in the middle of his back. He was surprised how dry the hide was, as if it were sun-cured. Pedro froze at his touch, and Ray lifted him from the terrarium, keeping tight control with his hand. Ray reached around and grasped Pedro by his underside, and stood, lifting

the iguana until Pedro's face was level with his own, eye to eye. I need a goddam sombrero, too, he thought. Pedro hung limply, a dead weight.

He carried Pedro into the bathroom and flipped on the light. He turned Pedro until their heads were side by side. Then he laughed, as something else occurred to him.

Rhonda shifted in her sleep, snoring softly, as Ray searched for the car keys on the cluttered dresser. He nestled Pedro under his arm like a football. Finally, he found the keys and softly and quickly left the apartment. It would be cold out, early March with the frost covering the cars in the parking lot. Pedro shivered and clung to him, and it wasn't easy getting behind the wheel, but Ray managed.

He drove for a long time, up and down the interstate until he found a deserted rest stop. The lights crackled over the brick restrooms, the only sound. Even the highway was quiet. He eased Pedro from the car and headed for the woods. He lowered Pedro into the dead, damp leaves and stepped back. The iguana was still for a moment, crouching low. Then he sprang up, his tail twitching, his sombrero bobbing, disappearing into the darkness of the tree line.

Back on the interstate, Ray found a talk station and headed home. People screamed about murders, and what the President was doing and what it cost to buy cars and houses. Ray listened for a couple of minutes before he turned the voices off. Then there was only the engine, his own breathing and the dark road. He drove for a few miles. On and on, he kept saying to himself. Sure. That's how I'll go. He took an exit ramp and headed back down the interstate toward the rest area.

He did not know if you were supposed to call an iguana, the same way you would a dog. He did anyway, though. Softly, at first, and then louder and louder as he moved further into the woods, into the night, searching for Pedro, for the sombrero, hoping for some kind of sign.

Max Childers

### To Those Passed Daily

There is only so much to know  
about faces, tempting you  
to pry the rusty skulls  
with crowbar questions and see  
what living element scuttles inside,  
what connective tissue relates us

The dusty papers and melted 45s  
haphazardly atticked in the brain  
are often too personal, toys of  
only children, unexplainable.  
Private libraries die with you

Like the heart. Behind  
every face there lies (once lay)  
feeling, corroding the expression  
at times. This unwelcome knowledge,  
to see and to *know*. To slowly  
shift the lips into neutral, to  
smooth the questioning  
wrinkles, to lower the eyes  
and contemplate the ground.

Camille Hopkins

### One Soul

One soul calls for the other,  
One soul answers with love,  
One soul falls down,  
One soul cushions the fall,  
One soul wants more out of life,  
One soul stands aside,  
One soul looks for Happiness,  
One soul is happiness,  
One soul understands what's going on,  
One soul looks with pleasure,  
One soul feels so reassured,  
that one soul was always there.

Edmond A. Medina

In the coldhard night in which we live  
Little remains for man to infest.  
We've made our wings to touch the sky  
But 'ere we reached the sun the wax melted  
And we fell back hard to the earth with a thump  
(And we found that door to God locked tightly).  
The first attempt was the picking of a fruit —  
Why do we always reach for the apple just beyond  
Our fingertips and climp only forbidden trees?  
Its juice brewed a strange elixir called Death, and  
Now we must cover the perfection we once were  
With Guilt's unfirendly and hooded cloak.

We also built a tower that would reach  
The very Gates of Pearl, yet all our stacking and  
Climbing again brought us only back to  
The coldhard night. Even our tallest efforts  
With coloured-glass windows can not  
Bring us near to God — only wasted passion.

As children we are taught to dream—  
But why when we are told not to even sleep  
When we are old? Could it be that  
Time draws near its end and we find that  
We haven't yet finished our tower?  
Then we stand looking at our still feet and  
Wait for someone else to lay the first brick.  
And with our last and final breath we frantically  
Write our poem on the bathroom wall  
And we don't even sign our name.



The quest for the Grail is failed,  
Another hopeful knight is put to death,  
And still our daylight drips slowly away.  
The coldhard night grows deeper each moment  
And another doorway to Heaven is closed.  
Too many wayfarers discover that the Oneroad to  
Truth is laked with thorns and turn away.  
Our Oneroad lies before us yet; we must not stray  
But bear the crown of thorns taken from its way;  
And when the branches fo that path tear  
From us our hooded cloak we must not  
Turn and run in same or regret or for the  
Warmth of the clothed paths — those have no thorns  
Until the end — but fare nakedly throught this  
Coldhard hight until we reach the Doorway to  
Heaven,  
The lamb whose wool will keep us safe and warm.

Our waxwings have melted, the towers have  
Crumbled in the storm, and still, the  
Oneworld — Onepower — Onepeople will fail.  
But our strength is the lamb we seek  
So we shall not turn — we are "that which  
We are; one equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but  
Strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and  
Not to yield."

Brian K. Hedgepath

Good Night

The caving  
echo  
of vocal  
fidelity  
allows me  
no peace  
but cold, sickly  
Quiet,  
dark and large.  
Dead  
drumbeats  
continue to walk.

The moon,  
new,  
exhausted,  
wants the copyright  
revoked—  
Your soul howls  
clearly with  
cold melodies  
rinsing  
indifferent mugs—  
She stands absent,  
against you,  
watches darkly,  
knows the  
music  
well.

Elizabeth Costales

## September

Closing my eyes, the bonfire's crackles  
could be mistaken for a waterfall. My face,  
flushed, is searing to the touch.

We're out of marshmallows, he announces,  
shoving crisp, crumpled leaves under the  
smoldering tree stump. It blooms yellow  
heat, and I am surprised that my forehead  
is not perspiring. He takes off his jacket.

We both wear glasses. I watch the flames  
dance on his and wonder what  
he sees. The stump snaps, making me  
jump.

Burning pine, I tell him, smells like Vapo-Rub.

He grins, and I wish it were mutually  
accepted that we would lie there embracing.  
However, the two lawn chairs are clearly  
delegated.

Camille Hopkins

"I used to love her"  
Now isn't that a thought  
Like changing linen  
Or like it had been bought

Things have changed  
We have changed  
Like wisdom born from chaos & despair

In the beginning  
Fear & love  
Apathy & love  
Love & hate

Various passions  
Strong and unrelenting  
Coupled & worrin  
Ambivalent menacing

Times have changed  
We have changed  
Like wintry snow and fallen leaves

But spring has come and passions gone  
And love & rage are memories  
As we share playful talk on the phone

Hearts are knit  
Like friends should be  
By copper wire of phones  
But "we"

Fade  
Like denim  
    and old perfume  
        not "we"  
    just  
        you  
    and  
    me  
Drifting apart on the tide of life.

Eric Ottinger

### Tea

Muffled emotion, hidden with haste,  
Eyes seek to escape the August sky.  
    A cup coveted, a lip's embrace.  
The liquid grows cool, with the miles pace,  
    A strand abandoned, a final taste.

John A. Murphy

## Ousted

I can't believe what she's done to me. Why am I letting this happen, man? We were doing fine: She gave and I took — a perfect relationship, but I must have given something she needed, still needs, because when she took up with that jerk she didn't pick a fight or really kick me out. Why should she? Rich! She has more money than anyone could want, so she just leased another apartment for me, you know, and *she* pays the rent.

She doesn't fool me. Obviously, she wants me in the wings in case *he* doesn't last. He didn't like me hanging around; I overheard him going on about it. He's really weird — I mean, it's her apartment, isn't it? You know what I'm saying? I wasn't in the way.

Hey, why should I care if she gets engaged? I've got a free hangout and anything I need here. That's why I didn't raise a stink about being thrown out, which is what it amounted to. IO left in an icy silence — a threatening one I hope. I didn't do anything stupid, like challenge him. He's bigger than I am anyway, and I hear he has a black belt. I believe it, man.

Needless to say, my new ritzy neighbors really gawked when I moved in. "Look at that. I can't believe it!" drawled a peppy-type senior citizen two doors down. "There goes the neighborhood." Then she laughed. I'm not *that* scruffy; in fact I spruced up my appearance considerably after I went to live with her. Took it quite seriously, because she got a kick out of watching me "at my ablutions," as she put it. Is she kinky, or what?

A part of me still loves her, but only a part; you know what I mean? The rest of me intends to make her pay for this. Him, too. Still, I guess her heart's in the right place, though.

Most girls would've ignored a stranger, beat-up and destitute, grubbing in garbage cans, but *she* invited me home!

So, what choices do I have now? I have no skills, no talents, not much brain, if you want to know the truth. Bum around on the streets? Get in with the wrong crowd? No, thanks. It's warm here in my apartment, you know, and I have a staggering view of the city from my window.

Know what? She still loves me. She slips over *every day* to be with me. *He* probably hasn't a clue! What she really likes is to give me a massage, and I guess it's not as much fun with that man as I can make it for her, because *I* know what she most enjoys.

After all this is over, I'm going to win, because (black belt notwithstanding) *he* can't curl up into a ball on her lap and purr, and he'll *never* have glossy white fur like mine — the fur that gives him allergies and gives me my name, Fluffy — and that's what she likes the most, man. You know what I mean?

Jean S. Moore





## The Journeyman

Pesht, on the edge of the Andromeda galaxy, was a dry, desolate world dotted here and there with small feudal colonies. It seemed the last place that an extragalactic solar sailor would be orbiting.

In the burning deserts below, in the colony of Garradeth of the Houses of Regalius, a young man strode through the empty streets. His skin was darkly tanned but had not yet become leathery and tough. His piercing eyes were so blue they almost seemed unnatural. Chestnut brown hair streamed from his head down to the small of his back and was gathered up in an engraved brass clasp that forced it to fall into several ringlets, one for each five of his twenty-five years. At his left leg hung a beautifully detailed sword, the ceremonial blade of his family. In his strong hands he held a nondescript wooden staff topped with the head of some huge hawk-like bird. Lashed onto the staff was a crossbar from which hung a a banner that bore the sigil of the House Regalius.

His moccasin boots crunched softly in the hot sand as he moved steadily toward the center of Garradeth to the main square. Ominously, a large shadow fell across his path. The shadow resembled a gargantuan finger of an ancient witch-hag. The object causing the shape was a curved twisted rock rising from the ground: the Great Stone. The hamlet of Garradeth centered around the ancient relic, which covered an underground stream that bubbled up in a well nearby. Many miracles (some of them had not been staged) had been performed at its base. Standing atop the Great Stone was Brithunia Mortell, also of the House Regalius, even though his family had lost the name through marriage seven generations ago.

Slowly, Brithunia raised his arm and stretched out his first finger, pointing at the lone man striding solemnly toward him.

"Kettis Regalius!" Brithunia's rattling voice boomed over the empty alleyways. "What business do you have here?!"

"I have chosen today to begin my Man-Quest, Shaman Mortell,"

Kettis returned.

"So, do you think you are prepared simply because of your age? If so, you insult your House and yourself. Cast off your banner and family blade and follow me to my home."

All Kettis could think as he followed the slow-moving shaman to his abode was, *what have I done?*

The shaman Brithunia Mortell's hovel was a weird amalgam of technology and sorcery. Small nightmare shapes skittered through the shadows and several bats hung, sleeping, from the ceiling.

"Sit!" the shaman commanded without looking at Kettis. Seating himself at the center of the room Kettis opened his mouth, then thought better of speaking.

Shaman Mortell began, speaking in a voice as somber as the grave and as old as death, "Kettis Regalius of House Regalius, you see the world with the eyes you were born with. You see very little. There are many other worlds within our own and many more beyond our own. You see the stars, but miss their meaning. You comprehend the concept of time, but do not see its path. Before you begin your Man-Quest, a quest you will undertake to find your true Korak, your true soul. You must partake of the Gesh, the Water of God, so that the paths of time will be free and clear to you."

The Shaman handed Kettis a small earthenware bowl, half-full of a sweet-smelling, faintly green liquid. At the bottom of the bowl rested tiny leaves of the Gesh plant, the holy herb used to brew the Water of God. Slowly Kettis raised the bowl to his lips and sipped from the edge, tasting the sugary liquid, swishing it round in his mouth, and, finally, swallowing it. Suddenly the world exploded into a collage of colors - blue, red, orange, yellow and green - all swirling together into a gorgeous starburst. He had taken the Gesh. His forebrain quickly became aware of faint images seen through an ethereal mist. First was a world with a feudal establishment, populated by men with the heads of birds. Next, his mind's eye saw a strange craft that was shadowed with an intangible wraith-like face. There were more faces: the first was a peaceful blonde haired youth who controlled a demon called Graviton; then a man the same age as Kettis who was human, but also part wolf, and whose hands had long, steel fingernails. The last of his coherent visions was of a middle-aged man, thick of beard, who could see across the miles and into the atom. The slow recovery from the effects of the Gesh was but a blur for Kettis: windswept faces and signs that were all of his past - his father, mother, brothers - all spiraling away into blackness.

Kettis awoke seven hours later, lying on a grass mat under the shadow of the Great Stone. He rose slowly on wobbly legs, and the world spun for a moment, but stopped when he focused his eyes on Shaman Mortell. The shaman was sitting alone atop the Stone, staring down approvingly.

"So Kettis," Shaman Mortell said in his powerful voice, "you have taken the Gesh, and your future has been shown to you. Now you are truly prepared for your Man-Quest. From this day you shall no longer be Kettis Regalius when you walk among outlanders. They shall know you as the Journeyman. As the Gesh has extended your vision, so has it extended your life. As all men of the House Regalius, you shall live the lives of ten men, with a thousand years to complete your quest. Change not your hair, as it warns others as to your home, gather what you need, and then wait for the dropship from the solar sailor to receive you. Do not dishonor yourself of your House."

Even as the holy man's final words were echoing in the deserted streets of Garradeth, the Shaman himself began to fade away, like wispy smoke from the dying embers of a small cooking fire; then, all at once, Mortell was gone.

Kettis shook his head and attributed the vanishing of the shaman to a slight aftereffect of the Gesh. While Kettis walked back to his home, he noticed how all the people were still in their huts, waiting for the end of the Man-Quest ceremony. Kettis reached his doorstep and looked at the sigil banner beside it, stirring memories of his family, all killed in wild bloodfeuds ten years ago. Stepping inside, he shut out those memories as he shut the thick ironwood door behind him.

The inner hall of the home of House Regalius was lit by a single fire in the pit at the center of the room. As Kettis strode into the room, his body cast strange shadows across the walls. Glancing about, he decided what he would need. From the wall he pulled down an ancient set of swords, a Katana he'd dubbed Windrider, and a Daisho he'd named Kamikazi. These he slid into clasps on the back of a belt harness so that the handles hung down on his back. Then from a teakwood box he drew his most prized possession — a 7,000 year old Colt Dragoon, perfectly oiled and cleaned, silvery in color because the black of the iron had, centuries ago, been polished away. This he placed into a holster on a low slung belt that held brass cartridges in its loops, and in a small pouch on the belt's left he placed a cleaning kit for the archaic slug-thrower. In a large buffalo-hide pack he placed a journal, artist's tools, jerky and several empty water skins. Then he wrapped a small pouch of precious gems in his bedroll, which he then strapped to the top of his pack. Lastly, he pulled a heavy leather cloak over his shoulders and placed a wide-brimmed floppy hat on top of his head.

The Journeyman meditated until dark on the huge tarmac

outside wracked with guilt for leaving Garradeth when he was the last living Regalius, but filled with elation for beginning his Man-Quest.

All these thoughts and feelings scattered like dust in the wind when he heard the faint rumble of jet turbines. Looking up he saw the dropship form the solar sailor. The Journeyman stepped out of the tarmac, his cloak swept back by the dropship's backwash. His eyes gazed across the craft's lines and came to rest on the name-plate which read "Wandering Spirit." Hitching up his pack, the Journeyman smiled and walked toward the landing pad.



Michael Cooper

## The Cycle

The longest days burn toward thunderhead.  
Stringy haired sprites run barefoot.  
Marching bones dead soldiers send home  
prop on courthouse and barbershop facades

At the baseball game, after four full, a metaphysician  
hauls a station wagon full of mystery on to the pitcher's mound.  
The town people cluster near, and partake of what he offers,  
leaving later when the moon has cut the storm clouds.

It is the month for festivals to ward off exhaustion.  
There are pronouncements and watermelons,  
long black highways, blackened with mosquitoes,  
forlorn copulation, muttered love and love lackluster.

Out on a hill, a boy and a girl, alive, alive  
but dying quickly, drying up their Spring fed juices.  
As the child takes root inside the girl, the boy  
begins to think of other places.

David C. Childers

## Nocturne

The evening fog rising from the river  
is no metaphor, nor the crows  
searching for a night place  
in the trees. I listen for messages  
in their black wings over head  
but hear only darkness coming.  
On the next ridge, the mercury lamps  
blink on, their harsh unnatural light  
fending off the fears of distant neighbors.  
All the rest is as dark as the hammering  
of a heart when the quiet lets it listen  
too long. This is the old night which  
dreams in our bones we hope we'd left  
behind. Under the first new moon of  
the fresh new year, it's still  
out there, and it still won't talk.

Russell Fowler

## Courthouse IV

Dressed of  
celery  
velvet,  
they come.  
Vulgar, dark  
hose, white  
shoes,  
tall heels.  
Pretty  
polyester  
line for confession.  
Noon,  
they stampede hungry and  
absolved;  
dirty,  
toothless,  
assured.

## Ruins

Systematically  
absentminded, feeding  
wrappers to  
broken buildings and  
compost clay parks  
harboring  
hot, dry  
dust-chalk —  
red, struggling  
greenery lush and  
despairing —  
The man smiles,  
eats his  
snack with  
borrowed gusto.

Elizabeth Costales

dripdrops of sweat  
from my nose tumble-umble  
to the ground  
where the shovel  
hits the soil and  
makes homes for flowers  
with petals of  
red and yellow and  
white and blue and  
good scents that reach  
far up into my nose  
past my eyes  
into my brain  
— you know, the part  
that breathes life —  
and tells me to plant  
an acre of this stuff  
but how can i  
with only one shovel  
and summer so near?  
the dripdrops of sweat  
fall to the ground  
faster and one  
becomes a little old man  
that plants flowers for



the brain, and  
another gives them  
smell, and  
another paints them  
and pretty soon  
we have a garden  
that everyone can see  
and breathe  
and taste  
and run barefoot  
through  
with no worry of  
what the people with  
shoes on  
might say.  
this is our garden;  
**NO SHOES ALLOWED!**  
so strip  
those feet  
and run and play and  
work if you like  
but sweat  
because  
that's what makes flowers  
flowers.

Brian K. Hedgepath

## The Clown

Pathetically sad little creature  
with your hands in the air — imitating motion.  
A smile was painted flawlessly on thy face,  
but something remains unconvincing about your constant  
happy state.

There is a desperate, gasping feeling lurking  
in the silent rests encased in the melody line  
which flows from inside of you.  
All dressed up with everywhere to go —  
but nowhere to purely blend in.

Yet, I cannot insult you or your desperate song  
for I do yearn for warmth to return.  
Please, march it in quickly — keep pleading with life  
mankind needs the hope of your song.

Michael Lillard  
from 30 Dec 90 to 04 Jan 91

If you creep & moan —  
If you shout & cry  
If you whimper in dark musty corners  
HEY!

There's a little red pony rocking in this attic.  
A child's toy. A supermarket statue.  
Welcome to the Church of America.  
Aisle Eight Lighted. Pointed Knave.  
Towels. Napkins. Sporks.  
It's here. It's there. It's yellow tag  
Everywhere. Here's a dime. Ride it.

Anna Tosick

## George

On a typical day,  
I ponder the techniques of literature,  
The theorems of calculus, the nuances of  
French and physics,  
And on every typical day,  
You drop determinedly on my studies,  
Stretch out, and nibble the pages of my books —

GEORGE! I cry. STOP!

And you will not look up. When  
I surrender and retrieve my notes  
From under the tonnage of fur I  
Have given your name, you  
Unabashedly rise in a cloud of  
Furfly, balance in an arch, and look  
For my drink...

THERE IT IS, invading your crawl space

As you (nudge nudge) PLOP SSSSSHHHHHHH

Pepsi washing against my dearest  
Possessions and YOU. You lick the sticky  
Brown water from your paw. I retreat  
To the bathroom, returning with weapons  
Of water and cloth, but I am  
Defeated. Despite my screams,  
You are already saliva-slickened,  
Recovered, and sauntering out the door

Camille Hopkins

## Southern Christmas

We don't have the snow down here that you do,  
and it's awfully hard sledding on new fallen dew.  
Our boughs of holly may wilt in the heat,  
and the pavement may burn the soles of our feet.  
But we put up our lights, so pretty and bright:  
they twinkle so lovely in the warm southern night.  
We hang our stockings by the chimney with care  
with never a thought of a fire in there.  
In the warmth of the sun, we lie on the grass.  
We hum with the carolers and watch as they pass.  
We hold Christmas in our own special way,  
and the excitement grows with each passing day.  
Each stranger we meet, they smile and they call,  
Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas, y'all.

Margrete Anderson

## CONTRIBUTORS

First time contributor **Margrete Anderson** lives in Stanley. She has written since high school and has been published in *Voices of America*, a national anthology.

**David C. Childers** is a lawyer in Mount Holly. His poetry and short stories have been published in numerous magazines and journals, and he is the author of a poetry collection, *American Dusk*.

**Max Childers** lives in Lowell and teaches at Winthrop College. His first novel, *Things Undone*, was called by the New York Times, "a very intelligent, very sour satire." His second novel, *Alpha Omega*, will be published this year.

Freshman **Michael Cooper** is from Whiteville, N.C. "The Journeyman" is the first installment of a novel he hopes to complete.

Abbey alumna **Elizabeth Costales** ('88) is jury coordinator for Gaston County and a consistent contributor to the *Agora*.

English department chair **Russell Fowler** has been published in numerous journals.

**John Harris** is a professor of English. He serves as moderator for this year's *Agora*.

**Brian K. Hedgepath** graduated from the Abbey in December and will pursue a Master's degree in English at Appalachian State University this fall.

**Camille Hopkins** is a sophomore English major from Gastonia. She has been published most recently in the *Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal*.

**Michael Lillard** is a sophomore English major at UNC Greensboro.

**William Lindsey** is the author of two books and numerous articles and poems. He is chair of the Theology department.

**Edmond A. Medina** is a junior computer science major. This is his first appearance in the *Agora*.

**Jean S. Moore** has been a professor of English at the Abbey for 28 years. She has written for *Greensboro Review*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and *The Crucible*, among other journals.

Junior computer science major **John A. Murphy** lives in Gastonia.

**Eric Ottinger** has extensive theatre and dance credits in this area. He will spend next year attending college in Japan.

**Antonio Pastrana** is a freelance cartoonist studying Commercial Arts at CPCC.

**Darren Sorrels** is a senior education major from Gastonia.

Senior English major **Anna Tosick** will enter graduate school spring. She is from Greenfield, Indiana.

# **AGORA 1992**

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