MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 8 ISSUE 2
THE VALLEY REVIEW

ROSE HIP

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

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salutations from the editor

All good things eventually come to an end, and some of the very best end too soon. I remind myself of this as I bid a fond farewell to my dear friend, Rik Mayall, who will always be a young one in my estimation.

My tenure as Editor-in-Chief of this magazine is also coming to a close. In truth, I have been little more than a figurehead, the Charlie to the angels, Elizabeth and Mark, who do the bulk of the work. I hand over the reigns to the capable hands of Elizabeth MacDuffie. I am confident, especially after the New England Book Show award, that she will keep the magazine going with wit and flair, and, with her new husband, Mark, will continue to make it beautiful.

I am excited to see you all at La Cirque de Lapin de la Poussiere, which will boast an enormous art exhibit coordinated by Chris Gentes, spoken word, excellent music, and films at Abandoned Buidling Brewery. The art exhibit is so big that it will fill both Sonelab and the brewery. The Cirques are taking on new frontiers these days.

I bid you all a fond farewell. I shall be busy tending my bees.

besos y abrazos

Meaty Gonzales

friendly ghosts

Davd P. Miler

When alone at night,
it's best to keep your mouth shut.

You can pull down the old LP set
and hear Cyril Ritchard
reading *Alice* as you sat
with your grandfather at five.

You can reread Beckett's *Not I*,
replay Billie Whitelaw's voice
as you listened paralyzed
before a video in the gallery.

You can find your Bowie albums,
dream yourself back to college,
ears thrust toward the stereo.

You can find yourself online,
listen to yourself read
one of your own poems,
if you can bear it.

You can hear your mother's voice,
and your father-in-law's,
permanent residents
where brain meets mind.

But alone at night,
no need to move your lips.
You can abandon the chatter.
The friendly ghosts surround you.

yes mister i believe

Davd P. Miler

This is music like bread.
The kind you mush
into little pills and blow
through cafeteria straws
at kids you don't like.

Handclaps and tambourines
throatful sopranos, operetta baritones
paintbynumber shakenbaked praisesongs
with a place reserved for you,
for him –
the Karry-oaky Evangelist.

We creatures find our places
along the subway platform.
He anchors one end at Downtown Crossing.
I'm swept away
against the opposite end, and ask myself:

Has this snapfingery toetappery
ever brought anyone to Jesus
who wasn't mostly there already?

*

A man I never knew
but only recognized
appears again in view
and I realize
I cannot fit his missing years
to my copious days.

The former Karry-oaky Evangelist
works the platform, tinpot amp,
microphone, and song disappeared
or hocked. Self-testifying,
he carries a question to one by one:
Could you spa-yuh fifty cents?
I hear him approach and do not flee
as he asks me:
Could you spa-yuh fifty cents?

Why yes mister
I believe
I will do that.

swamp

Charles Rammelkamp

Mrs. Herzog's ninth grade English class was doing its unit on poetry. They'd discussed meter and rhyme, iambic pentameter, stanzas and couplets and sonnets, covered the difference between metaphors and similes. Now they were moving on to sounds.

Colin wondered what the big deal was saying "Mrs. Herzog is a swamp" compared to "Mrs. Herzog is *like* a swamp." He suspected it was just another school conspiracy to find a way to trip him up on a test.

"A metaphor *identifies* one thing with another," Mrs. Herzog had lectured. "A thing, an idea, an emotion. A simile merely compares them."

Merely compares them. It wasn't as if saying one was the other *made* it the other, like alchemy. It was still just words, right?

She was a swamp, Colin thought. Mrs. Herzog was a swamp. She must have been around forty, he figured, and he wondered what her husband was like and if they still had sex. Forty, ancient. She had a daughter about five years younger than he was, still in grade school.

"Onomatopoeia," Mrs. Herzog declared now, and she wrote the word on the chalkboard. Colin loved to watch her write on the board, lifting slightly on her toes to write high enough for the kids in the back of the class to read. He loved the way her skirt hitched up, tightening against her rear, revealing a little more leg. She wore sexy nylons and in warmer weather her legs were bare. He found her attractive and wondered if this were an illusion of some kind. Was it wrong for a fifteen-year old boy to desire a woman that old? She turned toward the class.

"Anybody?"

Alicia Drury raised her hand. She always did. Mrs. Herzog tried to look past her, but nobody else raised a hand.

"Alicia?"

"It's when you use a word that imitates the sound of what the word means. Like 'sizzle.'"

"Very good. Anybody else?"

Several hands poked up like arrows in a quiver.

"Sheldon?"

"Puff. Like a puff of wind."

Several students giggled, seeing a bit of bathroom humor in his example. Mrs. Herzog ignored the titter.

"Tanya?"

""Splat."

"Yes, splat. You hear it, don't you? Anybody else?"

"Hiss," Paul Holdren said, but he hadn't raised his hand and Mrs. Herzog ignored him, as if he were a contestant on *Jeopardy* and he hadn't pressed his buzzer.

"Colin?"

Colin's hand had shot up almost on its own. It surprised him that raising it hadn't felt like an act of volition.

""Libido," he declared.

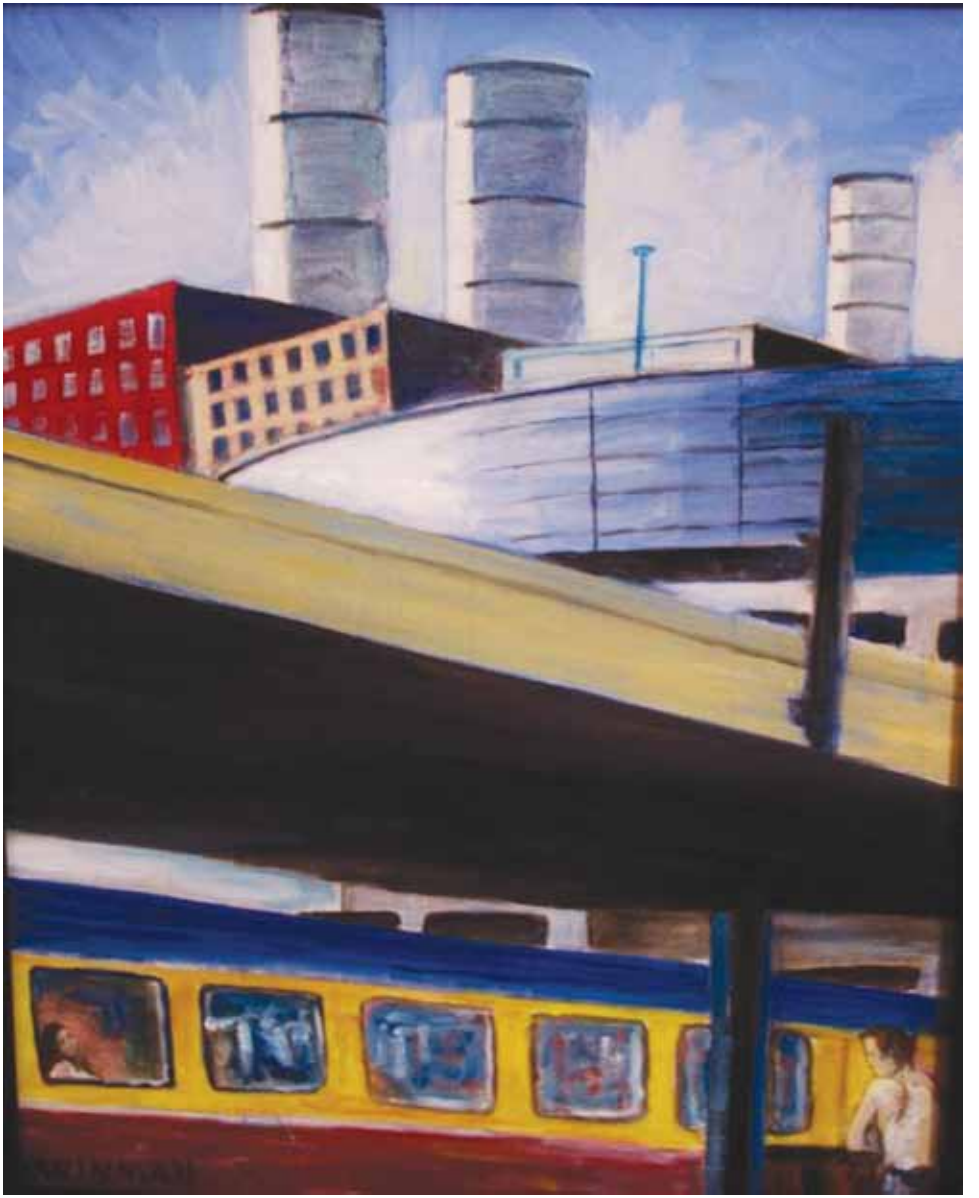
There was a confused silence in the room for a moment, and he watched Mrs. Herzog's puzzled expression dissolve into annoyance, incipient anger. Was Colin playing with her?

"It's the way it *sounds,*" he tried to explain, the words tumbling out of his mouth. "That *beat* you feel when you get…excited, like a thumping down there, you know, like a -"

"No, I don't think that's a good example," Mrs. Herzog cut him off, and there was a warning in her tone. *Don't fuck with me.*

Colin sank back into his seat, dropped his eyes.

"Buzz," he mumbled. "Like the bees. Chirp. Birds and bees."



Clinton Inman

a small town in michigan

Thomas Rowland

The path of decay, it probably began about back in 1957. That was when the oil refinery just east of town closed down. It began to die then, when they moved it all out. Now there're just a few pipes in the ground, venting off all that gas.

Then there was the big fire one fine sunny morning that took away the T-shirt store that was most of what was left of downtown. They brought rigs all the way from Mt. Pleasant. And the TV guy from channel 3 in Flint came all the way down. Said it was just telling how the small towns were just falling apart, deteriorating. But then, he didn't know, it was born again, when the McDonald's went up next to the Interstate just north of the Masonic home. And people started building stores up there. A Shell station, a tire dealership, then a Denny's. Motels no one would ever spend a night in. And a few mobile homes. It sort of grew from there. The New Town, a satellite hovering forever to the North, a celestial body of tacky this-and-that, came to be out there at exit 34.

I miss Gail Knutson. Her home was where the McDonald's stands. They must have torn it down. Gail is somewhere else now, I bet. One can only guess where. Maybe Fort Wayne. Her father ran the hardware store in town, but that's not there anymore either. I bought my first baseball glove there. Back then getting your first baseball glove was a big thing. We used to play on the field next to the college chapel, just across the street. My friend Glen Rice got hit once by a car trying to cross there. Had to go to the hospital. He must have been about seven years old at the time.

The fire trucks came up that street once. The guys at the fraternity house had set fire to the grassy lot next to their place. The fire trucks came up the street. The sirens, I could hear them, saw those trucks coming the whole way from downtown. The firemen jumped out and told the fraternity guys to stop smoking in the lot. And then they put out the fire. Later, about the time the New Town was being built, the house caught fire, too. It's not there any more. But the pine trees in the back, they're still there. They use to border Ernie Bebo's dad's farm. The field of corn went all the way to the Pine River. Sometimes I'd visit Ernie on his farm. I remember the smell of the cows. Once I got a couple of baby chicks for Easter. We raised them until they were big, then we gave them Ernie's Dad to live on the farm. A couple of months later Ernie's Dad was at the door with the two roosters in a bag, cleaned and ready for roasting.

I see her standing there. She smiles. "Are you Gail?," I say. "No, I'm Leila." Leila. "Did I see them backing you up against a wall behind Dentsteadt's Grocery, the four of them pinning you so that that guy could kiss you." "Yes." "But you were only, what, 14 or 15?" "That's right." That was back before the refinery closed. They don't do things like that out in the New Town, I don't think. But I don't know for sure. I ask Leila, but she doesn't know either.

They caught us eating plums. Those heavy red fruit dangling from the trees behind the dormitory. They cut all those trees down, and now there are tennis courts. The dormitory caught fire

once, too. The horror of seeing smoke billowing from a top story window. Why do I remember fires? A building burning, like the structures of life burning, like people dying, like rejection and loss and pain. The burning buildings of one's life. You can put out the flames. But they make scars. They continue to smolder on. And there is nothing you can do to put these out.

The college seems to be all that's left of the soul of the Old Town. It thrives like a forgotten relative, a distant cousin who grows in fame and energy and life on the western outskirts of town while the rest of the family tree withers elsewhere. I wonder what the College thinks of the New Town. Out there by the Interstate, without bookstores, or museums. The College probably doesn't consider it at all. Its students scurry from class to class, pull a rope in a tug-of-war over a muddy pond, dance to May festivals. They have their homecoming floats, and queens with trains carried by small girls. Its football gladiators drag themselves slowly onto the practice field every 4:00, little aware of the precious gift of meaningfulness and purpose they've received, and which will not endure. I hear the bagpipes being practiced in the courtyard. No, they are not thinking about the New Town at all.

Out beyond the College there sit rectangular houses on rectangular lands, with rectangular automobiles that pass rectangular streets. Out towards the Pine River, out where the corn field used to stand.

The Old Town is dying. Its eulogy pours out in the angry smoke from the t-shirt shop, the flames hidden and long forgotten, the ugly black cloud staining the clear October morning, thinning, disappearing. But the New Town! The New Town has neon, and parking lots, and discount tires. It has gasoline and hamburgers and tired travelers, half-way down from the Upper Peninsula. The New Town survives. With dull energy, it carries on.

So I stand with the others behind the fluttering yellow tapes and watch the streams of water from the hoses, pouring mechanically, not expressing much hope, into the darkened shattered windows of the t-shirt shop. It's very early on a Saturday. They're just waking up, and from where they are, the students don't know about the smoke.

bistro
Jimmy Ostgard

bam-bam

Tom Pappalardo

Before he was even out of bed in the morning, one of the first things on Jon's mind was his bamboo plant. Not because he particularly cared, but because it was right there, a few feet from the foot of the bed, waiting for the blinds to be raised so it could get a little sunshine.

The bamboo was almost four feet tall, quite a change from the eight inch stick he'd bought at an Ikea in Montreal a few years before. It had sat pleasantly on his desk for a couple of years, until it died. Jon took it outside and dumped it onto the compost pile in the backyard and forgotten about it. At the end of the summer, he'd noticed that it wasn't dead after all. Lying on its side, roots partially exposed, it had been green and alive, fed by sun and rain and coffee grounds. He'd repotted it and brought it back in the house.

Because of this miraculous resurrection, Jon took the bamboo plant for granted. He watered it when he thought of it, but his office got very little sun. Didn't matter. He treated the plant as if it was indestructible, which is generally a bad way to view a living thing. But his view was reinforced. The damned thing just kept on not-dying. Until a month ago, when it started re-dying.

"Oh, Bam-Bam," Jon mumbled at the plant as he pulled up the window blind. He didn't call it that out of affection, he just liked giving things nicknames. He ran a hand over the wilted plant, three long shoots of sagging bamboo, strapped to a stick with garbage bag twist-ties to keep it upright. The plant slumped against the wall, seeking support. He'd finally moved it into his bedroom last week because it was the sunniest room in the house. He'd also cut away a bunch of the dead yellow leaves, and what remained was a pitiful sight. It probably needed a bigger pot or something. He kept meaning to Google that. Jon grabbed the spray bottle off the floor and started strategically squirting his flaccid plant, careful to not overspray and hit the old wallpaper.

"You're gonna dieeee, Bam-Bam," he said in a mean but sweet tone. "You're gonna die and no one's gonna remember you. You're gonna die and no one's gonna notice you ever existed." Jon wasn't sure why he said that, but he did. He was still half-asleep, standing there in his boxers at 6:30 in the morning, holding a spray bottle and talking to a goddamned plant. He sighed a big sigh and rubbed his eyes.
"What is this day going to bring us, Bam-Bam? Satisfaction? Accolades? Eh?" He couldn't think of a third thing to say, so he just said 'Eh.' He ran a thumb over a leaf, wiping away a light layer of dust. He assumed dust was probably bad. It probably clogged plant pores or something. Plants have pores, right? "Death," he continued, undaunted. "Today will probably bring us death. Goodnight, Irene. Goodbye, Yellow Brick Road. Sweet Dreams, Aremade-O-These." He was talking nonsense, feeling punchy, and wanted to go back to bed. He was self-employed. Why not?

The earth finally rotated just enough to reveal a sliver of the sun over his neighbor's roof, allowing it to shine through the window onto Bam-Bam's wet, still-green leaves. It made everything seem very alive and rainforest-y to Jon. It made him hopeful. Optimistic. Jon shifted his weight onto one leg and assessed the listing bundle of green and yellow vegetation.

"I'll bring you some water, Bam-Bam." He won't. "Everything's gonna turn out fucking great." It won't.