

DETROIT LIT MAG #1

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Poetry

FULNESS OF PARK, FULNESS OF MAN

It is good the park should be unkempt,
Evil with mosquitos, and hornet-loud;

It is good. There one's clothes ought to
Twist up and prickle with the burrs.

It should be so lonely there, where
The jungle gym is a blackberry trellis,

And the world seems smacking its lips.
This is the image of earth that I prefer.

And this little butterflylessness
In a repletion of yellow butterflies—

The eye of a flurry of moths and dragonflies,
With hands in his pockets, his eyes down—

This is the image of man that I like best.
Only, he should feel a sinking. He should stop,

To feel it, while the goldenrod wags—
And he should remain still, even as the rain starts.

Liam Gerhart is the author of one book of poetry, *Yellow Rintekelberg*, and has had his poems published in *Rattle*, *The Ilanot Review*, and *Wild Roof Journal*. He is an

adjunct professor of English literature at the University of
Virginia.

TO ENCOURAGE A PICKY EATER

I suspect – oh, I have long suspected –
That there is dancing in those peaches.
I've just washed this one. Look at it:
The water's beaded silver in the fuzz.
It is so fuzzy! – suggesting to
My lips that I bite a thing with a heart;
But my teeth sink sweetly coldly through
And scrape pleasantly against
The pit of this small peach instead.
Ooh! You see? There's dancing in here,
Dancing in these peaches! Try –
O laughing one, come, try a peach!

Casey Haloran is an up and coming poet, from Plattsburgh,
NY, with recently published poems in *Tupelo Press*,
Conduit, and *Do North Magazine*.

A CRUDE AND INCOMPLETE STRUCTURE DEEP IN THE WOODS

Children built this house. They saw fit
To make the vaulted doorway first of all,
And only after this considered walls.
But technique is sound. Roof is well knit.

It's at least safe from rain or sleet, although
Three of six walls are lacking; or but three
Of six were needful, not to miss these does
Go quietly past, oblivious of me.

It might be much in God's way to commission
These creatures of such fugitive ambition,
A troop of laughing children, to construct
His City out of Sticks, and Bark, and Muck.

John Goerlitz is a graduate of EMU in Ypsilanti, where he studied English literature. He has been writing poems for years, but has only recently sought to publish them.

JOB IN OTHER LEGENDS

Like hours the spindly whirls of ash lifted
In little cyclones and fell down again.
He watched the dirt, grateful to watch the dirt.
Passing clouds laid a purple light across
The dirt and the few blades of grass he watched
Realizing he had never watched the dirt before;
He'd never thought merely to watch the dirt.
And suffering's consolation is in this
Dumb stillness newness and the eyes remade.
Like babes who weep for newness without name
He quietly wept for this clear new thing
Until at evening after some three days
Of lying prostrate on the ground to pray
Not quite beyond God but almost, almost,
This Job spilled dust and ashes up his cheeks
With unexpected laughter and he choked
And then that was when he got him up
With ash stuck to his face in sores and tears
Coughing and swiftly running through the earth
Laughing and praying that it would be worse:
O Lord please give me suffering even worse,
O God set all your wrath against me now.
The floor before him opened without sound
And Job fell into the black earth
Laughing knowing God was with him still;
He spun and twirled and fell and fell and fell
Until he gathered up himself enough
To pray for worse Even worse than this O God

And so a spindly spike of stone impaled him
Right through his belly, and his limbs dangled
And his teeth had mostly been smashed out.
He could not speak but still he mouthed it Worse
And all the creatures there that God removed
Declaring them unfit to roam the world
He now unchained to feed upon the man
Reaching their spindly necks to rip the flesh
All feverish and bludgeoning each other
But Job got a good look at some of them
By the small light of the molten earth,
And in a way they were so beautiful
But there were thousands.

Riccardo Trout is from New York City, but has recently
moved to Detroit, to work as an assistant editor at the
Detroit News.

WOMANIZER'S SOLILOQUY

I put my hands upon a girl
And she was shaped like clay.
I put my hands upon another –
And sculpted her the same.

This one, she loves the books I love;
This one repeats my words;
The both alike sing out my mind
As it were hers, or hers.

Where she is touched, she's cut away,
To better fit my hand –
So woman's empty after all;
Man ever kisses man.

Karina Kitt is a recent Russian immigrant to Detroit. She is published in many Russian publications, such as 45-я ПАРАЛЛЕЛЬ, and Топоc, but this is her first published English poem.

LOVE / CRICKET SONG

My love once caught the cricket song
As it crossed just before us;
It seems they share a single note,
And only seem a chorus –

For my love caught it once by chance
When we were walking by it;
She clasped it with her hand to mine,
And all the night was quiet.

Karina Kitt

BALLAD OF AN EMBARRASSING CREATURE

Now wait! That I may sing a bit –
Ah, cardinal my love, come sit –
Come sit beside me in the sunlight,
And I will feed you if I might –

I am the gentlest man I know,
And would harm nothing, so,
So Bunny, come and sit with me
In the shade of this pear tree;

O would not anybody like to play?
Put off your prowling, Cat, –
Now, picking berries, here we'll stay,
And cuddle with the Squirrel and Bat, –

A pile! A pile of furry glee
Where nothing matters happily,
And I will feed you all and sing
Of every broken human thing

Which burns inside me all the day –
Unlike you, just myself I fear;
Your sleep is green, ah, mine is grey;
You eat the flowers, I the sere,

The crush of drawn-out lonely life,
Whose medicine's remembering death:
They cannot steal, by any strife,
The someday ceasing of my breath.

But I could feel entire, and calm,
If you would only lick my palm,
Sweet Deer; or, Raccoon, touch my nose,
Or Woodchuck, let me palp your toes!—

For one day soon I must drop dead,
And when that day comes, then, instead
Of laughing to be cold no more,
I might weep forever ever more.

Deon Stewart is a student at Wayne State University.

THE TICKLER OF BELLIES

Thanks to stupid nature, everything's
Afraid of me and won't play with me,
Though I am the supreme Tickler of Bellies.
(If you don't believe me, come belly out).

Chipmunks would chitter gleefully
Beneath my two forefingers tickling—
Would grab them with such tiny hands to stop me,
Only half-earnest, only half-tormented.

The sparrows, combative, probably
Would not wait in line, hopping about,
And likely nipping ears of bunny rabbits—
Loud with nonsense, beating their wings at cats.

That is how sparrows are. They toss my birdseed.
The others do not care to deal with them;
Still, I'd not refuse a sparrow his bellyrub.
It is my burden, as the Tickler of Bellies.

Deon Stewart

DETROIT, THE WHOLE BAD CITY

My mind licks the ruined buildings
With a dirty, fat tongue.
He nibbles a corner with a scraping
Like to one gnawing at a peach pit,
The orange clouds peachlike around it.
My mind licks the crumbled buildings,
And the rough bricks scratch his tongue.

My mind is pulling up the bleak factories
By his fingers in the smashed windows,
And putting them under his arm.
My mind is drunken with the beauty of them;
He leaves pale, clodded roots hanging from them.
He dances with the shattered factories.

My mind is in the belltowers, ringing the bells,
Making faces men's faces can't make,
Full of something kind but strong as hatred.
— My mind is crawling, bestial, up a spire,
And grooming the whole bad city.
He will not stop, in such a purple light.
This city is good, tastes good, to my mind.

Robert Hunter is a writer of poetry, but primarily a reader of it; he is the founder and editor of the Detroit Literary Magazine. He was born in Ypsilanti, and studied literature

at Wayne State, before moving to Russia a while to teach English, hitchhike, backpack, and sail a little.

FIVE HAIKU

I

Your tongue is grainy,
like the pink sugar in that
crisp watermelon.

II

Smelling deeply the rose:
with my nose
I have nudged a bee.

III

Thrashing my feet in fresh puddles:
like pale, hairy fish,
gasping for drink.

IV

The shadow of a bough
fails and again fails
to sweep the ants away.

V

A poem should come to the mind
like long fingers, with
a knuckle, and a knuckle.

Robert Hunter

AENEAS AND ANCHISES

Aeneas

Exile is sweet, the home held in the mind
Immune to troubles human or divine,
Golder and fatter each lash and every year,
Until the place for which we shed our tears
Is not of earth, and stronger, therefore, still,
We grow in longing, in fearlessness, in will,
To gain the thing which never can be gained;
The worse for us, if ever we attain:
For too long an exile creeps into the bones.
Exile is sweet, is sweet, is quickly Home.

Anchises

No. I will burn with my burning city.
Look: I hold my hands out to it, and warm them;
Let the fuel of my last warmth be this night
The homes and bodies of my countrymen.
I am not ashamed to ruin with these walls;
To make my clammy descent from this place,
With cold feet slapping the cold stone;
For I know that even the thud of toppled stones,
And the sandals of the awful Greeks still pounding
The blood-clumped dust of these familiar roads
Will sound, from below, like welcome rain,
That patters rooftops and gives deeper sleep
To all men weary from the day's long toil.

Jon Robinson is a Downriver guy, currently spending his days working and caring for a newborn. He writes merely for the enjoyment; but Mr. Hunter has so belabored him with the request, he has finally given in, and given over some poems for publication.

ODYSSEUS TO KALYPSO, FIVE YEARS ALONG

Bright haired and bewitching nymph, large-eyed,
seated before me at the cypress table
I myself devised with the lustrous bronze adze,
your customary nectar dish between us,
into which you dip your long mouth sipping,
for you unfurl it from afar, and drink,
as butterflies drink from the fresh dianthus—
and the fragrant ambrosia beside, while I
must tear the meat with my hard teeth, and chew it;
Calypso of the silky, dusted cheeks,
you say that I have scarcely touched my bread
these three long days, and look so thought-consumed,
with sullen brow, and sunken, wasting eyes.
You say that you have withheld no good thing,
and cannot see, then, what devours me.
Though the immortals know and see all things,
perhaps it can't be said they understand them;
for how can they, as boundless as they are
in life, in beauty, and in happiness,
how could they comprehend the reckless thought,
which leaves me without appetite for food?
In short, my deathless queen of Gygia,
I would not be immortal, after all:
for having lived my years upon the earth
my heart's desire is also once to die,
to taste myself what I have wreaked on men
in hordes, in purpled thousands crying out;
though this "once" is eternal as your hands'
velvet, that ply their velvet work forever—
though I must groan for loss of sun and wind,
lamenting over gloomy Acheron—

though I shall cry out for you in those days,
wasted with years and gray, and far too late,
and you no longer desiring me as now –
yet even these things must have their sweetness.
These thoughts are keeping me from ruddy health,
from restful sleep, and strength-giving bread.

Jon Robinson

IT IS GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE

When one has finally strayed so far along
The little path beside the river, worn
By the current to a muddy shelf
With not much more for width than will permit
A bootsole – grabbing horizontal trees
Above one's head for balance, sunken in
The steep hillside, the panicked roots exposed –
That it opens up again to marshland wood,
And one has finally shrunk the sound of cars
To nothing – and nothing made of man is seen –
The stomach sinks. One sinks with mighty rest,
Like some enormous laborer caked with mud,
Only his eyes and his eyewrinkles white,
Collapsing recklessly upon his bed.
The greater rest belongs to great exertion.

Yazan Alali is a student at the University of Michigan
Dearborn.

FICTION

CHARLIE AND THE MAN-IN-THE-DIRT

Charlie set about on a long walk one morning in July, not having first looked at the weather. He was far from home by noon, for which reason he experienced great relief on looking up and realizing that this alarming sound was not, in fact, the rain starting powerfully, but merely the windblown trees shaking in a certain way as to mimic strong rain – so that he continued wandering farther from home, wrongly presuming that that hard rustling of trees was not prophecy; that rather the world’s hunger for sound had been satisfied by only the susurrus, and – as if the rain were primarily an auditory phenomenon (and “Being but an Ear”), the water produced by it and not vice-versa – that the trees, in the same manner as a lightning rod safely diverts the lightning into the earth which would otherwise have led to wildfire, had safely collected the rain-sound, obviating the need for rain itself. Pleased with this meditation, even utterly lost in it, dreaming buttery, self-satisfied dreams, he continued into the woods an hour more. When the rain did come, following a brief panic that he would not escape it with any square inch of him short of sopping, he shrugged his shoulders, still however reluctant to turn back, in case something wonderful waited for him only thirty feet on, or sixty feet on. Nothing was; and thinking to himself, first, that he was terribly weary, second that despite the rain the air was still fairly hot, and third that a young man sleeping alone in the woods in the rain was a beautiful sight, whether he or anyone else were present to see it, he plucked a mass of fresh leaves for a pillow and lay flat on his back to nap,

pleased with himself.

When he woke, not long after, he was drenched and cold, and the dirt around him, which he'd rolled around in somewhat, had grown muddy. He felt afraid, waking in a strange place, cold and all alone. He began to do some physical exercises, both to regain full possession of his mental and emotional faculties, and to warm himself; he removed his clothing, in order that he might at least himself dry out quickly; and when at last he exited again into the full hot day, like a primitive stepped miraculously out of ancient days into the world as it now exists, stunned by the sight of planes and houses, he sighed and lay down.

But presently he heard a little whisper behind him: "sir!" And he turned, but saw nothing. "I am under the leaves," it said. And Charlie crawled about, wiping the old leaves off the earth, until he uncovered a face upon the dirt, made of the dirt, with wide, excited eyes. "You savage, you savage! Leap into my mouth; you are just the one that I have waited for, these three hundred years." And that handsome, boyish face in the floor opened wide to swallow the man. But Charlie said, "Why should I do such a foolish thing as that? For I am not so stupid as to leap directly into what is clearly a mouth. Am I not a man? And have I not learned wisdom in my few days, despite that I squander it remarkably well? Yet still I know better than to sit myself upon a great tongue, and tugging the upper row of teeth to slide briskly into a great belly. Ha! The vultures also would love me to spike my eyes out on their talons, but even they are not stupid or brash enough to ask."

"But sir," the face in the dirt said, "I do not desire to consume you, but to befriend you. When you step into my mouth you will wear this face of dirt upon your own face,

and you will have a body made of the clean forest earth; this is a vital suit; you will be inexhaustible, with force to uproot the oldest trees among those you see here, and we together will run faster than any deer, any wolf, or any cheetah. We will rip the animals of the woods into pieces, and eat them raw."

Charlie told him in response, "I am a useless man, utterly useless, and therefore what you say greatly tempts me."

"Leap, leap into my mouth!" The face in the dirt licked its lips, as a joke.

"But, then, humanity has such a need for the useless; there is a niche for my sort specifically; they might throw away all the most useful soldiers and public servants in exchange for one useless cretin like me. Out of boredom, I wager; I at least am entertaining. Or, perhaps God provides us with a preponderance of useless ones, so that the righteous always have someplace to spend out and temper the flame of love in them; so that I am like a strop, upon which to strop one's spirit. Why do you need someone to wear you, after all?"

"I am lonely, lonely! And moreover, I'm stuck here, without another to help."

Charlie dug his fingers into the earth around the face, and tried to pull the man up from the ground by his cheeks; but he did not budge. His cheeks were squished together, and then Charlie's hands slipped, and came clapping together upon the nose. Seven times he tried, before the face in the dirt told him: "Okay! Stop that!"

"Well, alright."

The face began to weep. "I'm stuck here. Every year the leaves gather over my face. If I am quick to puff out my

cheeks and blow, I can keep the leaves off, so long as I don't let them pile up too high; for then it rains, and they suck to my poor face too heavily. But regardless, soon the snow comes, and there's no helping it then; I'm as good as buried. Jump into my mouth, and I shall be saved."

"And how did you wind up here?"

"A long time ago – seven hundred years ago – I was just a young man, running around with the others. I liked hunting with them, and painting myself, and sitting by a fire, and chipping away at one stone with another. But one day, when we went out hunting, I killed a white deer, being too proud for my own good. The medicine man made me eat a certain purple leaf, after he whispered into it, and waved it in three directions. Then he buried my feet in the dirt, and soon I fell asleep. When I woke up, everyone was gone, and I was sunken to my chest already."

"Hm."

"Oh, please, please! For I see that you are a merciful creature."

"Will we live forever?"

"No; I may, perhaps, but you will rot normally, or even faster than normal, once you die."

So, at last decided, Charlie leapt into the mouth as it gaped. But he was swallowed down to the blackest pit, and that malicious face came up out of the ground on a myriad of long pale roots, and planted itself elsewhere, crying out. – Or, so goes the tale of the Man-in-the-Dirt, which the children at least find fascinating.

Charlie Dunn was an Ypsilanti local, and wrote much in his spare time. He passed away, tragically, in 2019, at only 26

years old. [This little story is included with the full
permission of the Dunn family.]

A FABLE

Whether it was a congenital hollow in my abdomen, or some unnaturally heavy element in my blood – the wild excess of some mineral or another – or both of these things together (for whatever is unheard of in medicine has only never been noticed; it was not very long ago at all that the era of modern medicine first began, and there are still a great many who have never come in contact with it, for pride or inconvenience or poverty – or even spite, for I spoke to a woman once whose father, having developed gangrene, intentionally allowed it to kill him; but this is neither here nor there). Nonetheless – at 34 years old I have been diagnosed with an unheard-of condition (by a doctor abroad – and a language barrier made the situation all the more surreal). That is, my heart is shaped like a stalactite. But, he said, it didn't seem to be causing me any trouble, and he didn't see how it should, in the future – doctors never do see such things – so that I went away in an optimistic spirit. I began even bragging about it, and analyzing the symbolism of it – that the very source of my life wore such an exhausted appearance – that it was an ancient heart, formed over the (effectively) thousands of years of idle drippings of my brain – that the weight of life was especially heavy to myself; of all people on earth, I alone understood and felt the weight of living so acutely that it stretched my heart toward the dirt. But I boasted of it to one man, who, when I told him, began to weep so profusely that he went to his knees. He held me, when I knelt to comfort him, imagining that he was comforting me rather; and he cried into my shoulder until it

was wet through and through. And so I have come to suppose that the bearer of a symbol is not necessarily its recipient.

Joseph Mirkin is a student at Wayne State University.

NON-FICTION

AS A TOURIST IN ROME

Life has so little to do with travel, spectacle, or experience – so little to do with what one has seen, or learned, or even licked – for indeed I myself, sunbathing and enjoying the Castel de Sant’Angelo in a way that felt to me abyssally insufficient for as beautiful, and ancient, and grand as it is, I sought out a little spot where none would see me, leaned up between battlements on my stomach and forearms like a child in suspended failure to scale a large chair, and licked raspily the rough sunwarmed brick of the castle, loosing a dust of mortar – which foolishness, though it gave me a decent laugh, did not strike me whatsoever; did not pluck at the valves of my heart, did not shake me psychologically, as it ought to have, if I were an even remotely reasonable creature, given for example my incommensurate shock and disgrace upon receiving a rude glare, or some otherwise unfriendly interaction with a stranger. Such a thing as that, I ought to merely swat away, like an inoffensive fly; whereas castles ought to refine us merely to look at them.

In short, as I was saying, life is but the hundredth part primary sensory input, and the rest consists in the reflection upon that input – for had I licked every square inch of the Vatican, which is, in a word, forbidden, I should not have known half the joy that I knew speaking to a very charming stranger at the Fiumicino airport *about* the Vatican, the things I’d seen there, and myself discovering, through happy conversation, what exactly my impressions were. It is never the experience, but the reflecting upon it which gives joy; for which reason suffering too is able to impart such joy – it is

as, or sometimes more, lovely to reflect upon. We do not pursue negative experience, but perhaps we ought to; for if it is a delight to watch the fireflies we have trapped in a jar, it is equally, if perversely, delightful to watch a tarantula in a glass box. We might wisely sit around for a week, alternately alone and with friends, simply contemplating a prior experience, before we venture out after others, alternately sylvan and terrible.

But speech is also something of a licking, a tasting of that which has been around for so many thousands of years, whose syllables are lovely sweet and heavy, especially when they have been well-ordered by someone else, something out of an old book, something metrical; and so as I waited for my plane, I began reciting Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud," and thinking that that long-dead-poet's rhymed contemplation of firsthand experience, which had once been my own firsthand experience, I now summoned up in service of my own contemplative assimilation of my sensory experiences of Rome. I had to cease reciting in order to laugh at such a lovely vortex of thinking.

Still, it is fortunate that words themselves do not carry so vividly the sensation of ancient, sun baked brick, or of a hilltop's mild breeze, for as it is, I am already far too content to sit alone with a book.

Jon Robinson

ABOUT DETROIT LIT MAG

Often, in the course of history, there comes a time when you must simply do it yourself. For literature, this is that time. The agents and the publishing houses need profit, the general public lacks taste, and the highbrows have such excessively good taste that they merely wallow in the indecipherable. This is no insult; indeed it has as much to do with ourselves as a drowsing man has to do with the fly he waves unconsciously away. The simple fact is that our present culture is deeply ugly, and it must be remade. We can no longer trust the literary establishment to bring us anything human or refining.

I am therefore founding this literary magazine; it is to be a new publication, for a new city, a new country, and a new time – though its tastes are classical. The aim of this publication is to print genuinely innovative, human, refining, or otherwise pleasurable work. We reject this Poetry of Infinite Selves that is going around, in our pitiful 21st century; we have tasted enough of Selfhood for many lifetimes. We do not wish, reading a poem aloud, to taste the very tongue of the poet who penned it. Let us read with our own tongues, and we will be grateful.

If you write in the established forms, thank God for you. If you write in blank verse, Thank God, and Please Send Me Your Poems. If your poetry rhymes, and does not cloy – if you rework old themes – if you make use of religion, or are religious – if you are interested in what is beautiful – please send me your work.

I will read and respond to submissions quickly. I'll publish the second volume when I have received enough quality writing to fill 20 or 30 pages. Submit work of any kind to detroitlitmag@gmail.com. Learn more, and see a free digitized copy of the publication, at detroitlitmag.wordpress.com.

I am myself quite poor, and as such, I will be paying only 20 dollars to anyone whose work I include in the periodical publication, as long as I can afford it. In addition, I will be publishing and distributing the magazine online, and physically around Detroit, at my own cost, and on my own time. I will of course ask for no reading fees, for I find such a thing repulsive; but on the other hand, the production, as you see, is minimalistic.

With my whole heart,

Robert Hunter