



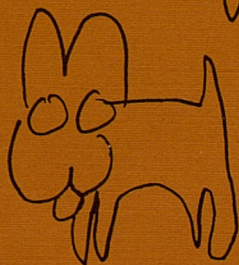
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WORM WOULD. RAY VIEW. NUMB BURR. WAN HUN. DREAD TREE.

As a matter of policy, this editor avoids statements of intent, achievement, breast beating and similar conceits. However, after completing 100 issues of Wormwood, something seems called for.

This chapbook commemorates nine Wormwood "regulars" -- poets who have come to be associated with the magazine in the minds of readers. Several others also fit this category but are deceased (Christopher Perret, Charles Shaw, Gloria Kenison, William Wantling) while others appear not to be currently active (Carl Larsen, Ben Pleasants). Poems appearing here are new (not previously published) but not specially solicited for the occasion -- they have just been taken from the "accepted" file. For bibliographers, fans and collectors, the appearances of all the "regulars" in past issues of Wormwood are noted (ss = a yellow-page section, cb = a chapbook special issue, wa = Wormwood Award announcement).

Every three years, the editor prepares an index and tries to decide whether or not to continue publishing for three more years. The decision always rests on three factors: (i) the number of interesting new poets found, (ii) the mag's general vitality, and (iii) Wormwood's capacity to pay its own way. There will be a note of some sort in either Issue 105 or 106 as to whether the mag will continue past Issue 108. Thank you, thank you, the readers, for your attention and past support.

-- Marvin Malone

Stockton CA



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CHRISTOPHER PERRET: WR: 2, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 30ss, 39wa.

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CHARLES SHAW: WR: 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 16, 21, 24, 27/28, 30, 32, 38, 40.

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JUDSON CREWS: WR: 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, 18, 19ss, 27/28, 31, 33, 43, 50, 52, 58ss, 60, 80, 83cb, 88, 93, 94, 99.

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TEPID TEA SINCE THE SAMOVAR WOULD NOT

Steam. Yet, in that steaming pot-kettle of  
a cranium, Bulltoven was born full-man

From the bowels of a phantom windjammer.  
In that sala grande not very grand

Writing on a few week's sinecure from old  
buddy, G. I. Bill, I did half a

Hundred of the best poems of my life --  
that long narrow room peculiarly majestic

Though I could touch the low old latiad  
ceiling with more than the tip of my

Fingers. I lived my life as a lie (Azalea)  
in this Hispanic web of pure bastardry.

Part fortress wall in days of Indian  
raiders -- then the home of "a better family"

Later owned by a history-conscious, but art-  
conscious American, a great north window

Was implanted which I turned my back  
upon the world through. There was a pig-

Skin chair of Mexico, tin lamp, a fine  
Navaho rug, an iron stove, retablos

On the walls. The small old pre-war  
Ford broke and broke, immured in the plaza

Mud, asshole and axel. An old White Russian  
widow visited, stiff as a nutcracker



Her white, painted face ghastly as the mask  
of a kabuki dancer. We served tepid tea

With a small spoon of Jamaican rum.  
This old house had long been a house of

Women. Was it a lady who had once pissed  
in the only obvious convenience some dark

Night in bone-deep frost, not braving the shit-  
house in the patio out-back. The tea had

A certain perspicacity hardly explained by  
the copper canker inside the pot. Bulltoven

Was not an Ahab, nor yet an Ishmael. If  
you had to brand his ass, it would be

A J.C. plain -- no copper-plate, no flourishes.  
His ship ran upon a shoal, or else was

Scuttled. Was it sand or humid jungle ...  
how humid that jungle was, inside my brain

Though the samovar would not steam. A penchant  
for hoarded marital favors. Had I had a condom

Over my head, would Bulltoven ever have broken through?

I HAD THOUGHT OF THIS CAMP-OUT ENGAGE-

Ment as a sort of act of mercy. Like all  
acts of mercy, it was to get my goat

Before it was finished with. If you  
are crossing a river at flood-tide on the

Back of a crocodile -- chances are you know  
this Aesopian homily as well as I

Do. As between the two of us on this  
camp-out romp, who is the crocodile?

This is the question. I will only relate  
the dispassionate facts. Except for her

Sprained ankle, this bitch was quite a  
hiker. Except for her sprained butt, she

Was "something else" as they say when it comes  
sacking-out time. Even with her sprained



Tongue her sentimentality was about like that  
of a Homeric siren, to borrow a Huxleyian

Similie -- that's all I'll say.

THIS IS THE NUB OF IT, YOU FORCE YOUR WILL

On others because of their need. Is this  
politics, or is it economics? Is it education

Or is it religion? Is this the nub of it? Who  
is without will, and who is with need? The wolf

Weans her young. She trains them not to shit  
the lair. The wolf does not rape his females

They like us are a community kind. Where are we? What  
is the difference? Pound was right, the broker

Is the great evil one. But why the obsession with  
economics? The broker has his claw and his fang

Or his clacking tongue in on every human insti-  
tution. Pound was wrong. The broker was

Only by chance a Jew. The broker is,  
by human design, you --

You being human.

AN ARCHING GROSSNESS OF UNCUT STEMS IS

The only battlefield I have known. I've shot  
them all dead with me eyes closed -- Shut-Eye

Dick. If they had poked me would they have  
known I was only a possum? The defoliated

Jungle. Do you castrate the enemy among all  
the punk and dead leaves, the spores great

As puff-balls? Eyes fixed, glazed -- absorbing  
all the light, reflecting nothing. It's no

Mirror I'll find my rusticated retreat re-  
flected out of, much less my soul, so-

Called. I'm not wanting to be known as  
a castrater of corpses -- even this self-



Commissioned captain of artillery. Though she  
manned the howitzers that blasted out

The unkept laurels -- the roses.

#### IF BULLTOVEN'S REPUTATION GOT WORSE YET

Had it more or less to do with his urinary  
incontinence? Wherein does the existential

Have its conception and its birth, when the word  
is named, or when the name is rendered nug-

Atory past cavil? Undine it was to relate the story  
once he was surely dead. He pissed his

Pant's leg ringing the door-bell to beg  
a friendly commode -- then lied a dog had

Lifted a leg on him in the street. Now he  
must surely take them off and dry them for half

An hour or more. Likely story. As if it were  
not his gonads that had always kept

His imagination at work with words.

#### THE OLD STALLION HAS HIS BLACK COCK OUT

All the way, and his head is resting  
upon the rail as if he might be

Dreaming. If you are human you can  
think what his dream might be

The two fillies and the old mare are  
unconcerned. He pulls it back in

And walks away. He stops a moment  
and pisses a white froth. And walks away

These horses are Americans -- Protestants  
or Roman Catholics. In the Stones of Konarak

Did you ever see  
Asians behaving like this?



IT WAS NOT THAT BULLTOVEN WAS GOING DEAF

Just fed up with Undine poking him if she  
thought she had something to say. He pierced

His left ear, said he'd put a ring in it  
attach a small gold chain. She could yank it

When she had something to say -- twice if it  
was anything that mattered ....

YOUR CRACKED HERO WORSHIP FOR MEN

Who are dead. While I  
am yet alive. I made a

Khatchaturian sabre dance for you  
on the steel rail of the fifth level

Of the look-out tower. You never saw  
-- the sun was in your eyes

We gorged on obnoxious rinds  
of uncured mutton

As the sun went down.

-- Judson Crews

Albuquerque NM

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CARL LARSEN: WR: 4, 7, 9, 11ss, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, 24,  
47, 58, 65/66.

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CHARLES BUKOWSKI: WR: 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16ss, 18,  
19, 20, 21, 22, 24ss, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37, 38, 39wa, 40,  
41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53ss, 55, 57,  
60, 61, 62, 64, 65/66, 68, 71cb, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78,  
80, 81/82ss, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 95cb,  
96, 97, 99, 100ss, 101, 102.

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FOR THE FOXES, THE DEFAMERS, THE TAP DANCERS  
AND THE DREAMERS OF BALLET

don't feel sorry for me  
for I am a competent being  
I am a kind being.

be sorry for the others  
who  
fidget  
complain

who  
constantly  
rearrange their  
lives  
like  
furniture

juggling mates  
and  
attitudes

the malady of their  
confusion is  
constant

and it will  
touch  
whoever they  
deal with.

beware of these:  
one of their  
key words is  
"love."

beware those  
who are  
always talking about  
love.

beware those  
who take their  
instructions from some  
Ultimate Being

for they have  
failed to  
formulate upon  
the results  
of the experiment  
of  
living their own  
lives.

don't feel sorry for me  
because I am alone  
in multitudes of  
Humanity

for even  
in the most terrible  
moments  
humor  
seems to arrive  
as my  
companion.

I am a dog walking  
backwards

I am a broken  
banjo

I am a telephone wire  
in  
Toledo, Ohio

I am a man  
pouring a drink  
this night  
in this month  
of September.



## SHUT OUT

they were putting them in the gate and I was trying to get my bet down and there were two men ahead of me at the window -- the first, a well-dressed fellow seemed to be leaning against the window ... "JESUS CHRIST," I yelled, "SLEEP AT HOME!"

"LOOK AT HIM," I yelled to the man in front of me, "HE'S PICKING UP HIS TICKETS WITH ONE HAND!"

"yes, he's very slow," said the man in front of me.

"I'VE SEEN SOME JERK-OFFS IN MY DAY!" I screamed, "BUT THIS BABY BEATS THEM ALL!"

the man at the window picked up his tickets, spun about, screamed at me: "JESUS CHRIST, I'VE ONLY GOT ONE ARM!"

"sorry, sir," I said, then had a second thought and as he passed I told him, "listen, if you've only got one arm you ought to get in line earlier...."

he walked off and then the bell rang sending them out of the gate and I walked toward the bar.

## RESULT

the room was small but neat and when I visited him he was just on that bed like a grounded seal and it was embarrassing, I mean, coming across with the conversation; I really didn't know him that well except for his writing, and they kept him drugged -- had to, they kept operating, chopping bits of him away but being a true writer he talked about his next novel.

blind, and cut away, again and again, he had already dictated one novel from that bed a good work, it had been published and now he talked to me about another but I knew he wouldn't make it



and the nurses knew  
everybody knew  
but he just went on talking to me  
about his next novel,  
he had an unusual plot idea  
and I told him it sounded  
great,  
and after a visit or two more  
his wife phoned me one afternoon  
and told me that  
it was over ...

it's all right, John, nobody has ever  
written the last one,  
some only think they have.

you were really tough on those nurses, though,  
and that pleased me, the way you got them  
running in there in their crinkled whites,  
you proved me more than right  
in my assertion  
that your power of command  
with a simple language was  
one of the most magnificent things of  
our century.

#### MY FRIEND

I loved bar room fights in bar room  
alleys.  
I fought the biggest meanest men  
I could find.  
the patrons thought I was  
brave.

but it was something else, something  
that walked and slept and sat with  
me, and it ate with me when I ate,  
and it drank with me, and I drank.  
and I saw it everywhere: inside loaves  
of bread, along the back of a mouse  
running up a wall, I saw it through  
the rips of a window shade, I saw it  
inside the bodies of beautiful women;  
I never saw it in the sun but I saw it  
in the rain and I noted it in the in-  
sects; and I saw it riding in busses  
and trolly cars filled with human  
heads;  
I saw it in a dresser drawer when I  
pulled it open,



and I saw it in the faces of the  
bosses with their dumb wet lips and  
their little rivet eyes: blue, brown,  
green;  
I heard it in the click of timeclocks,  
saw it spread like powder across the  
faces of my religious landladies;  
I saw it along the bare carpeted  
stairways  
always seeming to lead to some 2nd  
floor of some rooming house in  
Houston, in New Orleans, in St. Louis,  
in L.A., in Frisco, wherever I was,  
and I saw it in the doorknob and I saw  
it in the room sitting on the quilt  
on the bed  
waiting nicely  
nicely waiting ...

and in some bar  
after hours of drinking  
somebody saying, "hey, Hank, you  
ever tried Big Eddie?"  
Big Eddie grins, I see it in his  
teeth, I finish my beer,  
nod at him, get up, walk toward  
the rear entrance, Big Eddie and  
the crowd following, and outside  
I see it in the moon and the bricks  
as the patrons lay their bets  
I am the underdog, and as Big  
Eddie charges I see it in his  
feet and along the buttons of  
his shirt and I hear a horn  
honk somewhere far off, and  
it's a decent a time as a man  
can expect.

#### YOU CAN'T TELL A TURKEY BY ITS FEATHERS

my son, my father said, if you only had some  
ambition, you have no  
get up and go! no  
drive!  
it's hard for me to believe that you are really  
my son.

yeah, I  
said.



I mean, he went on, how are you going to  
make it?  
your mother is worried sick and the neighbors  
think you're some kind of  
imbecile.  
what are you going to  
do?  
we can't take care of you all your  
life!

I'm 15 now, I told him, I won't be around  
much longer.

but look at you, you just sit around in your room  
all day! other  
boys have jobs, paper routes, Jim Slover works  
as an usher at the  
Bayou!

HOW IN THE HELL ARE YOU EVER GOING TO  
SURVIVE IN THIS  
WORLD?

I don't  
know ...

you make me SICK! sometimes, having a son like  
you, I wish I were  
dead.

well, he did die. he died around 30 years  
ago.

and last year I paid  
\$29,000 in income  
tax.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

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GLORIA KENISON: WR: 9, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 23ss, 26ss,  
27/28, 31, 37, 41, 46, 49, 53, 56, 58, 61, 68, 72, 76,  
80.

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GERALD LOCKLIN: WR: 9, 21, 27/28, 31ss, 33, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 50ss,wa, 53, 56, 60, 61, 64ss, 67cb, 70, 72, 73, 74, 76ss, 77, 78, 80, 81/82, 84, 85, 87, 88ss, 92, 93ss, 94, 97, 99, 101, 102.

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#### A SECULAR SALVATION

because we believe in acquainting our children  
with all the myths of their society  
my wife constructs a paper-cutout creche  
on top of the t.v., next to the living christmas tree,  
and we play all the christmas songs  
of every faith and every language.  
i'm a little worried that we may be overdoing the tolerance  
to the point of making a convert to an outworn creed,  
since, at first, our three-year-old speaks reverently  
of mary, joseph, and "the baby lord jesus,"

but within a couple of days i hear her,  
sitting, pissed off by something or other,  
on the pottie, and creating her own carol  
about "the stupid dumb jesus."

and the next morning i awake to hear her,  
in front of the nativity scene,  
asking her mother,  
"where's their ping-pong table?"

#### SHE LOVES THE RING OF IT

when i tell her i've been receiving mail  
already opened, and that two large packages  
of my books never arrived,

and that i think these postal mishaps  
could be related to the theory i was circulating

that hemingway might have been slipped drugs  
by american intelligence agents,

she says, "you're too small a fish  
for the c.i.a. to bother with."



JOHN GARDNER

he grew up in batavia, new york,  
about thirty miles from rochester,  
where i grew up.  
he was just a few years older than i am.  
i fled to california, where i've stayed.  
he stayed east and wrote eight hundred page works  
set in places i couldn't find a single thing  
to comment on.  
the internal revenue service,  
which hates writers and teachers above all,  
because we are apt not to balance  
our fiscal check books,  
only our immaterial ones,  
bullied him to where he would have been  
writing for them for the rest of his life.  
my mother sent me all the clippings  
from the rochester papers, knowing  
i'm always fitting his novels into my classes  
in contemporary fiction.  
also he was an example  
that sons need not leave home.

after his father had a stroke,  
he commuted by motorcycle to his teaching job  
at suny-binghamton. he tried to keep the farm  
and he read to his father because his father  
had once read to him.  
he died on his motorcycle.  
or maybe it was what freud called half-intentional  
suicide, the death wish taking advantage of a lapse  
in consciousness, like nathanael west's accident  
in the rain in el centro.  
or maybe there's a federal agency now  
whose duty it is to kill off writers  
as soon as it seems they might become  
politically counter-productive.  
my paranoia could allow for that:  
maybe no american writer has died a natural death  
since philip freneau froze to death  
in a snowbank, most likely shitfaced.

john, we never met, not even through the mails,  
so why was i so moved by your death?  
probably it all goes back to  
the genessee river valley, which i left  
and you didn't. maybe i can best appreciate  
against what odds your masterpieces  
were made to weather that climate.

and although you wrote "on moral fiction"  
and no one has accorded my writing



that particular adjective,  
still, the week you died you were all set  
to marry one of your former students.  
so maybe we weren't all that unlike each other  
after all.

QUO VADIS, M.F.A.?

do you remember how bartleby the scrivener  
felt about his period of employment  
in the dead letter office?

that's how i felt this spring  
screening a hundred highly qualified applications  
for a single one-year non-tenure-track lectureship  
in creative writing.

#### WORKING GIRLS

to listen to the current propaganda  
you'd think all women up to 1969  
had been occupied entirely as housewives,  
and yet it occurred to me the other day  
that my mother and all my aunts  
had been working women.

my mother was a teacher and very active  
in professional organizations.  
my aunt elizabeth was private nurse  
to a rich lady.  
lucy worked on a kodak assembly line  
(as did jack).  
pat was head of the stenographic pool  
at stromberg-carlson.

terese was a saleslady at a detroit department store,  
claire a clerk at the department of motor vehicles,  
anna louise comptroller for an advertising firm.

when my grandfather, whom i never knew  
(except to the extent i know myself),  
moved his women to the city,  
they went to work,  
and they worked the rest of their lives.

elizabeth and lucy and pat and claire  
did not marry.  
my mother and terese and anna louise did



and ended up with rich husbands  
that they outlived.

now claire, though nearly blind,  
cares for my nearly senile  
(once the exemplar of dignity)  
uncle jack.

i hail from a houseful of women  
with nary a housewife in the lot.

#### YOU PROBABLY HAVE TO PUT DOWN A DEPOSIT ON THE SILVERWARE

at norm calvin's texas-style barbecue rib factory  
in seal beach, california, i am always  
served immediately with a jug of ice water.  
i usually order an l.b.j. special:  
a barbecue chopped beef sandwich with beans and pickles.  
with wine or beer my bill comes to six bucks.

a friend of mine works as a waiter  
at a french restaurant in an adjoining town.  
he says the waiters are instructed  
not to serve water or bread or butter  
unless the customer asks twice.  
the house wine is nine bucks a bottle.  
he says he's never seen a couple  
get out of the joint  
for less than eighty bucks.

#### A FAD WITH CONSEQUENCES, OR WHO NEEDS WHOM?

a couple of years ago  
a lot of wives i knew  
were leaving a lot of husbands i knew.  
these were pretty good husbands too,  
guys with a lot going for them.  
that was part of the problem:  
the wives seemed to feel  
they'd been living in their husband's shadows.

it seemed to give the wives some pleasure  
to put their husbands through bad times.  
the wives knew that the husbands weren't used to  
being in embarrassing situations.

now the husbands have all been snapped up  
by women who know that it's harder than ever  
to find a good man,



while the wives are discovering  
that most of the available men  
have learned the hard way  
to be on their guards  
with the self-asserting woman.

#### THE LITTLE ATLAS OF MODERN ENGLISH LIT

d. h. lawrence was at the health spa  
working out on the weights  
alongside many other writers  
of all sexes, ages, sizes, and schools.

the other writers lifted their barbells  
over their heads. most lifted much more  
weight than d. h. lawrence.  
a few lifted less. (they were women.)

the other writers started doing their reps.  
some did a lot of reps. some did a few.  
some added weight. some subtracted weight.  
they worked out for different lengths of time  
and with different combinations of exercises,  
but eventually each decided that he or she  
had put in a good day's workout  
and went home.

not d. h. lawrence.  
d. h. lawrence grasped his one little barbell,  
which did not objectively represent a lot of weight  
but which was quite a challenge to him,

and he lifted it over his head  
and he held it there.

and when all the other lifters  
had gone home for the day,

d. h. lawrence was still holding  
his barbell stiffly and achingly  
over his head

and he still is.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA



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WILLIAM WANTLING: WR: 15ss, 20, 24, 25, 36ss

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STEVE RICHMOND: WR: 18, 21, 35, 43ss, 55, 58wa, 61, 70ss, 72, 78, 80, 81/82, 91cb, 97ss, 101.

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satie is on  
still alive

that's one of my favorite  
lines

for years  
now

got 7 books about and by pound  
ez  
on the floor  
to right of my  
jew feet

there  
I just  
stepped on'em

so I could  
make it  
come alive  
here

he was great I love th'old fucker

all jews like to be attacked  
by somebody like ez

I'm 45 and havn't  
been inside a synagogue since I was  
15

so what?  
it's in the blood ez  
was right



gagaku

no no no they signal me  
by shaking an index talon at me  
side to side

no no no  
you're not going to make any  
money  
at your demon writing

and they really whoop it up  
they are much happier

than I

I ask myself  
nothing

I don't give a  
fuck  
that's the way it is

the demons of my imagination that I write of  
are much happier than I

gagaku

so many people ask him  
what gagaku is

he tells them  
but they soon forget

it is shinto music  
he plays it on his phonograph  
and he writes poems to it  
and to honor it  
he titles whatever poems he  
writes to it

gagaku



Ah

the places poets go  
try a public auction  
a probate sale  
I'm seated in the  
courtroom  
and the rich buyers  
are adjusting their ties  
anxious to begin bidding  
against each other

who is the greater "man"?  
they seem to want to prove

him with the highest bid  
each is convinced

I don't care  
I'm in for a fifth  
of the purchase price  
it's all grand to me  
the higher the better  
the bigger man the better

2 of them bid like hell against  
each other  
both coat and tied  
in very conservative  
court attire

now it's up to 449,000\$  
and now the winner goes to 45% of a  
million

jesus. that's about 80 grand for me  
lucky my grandmother left it  
that way

now  
afterwards

out in the hallway  
the real estate agents get the winning man to  
sign his name on dozens of papers  
his face suddenly becomes flushed with blood  
his face is actual scarlet  
why has this happened?

I don't know  
maybe it's my little devil's beard he's  
looking at  
I've got enough money  
now  
to write poems  
for years



dolphin

7 or 8 of them  
for the last two hours  
out in the waves  
just offshore  
only 30 feet from sand  
that's nice

nicer than any poem ever  
written by any human

nicer  
than any novel ever written  
by any human

nicer than you or me or them  
or us or we

I don't like humans very much  
I think we are a cancer on this  
earth trying to spread  
now about the solar system

I think we lost our chance  
when the devil as the head  
of a worm in an apple hissed  
to Adam "come eat meee ... come eat meee ...  
come eat meee..."

and Adam gulped him right down  
into the pith of Adam's gut  
where he became one with all of us  
one with all Adam's progeny

I think I've written a  
lot of nonsense above  
all save for that truth  
about dolphins

out there right now  
7 or 8 of them  
swimming among the surfers  
slowly and very relaxed  
almost playfully  
yet a little bit too much  
on alert

to be considered  
playful



smoking

three packs a day  
but not inhaling so much  
I just hold it  
between my index and second finger  
try not to inhale too much  
I have watched smokers  
some hold the smoke in  
for 30  
40 seconds  
sit behind a desk all day  
hassling with  
someone on a phone  
such pressure

those are the lung cancers  
I want to be like hubie  
blake  
the success story of all  
marlboro smokers

he often claimed marlboro  
allowed him to  
reach 100  
years of age

you see  
his cells didn't rebell  
because he liked what he was  
doing -- playing  
piano

I like what I'm  
doing -- playing  
my typewriter

poems poems poems  
when I cease writing them  
I'll get  
lung cancer.

-- Steve Richmond

Santa Monica CA



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PHIL WEIDMAN: WR: 18, 22, 24, 26, 27/28, 33ss, 35, 39, 43, 46, 49, 51, 53, 58, 64, 68, 69wa, 72, 76, 79cb, 80, 81/82, 88, 89, 93, 96, 99, 101.

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#### CUT

slice index  
finger tip on  
paper edge  
sharp as a  
knife blade.  
stick finger  
in mouth &  
swear into  
the wound.  
a disabled  
index finger  
unbalances a  
person, short  
circuits the five  
fingered hand.

#### BALANCE

if equilibrium is  
key to keeping  
body upright  
& head straight  
I still need help.  
today rasped, filed  
sanded & taped  
old mop handle  
into walking stick  
to balance body.  
for head I'm  
trying Updike  
& French brandy.

#### NUMBERS GAME

wounded middle  
aged man lines  
chair up with  
numbers board  
in Kaiser pharmacy.  
want to see my  
number when it  
comes up he says  
to old guy  
in next chair.  
something symbolic  
in that says  
old guy gently.

#### NEXT BEST

born with balls  
I don't wear  
ear rings or  
skirts or fiddle  
with men but  
I'm womanly  
in my desire  
to give birth.  
minus a womb  
I settle for  
next best: ideas  
in form of  
a drawing  
a poem  
a prayer.



## PLAYING NAZI SOLDIER, 1944

marching stiff legged  
thru vacant weed  
infested lot kicked  
pitchfork prong deep  
under big toenail  
& sitting ever so  
gingerly, tears blurring  
the ugly details  
of war, made my  
first covenant  
with God.

## CAT LADY

the cat lady  
of Del Paso Heights  
is wrinkled, stooped,  
raggedy poor &  
pregnant with purpose.  
she's stepmother  
to hundreds of cats  
sharing food &  
affection as she  
wheels a cart thru  
her neighborhood  
7:30 each morning.

## SOMETHING LIKE A PRAYER

don't pray  
to God much  
anymore but  
when I'm hung  
over & dying  
I sometimes  
whine, god, oh  
god, oh god  
holding my  
ugly, stinking  
aching head  
which is  
something like  
a prayer.

## FINDING MYSELF

sometimes dress  
four or five  
times before  
finding myself

then get lost  
driving to work  
hands on wheel  
mind wandering

among pine &  
aspen quaking  
in spring wind  
90 miles away

## BE SOMEBODY

Karl & his party  
buddies used to  
have a saying:  
let's get drunk  
& be somebody!  
now with wife  
& two kids  
Karl can't keep  
a job, plays wife  
off against his  
mom, needs a  
bottle to hold  
his chin up.

## MOLE

mole Doc  
cut from  
my back  
tested bad.  
so gotta  
hurry, go  
see him  
at noon,  
let him hack  
some more  
on my back.



## SMALL TALK

still learning  
to do what  
I know works --  
keep mouth shut  
pick my shots  
not let nerves  
or petty thots  
wag my tongue.

-- Phil Weidman

North Highlands CA

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BEN PLEASANTS: WR: 20, 24, 26, 33, 35, 38ss, 44, 46, 50, 52ss, 58, 64, 72ss, 74.

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LYN LIFSHIN: WR: 25, 31, 34, 37, 42, 44, 47ss, 50, 53, 55, 56, 59cb, 62, 65/66ss, 69wa, 72, 73, 74, 77, 78ss, 80, 81/82, 85ss, 87, 88, 92, 93, 96, 99, 101.

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## MADONNA WITH TOO MUCH TOO TIGHTLY SCHEDULED

seems on a  
train of glass  
taking corners  
too fast seeing  
inches ahead a  
yard of the  
track's missing

## BIKINI MADONNA

what she  
reveals is  
interesting  
what she hides  
is vital

## USED UP MADONNA

feels like a  
mine all the  
rubies have  
been scraped  
from

## SNOW MADONNA

covers you,  
melts when  
you touch her



MADONNA WHO GOES OVER THE  
MANUSCRIPTS TO TAKE OUT THE DIRTY WORDS

well maybe some  
of the penises  
could be  
taken out  
tho I  
like them  
in

NIFTY FIFTY MADONNA

is established  
and rather blue

MOMENTUM MADONNA

a rolling stone  
that gathers  
so much moss  
she bulldozes

BELOW ZERO MADONNA

can't measure up

CHAMELEON MADONNA: 1

she drops her  
accent like her  
corduroy chic jeans  
wriggles from what  
you thought she was  
like a snake shedding  
skin  
she loses more than  
she came with until  
there's nothing to  
keep what she  
was together

FOOL'S GOLD MADONNA

you think  
you're getting  
a gold mine  
but you get  
the shaft

CAMEL MADONNA

before your lips  
touch her she  
makes you  
walk a mile

SHORT TERM MADONNA

is interested  
in fast profit  
doesn't care if  
her acid ruins  
your rain

FALLEN LEAF MADONNA

once blazed and  
shimmered people  
drove to see her  
now they  
burn her

MAFIOSA MADONNA

her finger bowls  
have fingers in them

BURN OUT MADONNA

feels opaque  
as stained  
glass mounted  
on bricks



MADONNA OF THE RELATIONSHIPS SHE DOESN'T  
KNOW WHEN TO GET OUT OF

they're like  
water left in  
a jar roses  
have died in  
what was sweet  
now like a sewer

HOOKED ON BALLET MADONNA

becomes as narrow  
as her chest

HIGH INTEREST RATE MADONNA

comforts the  
greedy afflicts  
the needy

LOST GLOVE MADONNA

is all dark  
waiting for fingers

MADONNA OF THE SUBMISSIONS

is known for  
spreading her  
self around  
on many sheets

FILM MADONNA: 1

is expensive  
often over exposed

MADONNA WHO LIVES IT UP

has trouble  
living it down

LASAGNA MADONNA

bubbles is  
hot her smells  
turn your lonely  
rooms delicious your  
mouth waters her  
goo and spice  
make you lick  
your lips you  
plunge in starved  
when she's gone  
you're sorry you  
were so piggy

FAT MADONNA

when she sits  
down on the  
bus whoever  
is next to  
her pops up  
like a toaster

LEECH MADONNA

reduces your swelling

OLD MAP MADONNA: 1

has been folded  
and unfolded so  
many times she's  
coming apart

BRIDGE OVER THE ARNO  
MADONNA

even priests walk on her



MY MOTHER, HER FOOT BANGING THE SIDE OF THE BED IN A  
WAY I'D NEVER

noticed, can just  
read with one eye  
advertisements of  
refrigerators,  
"Honey, look I want  
to get you one and  
don't say no -- listen  
I was stupid, never  
took what I should  
have. If I had  
there'd be more for  
you now honey. I  
shouldn't have just  
let my brothers  
take and take, or  
terrify Nanny so  
she wouldn't ask,  
just signed. I  
trusted my brothers,  
it took me years to  
see how they lived  
and cheated, even  
after they said  
I gave Herbert  
pancreas cancer.  
Selling the store  
on the sly and they  
took the money Nanny  
wanted for me. So  
honey take what you  
can. Even I've done,  
tho I never knew it,  
things that have  
hurt you. Everyone  
else, if you're not  
careful, will try.

ON THE LAST DAY  
OF MY MOTHER'S VISIT

"I'll leave the corn  
flakes and puffed wheat  
if you think you'll  
eat it, it will be  
too stale for me if I  
ever come back -- I  
won't have to worry  
about the New York  
State seat belt law,  
I won't be driving any  
where near it, zip up  
your bag did you write  
down your checks, put  
the newspaper in the bag,  
I told you it would  
blow around, told you  
to check the water. Do  
you have to write words  
down all the time -- look  
drop me off, I'll never  
get lobster, I hope you've  
enough money yourself  
the way you eat -- don't  
wait for the bus. I know  
you're in a hurry Lyn  
honey don't cry I didn't  
mean, now I'll bawl all  
the way home. The corn  
flakes, I just wanted  
you to eat them, I  
don't want to make you  
feel bad, you're  
all that matters."

MADONNA WHOSE MOTHER KEEPS HER ON A ROPE

with the phone, the  
wire an unbillical  
cord, a leash like  
someone who ties up  
a kitten so tight it  
strangles itself

LOCKET MADONNA

hangs on you



## MY MOTHER, STRAIGHTENING POTS AND PANS

squatting on vinyl  
smoke puffing up  
like some city in  
New Jersey as  
appalled at some  
Sarah Lee pans I've  
saved burned from  
cheese melting in  
them as she has been  
at certain lovers  
in my life. What you  
need are a good set,  
something solid to  
last not such a  
motley not these  
stained chipped  
she frowns straighten  
ing and sorting as  
if the tins were  
my life

## MY SISTER WANTS TO SUE THE TREES

copyright each  
adverb she  
deadlocks the  
sky puts the  
sun in a safe  
deposit box  
swallows the  
key is afraid  
of thunder sees  
a killer in the  
next bed sees  
fleas in the  
roses her ideas  
in someone  
else's book  
won't let any  
thing grow in  
the house  
never sees  
herself

## WE STILL CALL IT

Nanny's house  
four years after  
the funeral May  
I dug up trillium  
on a back road  
and wait for it  
to come up near  
the window near  
my desk, smaller  
each year. It  
was always Nanny  
not Grams or Grand  
ma and it was  
her house even  
when it swelled  
with people and  
kids slept  
on the green  
Chinese rug the  
bathroom smell  
ing of lavender.  
She sang White  
Cliffs of Dover  
to me in the room  
full of wasps  
and a blood sun.  
My grandfather  
slashed at trees  
the cherry and plum  
and no one sprayed  
the apple. "See  
the trees are dancing"  
the first sentence  
I said in the car  
chugging there  
from Barre to her  
house where she  
brushed ants off  
the peonies trimmed  
planted the red spires  
lacey and not seen  
in many yards pale  
dust rubies that  
my uncle keeps  
mistaking for  
weeds and getting  
chopped down.



THE ENGINEER ON HER SCULPTURES, TERRA COTTA TORSOS

I like them,  
bellies and just  
the tops of  
thighs who needs  
a head or feet  
to run away  
just give me  
what's central

MADONNA OF THE BEFORE TV  
COMES ON

wakes up a bad  
dream's finger  
on her thighs like  
the man in Mount  
Haven who touches,  
slides in thru an  
open door into  
sheets and under  
fondles and fingers  
runs out dissolves  
in fog as an eye  
twitches starts  
to open like the  
fish slit opening  
tip of a cock

HYDROPONIC MADONNA

sucks all the  
nutrients out  
of your water  
invisibly she  
roots easy can  
move without  
tearing pieces  
of herself off  
and leaving  
them behind

STEEPLETOP MILLAY COLONY

with her head aching  
and spots like some  
language nobody  
left could read

the wild phlox almost  
too heavy, the color  
of the deepest flesh,  
the heart's rose on

fire wanting to  
run out and lie down  
in wet grass under  
the apples or rise

like mist over the  
pond. If you slid  
under the needles  
floating on the  
black emerald lake

floated for  
hours all you could  
see would be  
primary colors sounds

would be of pines  
and larches, bobolinks  
sparrows that never

have to choose to  
be nun or whore

SICK OF THE STAGE DOOR  
MADONNA

has had it  
with people  
being properties

-- Lyn Lifshin

Niskayuna NY



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RON KOERTGE: WR: 29ss, 35ss, 40, 41, 44, 51ss. 53, 58wa, 60, 61, 63cb, 72, 73, 76, 77, 80, 85, 92, 93, 97.

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WHAT A VARIED PLACE THE WORLD IS  
HOW TRUSTING AND STRANGE  
SO DESERVING OF LOVE AND PRAISE

It was wonderful to hear the room  
almost go out and then, at the prices,  
flare again. It was wonderful all day,  
from all 11 tracks, all 99 races,  
all 900 horses brown, bay, black, roan,  
grey money and numbers til the stars blur.

Tonight, full of Bohemia, lying without Bianca,  
Jerry across the room asleep in his Tennis Classic  
T-shirt, the light through these curtains  
in Mexican.

Half a mile away, someone yawns, breathes  
his coffee breath in one long hiss, mounts  
the catwalk and begins to inscribe the names  
from Belmont first.

Today, too, we will walk into that room  
already hot as laundry and feel the voltage  
of men who dressed without women, men  
who sit all day reluctant to leave even  
to pee, perfect in repose, perfect on  
the verge, always ready to rise and dance like mad.

#### GETAWAY

Most leave after the feature.  
Conditions for the 9th are not inviting:  
for fillies and mares who find speed  
unladylike, for geldings who would rather  
gossip with the hots.

But nothing stops me, not in the nightcap,  
not in the getaway race, last chance to beat  
the other couples.

And it is often so beautiful -- sky pouring  
through a sieve of clouds, sun colored  
like coral lips, and the riders! They  
in their helmets and I in my cap



here in the heartland, my body light  
as the birthday boy's

humming some lovely anthem as I walk  
from the windows hearing Pearly Desire  
so far ahead by deep stretch that the idle  
photo finish camera turns, and look:  
That's me, the one in the long black car  
with the motor running.

#### SOME SAY I RAN GUNS TO CUBAN REBELS

The other day I went down to the saddling  
paddock to return a book to my friend Darrell.  
When he saw me, he handed the tongue-tie  
to an assistant and walked over. We met  
at the white railing, my forehead into  
the secret space, his into the area  
marked Hopeful Anticipation on maps  
of Santa Anita.

He retrieved Laughing in the Hills.  
"Did you like it?" he asked softly so as  
not to disturb the big gelding circling  
behind him.  
"A lot."  
"Yea. That guy writes okay."

Just then a restless owner stamped and coughed  
so he said goodbye. It was then I noticed  
how the people around us had been leaning in  
their ears pink from strain, and I could  
hear what they heard: The Word. In code.

Tonight they will whisper about what goes  
on out there. They will be talking about  
me, the Man in the Satin Jacket, down to  
the lint and the secret compartment, not  
even betting for awhile, just watching  
them run, taking it easy, doing some  
light reading.

#### I'M AMAZED

As she was undressing, shyly  
she said, "You know, I don't have all that  
much experience."

I felt like I'd been chosen first  
for softball. But why? Why is love



homeopathic so that less is more  
flattering? The vagina does not wear out  
like brake lining. In fact, it keeps  
its comfy, Shriner grip pretty much forever.

Still, she's so pretty there by the window  
leaning forward to let her bra fall clear  
in a tender bombing raid on Pantyland  
with its sprawling suburbs of polyester  
Georgette.

"Close the blinds, Hon. The whole world  
is looking at your sweet ass."

"JUST IMAGINE THAT JESUS WERE WITH YOU"

-- my Sunday School teacher

What would you think today, Jesus, sitting with me  
in the Adults Only Arcade? Could you be comfortable  
breaking the 2-in-a-booth rule? What about those  
leading men longer than Russian novels, those  
starlets never alone, always a handyman popping  
into the shower, and those phone numbers on  
the tiny screen, each promising what we all desire  
more fervently every day: A Good Time.

I know it says in your favorite book not to spill  
one's seed on the ground, but how about on the door  
and walls? No one knows your secret life -- what  
you did on weekends and between miracles -- but  
everyone knows you understand how the heart  
can topple from loneliness and desire.

I believe if you were with me today, what a sensation,  
what a huge light in this place darker and smellier  
than Hitler's socks. Your sweetness would seep next  
door to Booth 26, bleaching the happy bathers off  
the screen, sending an angry patron storming out,  
the dew still on his brow, but happy somehow satisfied  
and -- like me -- feeling curiously blessed.

#### MISSING PERSONS

When Bill and Betty and I began to talk about  
them, we meant the fresh-faced choir directors  
and assistant pastors caught having affairs  
who vanished into some Protestant Siberia,



the moving van rumbling in at midnight  
and next morning the house was empty  
except for some sheet music and a shattered lamp.

Where did they go? Downhill, no doubt,  
to the deeper South, to churches smaller and smaller,  
further and further into the strip-mined hills.

These young men who still worried about their  
complexions were simply not prepared for  
the beauty in those choir robes, or the plight  
of young women married forever whose husbands treated  
them like dirt, or if they were lucky, like dust.

It must have been so exciting, those lips  
that pronounced the o in God like the one in woe  
whispering into the rectory carpet that they  
loved her and everything about her and knowing  
the both of them always knowing that somewhere  
a van was idling ready to swoop down and take him away.

We began to joke about sin and how if all of it  
in every church was brought to light it wouldn't  
be safe to cross the street, so dense would be  
the trucks. We laughed about men who got out  
of the God-business but could never forget the thrill  
and had to turn to strange practices, perched  
in the cab saying, "Now step on the gas, Sweetheart.  
That's what I really like."

Catholics, we reasoned, were the lucky ones: they  
understood the near occasion of sin. They confessed  
constantly and were forgiven. But we were not  
Catholics and are not now anything at all, something  
for which I am sometimes heartily sorry.

#### GIRL TALK

During "The Desires of Monique"  
my friend and I were chatting about  
the alarming number of men  
who tore off Monique's flimsy panties  
with their teeth.

The theatre was shrine-like --  
vast, smoky and dim -- so we confessed  
that neither of us had ever  
chewed away any underwear.

We agreed, though, that perhaps age  
and experience had a lot to do



with that. In the 50s there was something called a panty girdle and, believe me, after grawing on a panty girdle for awhile a person gets full and has to ask for a doggy bag to take home the rest for later.

On the screen Monique dreamed of her voracious lovers. There they were -- laughing, waving, flossing. This is where we came in, but leaving we vow that the first one to devour an entire pair will call the other immediately.

That is the kind of friends we are. We talk on the phone for hours and we tell each other everything.

"OBSESSED WITH SEX"

-- a critic

As if that's easy at my age.  
And, anyway: I'll bet  
if I stopped being obsessed  
with sex for as little as 10  
working days, my place in  
this already over-crowded field  
would be taken. I'd be forgotten  
and the new guy, Don Crotchty,  
would be in -- "Read the new  
Crotchty poems? 'Appetite  
for life,' says the HoHo News  
but obsessed, you know, with sex  
like what's-his-name used to be."

RAPUNZEL

never had a postcard or a phone  
call, just men in the shrubbery  
yodeling up at her.

And once they arrived, no one  
even looked at her outfit.  
Just her you-know-what.



Maybe Supercuts is the answer,  
after all, and a different kind  
of life where every day is

just every day, not an 8-hour  
shift of men on the tower walls.  
Gosh, to walk in a straight line

for hours, to always have enough  
shampoo, to be in the world  
of the Occupant brochure

where every dental assistant  
is cheery, every welder happy  
as a triumphant knight with  
his visor thrown back.

IF YOU LIVED HERE YOU'D BE HOME NOW

If you lived here you'd be home now  
and big sea birds would guide the car  
into the orchard.

If you lived here you'd be home now  
where sadness never comes, stopped  
at the gate by armed guards.

If you lived here you'd be home now  
where rapture of the deep lasts  
forever and the dark is like  
a beautiful wife who sits down  
at the piano after dinner.

If you lived here you'd be home now  
where the children come in  
and they're not bandaged anymore  
and there are Mom & Dad with  
the stars behind them.

-- Ron Koertge

South Pasadena CA

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JOSEPH NICHOLSON: WR: 55, 56, 58, 69wa, 70.

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## BUFFALO GAL

She is the girl of the buffaloes who live along the highway. They follow her out to pasture in the mornings, and into the corral at dark.

When it is time for them to be made into steaks and burgers, they follow her to the deadhouse, lowing peacefully.

The Buffalo Gal wears boots made of thir hides and a dress of their buffalo skin. Her hair is thick and dark like theirs.

## FICTRY

What we don't like about poetry is its distance from the object. Poetry is the process of converting bad ideas to startling images. The simple fact of the matter is that poetry is too old a form. So, too, is fiction (though more recently old). But now something new is on the loose, combining the two.

It is called "Fictry."

It avoids the absurd logic of fiction and the tortured standoffishness of poetry.

It says there is no difference between an adultery and a sunset, between a brass doorknob and a soul. It knows all our business is local and Fictry suits it best.

Fictry gives us characters whom we all know and love. They are insane and we never have to guess what they are up to. After all, what are we up to?

Fictry subscribes to the principle that form is a fraud and content a cheat.

Fictry may be read, spoken, or sung.

Fictry does not scatter itself all over the page like a mad woman's feces.

Though it has no end, Fictry may be read quickly without urgency, and enjoyably without apprehension. Fictry respects our time and our minds.

The best of Fictry is light-hearted and funny, in its own peculiar way. We feel good afterwards without having to wonder why.



## SORRY FOR MY ELF

Worry sores, the result of a recent series of traumas, have appeared on the head of my Elf. Despondent, he sits alone, muttering in his blue grotto.

"My ears have heard too much of the wrong thing," he whimpers, "and too little of the right thing."

"We should put a little salve on those sores, old fellow," I tell him. "We could at least stop the itching."

Carefully, I shave the head of my Elf, taking care not to nick the sores, and I bathe his knobby noggin in witch hazel, and I spread sweet salve over his worry sores.

Biggest of them all, of course, is the woman-trouble sore, bigger even than the ego sore, the career sore, the money sore, the existence sore ....

Oh, my poor, dear Elf.

## HANGING AROUND THE HOUSE

Make your cat smoke some cigarettes. If he won't do it, then feed him leftover mice from cancer research. Mix snuff with his cat chow. Pretty soon he'll be begging for nicotine the way he used to beg for salmon.

Next, get your dog hooked on vodka. When he's drunk, he'll turn nasty and chase the cat who won't be able to run very fast because he's been smoking all those cigarettes.

Pop open a capsule of your wife's favorite tranquilizer. Sprinkle the powder over the fish tank. Watch those fishies grin.

If your bird is nervous, walking sideways on her perch, watching you from the corner of her eye, put little BBs of hashish in her bird seed. She never tastes anything anyway; she gulps her food. And soon she's singing wildly.

As for yourself, take up poetry or the classifieds. Pay your taxes and hang around the house.

-- Joseph Nicholson

Lock Haven PA



DONUT SHOP

The baker is also  
a painter and  
as the years go by  
the pastries start  
looking more and  
more like Picassos,  
Degas, Chagalls,  
Dalis while his  
canvases take on  
the appearance of  
Bearclaws, Maplebars,  
Chocolate Eclairs.

HELPER

I'd like to murder my assistant.  
I wonder if this is a common  
desire among low-level clerical supervisors.

I'm not particularly interested in cruelty  
although I wouldn't shy away from it either;  
whatever got the job done.

total annihilation being the point.  
dynamite, poison, a gun? I  
haven't got much imagination for these sorts  
of things.

you see, I don't quite hate her,  
although I have every right  
and reason to. I just want to be  
rid of her, to no longer be  
subjected to her.

I wouldn't want to do it with my own hands.  
I prefer some indirect, remote means.  
maybe voodoo, pins in a wax doll?



### THREE CATS

I light my pipe  
with wooden kitchen matches  
sip from a tall Budweiser can  
a gray cat  
licking itself on top of the water heater  
behind my shoulder, then  
it's asleep too.

kids asleep on the last night of summer  
wife asleep in the tenth month of pregnancy  
dog asleep on the chewed up carpet.

two beers but I think this tall one's going to  
last me for tonight, I've  
slowed down a bit over the years.

everyone sleeping, dreaming uneasily,  
afraid of the nuclear war.

I would too but I wanted to knock out a few more  
before they blow it all up.

### JUST IN CASE I BECOME A WORLD TRAVELER

my daughter tells me that  
if you go barefoot in India  
these small worms in the soil  
with hooks on them will  
stick to the soles of your feet  
and bore into your skin,  
get inside your body and  
give you diseases.

at first I suspected  
she was passing along one  
of those new urban legends,  
like alligators in the  
sewers of New York City,  
but she assured me she had  
read it in her Science  
text book.

now I've had to add  
walking barefoot  
in India to my list of  
things to be avoided  
in foreign countries,  
along with drinking  
water in Mexico, and  
taking snapshots in the USSR.



HENRY MILLER'S BATHROBE

I'm always  
thinking of old Henry Miller  
making watercolor paintings  
in his blue terrycloth  
bathrobe, half blind,  
health shot but still  
happy as a clam,  
sitting at his ping pong table  
with brushes and water cans  
and big sheets of expensive paper  
in Pacific Palisades  
or pretending to play  
the piano while his  
lovely Japanese woman  
cooked.

-- David Barker

Salem OR

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Editor's note: The persistently curious can check the following public documents for the editor's opinions regarding Wormwood and little magazine publishing:

"Little Magazines: A Symposium," (December 1962), Mainstream (New York NY) pp. 41-42.

"Charles de Gaulle and The Wormwood Review," (October 1970), California Librarian (Sacramento CA) pp. 230-235.

"A Survey of the Little Mag Scene of the Sixties," (1974), Vagabond: 19 (Ellensburg WA) pp. 43-51.

"The Gall of Wormwood in Printing 66 Issues and Still Continuing," (1978), TriQuarterly: 43 (Evanston IL) pp. 388-397; reprinted in The Little Magazine In America, edit. E. Anderson & M. Kinzie, Pushcart Press (Yonkers NY).

"The Why and Wherefore of Wormwood," (1985), December: 27 (Highland Park IL) pp. 222-230; sold separately as Green Isle In The Sea: An Informal History Of The Alternative Press, 1960-85, edit. D. Kruckow & C. Johnson, December Press (Highland Park IL).

25 September 1986

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