

LOCUST FIVE

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FOREWORD

Everybody knows what a foreword is! But Locust forewords have never been that kind of stuff. As pointed out elsewhere, they are just a sort of tree trunk where the editor carves his moody thoughts. Probably the only way for him to be remembered! (Wasn't it Mark Twain that wrote something like that about unknown people who carve their initials on tree trunks?)

And whenever a new Locust issue is about to get online, the editor always feels at a loss. Yes, there is always a moment before publication when the editor doubts what he is doing! Dozens of existential questions flock to his mind. Such questions as "Does Locust *really* have a distinctive personality of its own?" or "Is this really the right mood an *alternative* magazine should be in?"

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing before publication. The only hope is that, once online, the issue will spontaneously give away its "*that's ok I shaved my head*" nature. Unconventional and irreverent. A sort of Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre*. In other words, a small press magazine should never comply! It should always kick, punch and shout at the top of its voice. And a poet should never comply! A poet should always kick, punch and shout at the top of his/her voice. And readers should never comply, and they should always peruse poetry magazines remembering that Wordsworth and his silly yellow flowers are dead and gone!

Can this be a credible manifesto in a nutshell?

November 2007

A RANDOM PASSERBY
~ A Poem by Clifford K. Watkins Jr ~

An old man's drunken belligerency
Thrust upon a random passerby
Finding hilarity in his blundering stab at aggression
I assist the elderly fellow to a rickety chair
And he soon nose-dives into unconsciousness

VAGABOND'S VISION #83
~ A Poem by Felino Soriano ~

Microphones obliterated silence,
also, the meaning of whispers having to surprise
through large active, activated speakers,
splurged with content of the laughing matter.
Octaves climbed vocal ladders arranging facets
of face-features and body-animals,
along wooden arcing woolen procedures,
meant as obstacles, ending as happy mistakes
listening to loudness.

Glorified wings resembling rooftops of exultant homes
overheard terms of overwhelming endearments,
reaching and embracing movements attached to exalted
benevolence.

A HAIKU
by David Fraser

Barrel-chested quail
rocket from the blackberries,
invasion of their home.

HEARING IT
~ A Poem by Joseph Veronneau ~

Old folks leaned over plates,
sagging jaws to receive food
what made us eat at the hospital dining room
was a bit of an enigma,
but we liked it there.

Seeing you again last winter
streetlights on at five,
we strolled together along
deep banks of discolored snow
Pushed to sides by machines.

We went back to the café,
you played with the tablecloth uneasily,
keeping your head low in most instances
and lacerated my ears with unforgettable news.

That night leaving you behind,
the embrace longer than it had ever been
we left our imprint
in the eyes of those watching from dimly lit windows.
and the tracks home fade quickly,
how machines help cover everything.

REALLY?
~ A Poem by Ashok Niyogi ~

we went through this
as mountains
go through rivers
which go away
on tourist boats
that don't have to
bring in fish
on a wish that
flying foxes won't
get drunk like skunk
and this baby lily will bloom in gloom

this autumn
I will buy handloom
fabric from the rabbit farm
to keep your arthritis warm
bees swarm
even here the sun is born
and grows
flows between rivers mountains
boats fish wish
drunk skunk
interrupt
what can be momentous
on route 680

another car dealer
calling you "Madame"
another small Mexican girl

selling burritos

your ice-cream has melted
do you want another one

**I KNEW A GIRL WHO WAS CONSTANTLY TUGGING AT
SOMETHING THAT WOULD NEVER APPEAR**

~ A Poem by Joseph Goosey ~

I knew a girl who was constantly tugging at something that would never appear
and shit,
how she would piss me
off

looking at her—
sitting there
like a half finished
painting in the corner of a
room—
completely dried

she would say to me
all the time;
“i’m going to teach the world about whales and mathematics”
and i’d think
whales are a mystery to us all
and no one likes
math

Now?
i am not quite sure what it is that she does
whatever it may be
i feel confident knowing it is something
far from what
she believed or
hoped

And in this;

i garner a small amount of joy
just enough
to make up for lost

time

i find that whales, those creatures of wonder,
they take up too much goddamned
space.

MUTENESS
~ A Poem by Anthony Liccione ~

I never mentioned
I'm sorry,
as the Sony
television falls
from our 19th floor
window apartment.
The set was on
the news to live
at five,
the weatherman
called the forecast
to be heavy storms.

I wait to hear
the loud crash
against the sidewalk,
lightning to strike
the sky—
pieces of glass
and plastic shattering,
the cause and effect
of hate taking place.
Wondering if some poor
bystander is walking by,

still evolved in a new
found love,
thinking on of his plans
for tonight with this dear.

A romantic candlelight
dinner
two roses in the vase,
as the television cord
whips about in mid-air.

They will have wine
and chocolate covered
cherries for desert,
some Bach to create
the mood.

She shouts,
we are done,
and heads out the door
with a suitcase
angrily packed
and reasons we
never talked about.

Timed perfectly,
he will throw popcorn
into the microwave,
to her surprise of watching
some happily-ever-after
movie on television.

And I await,
await for the crash
that doesn't come,
the sounds of spite
that left the door—
another form
of communication
yet falling, yet silent.

MONSTROUS PLEASING
~ A Prose Poem by Eric Freedman ~

When vampires stroll out with their velvet capes and gothic-white faces, spreading scarlet-lipped smiles, seducing with the sangfroid of their blood-tipped fangs, I tug down my shirt collar to offer them my neck, move in closer. They don't need fancy words spoken with trills or tongue rolls, no exotic quips in a Romance language, no psychic-sexy occult charm. Nothing—just a sidelong glance or a batting eyelash and I happily call out, “Suck my blood! Lots of it!” After I'm drained, I feel my inner succubus surface, then slink along fear-drenched streets looking to spread the faith.

When mummies cast off their sarcophagi shells, rise after millennia of supine splendor, and emerge from their painted rock wombs, I hold my breath at their tomb's entrance. They hobble over, pissed at the audacity of mortal air, ready to wrap their frayed-rag appendages around my throat. They offer to smother me with their bed sheet strips, and I agree. I whisper to them, “Mummies, dear mummies, descend upon me like a thousand-shag, carwash mop, slap your soapy suds on this sterile tangle of metallic confusion, keep me clear-eyed and clean-headed.”

When the werewolf smokes the fog that rolls along the moors, hunting for that weak creature that slithers and squirms in dark crevices, cowering and crouched in black corners, I will be that helpless runt, ready to be ripped to pieces, devoured in chunks, and sizzled by hot canine belly acid.

—The yellow eyes approach. I feel her spiky fur scrape my baby skin. Her jowls drip saliva ropes. Her growls shudder my entrails. With snout sniffing the air, she plucks prey scents from the crisp night. I quiver as her hot breath moistens my temples, then lie down at her paws.

As zombies open their dirt-crust eyes and search for flesh with vacant coffin stares,

survey the empty night, intoxicated from snorting decaying corpses, I listen to their heaves and groans, and drift over. I look into their soulless eyes and beg to join their sallow-skin frat, their gray-teeth gang. I hang on the tattered ends of their graveyard coattails, set my hook fingers into their leper flesh, and coast along on their mindless wanderings.

When creatures in black lagoons squish through slop and sludge then hobble on shore with their scaly webbed feet, I stop one and offer to clean the green slick slime that drips from between his fins. I ask to massage his reptilian armored back while sitting by the marsh, feet dangling in icy water, toes numbing as my thumbs ache from pushing them into his plates. Suddenly, bubbles pop and snap, and the creature blushes lime—I assure him I don’t mind swamp gas or bog breath.

When Herr Frankenstein throws the switch and buzzes his flesh jigsaw creature into animation, I’ll be his friend even when he frightens away the town folk with his rusty-nob neck, open-drawer forehead, and barrel-chest grunts. Even after he tosses little girls into lakes, smashes the skulls of smiling Black Forest farmers, mangles Egor between his compactor hands, I’ll dance with him on craggy escarpments under windmill breezes. I’ll shine his bolts, rub ointment into his scar, offer him flowers.

Then come the clowns. They parade around rings with powdered faces dangling promises of fantasy and laughter with a pie in the face or a slap on the ass. I drool from jealousy as I watch them knock each other cold, then skip around holding hands. I call to them from the stands, “Come, paint me day-glo, hand me an oversized lollipop, let me join your balloon and big shoe cult. Show me where to buy a red nose, where to get a rainbow wig.” I follow them at night when they shed their sweet, Bozo personas and become the frightful basement variety, the ones with eyes circled in glistening black tar. The ones likely to carry axes as they take side trips from their buffoon antics to haunt the suburbs and work for McDonald’s.

I’m a pleaser. A monstrous pleaser.

WHEN A FRIEND INVITES TO HIS *SALON*—DON'T GO!**~ A Prose Piece by Ricky Garni ~**

REMEMBER THAT, etymologically speaking, *salon* shares the same root as *shalom* which means *peace* and yet it is also a double-edged sword, made in Toledo, Spain, where the air is dusty but fine and where everyone is pleasant but coughing.

In addition, it shares its origin with *Salome* which is powerful music, it's true, but when translated properly, actually means "May I present to you the head of John the Baptist—on a plate!" Ouch. There are words that trickle through your mind as you try to sleep at night, in despair and love, unavailed, protected or furred: *John the Baptist—plate—sword*, and of course, *May I*.

Finally, there is the word *salami*.

Do not go when your friend invites you to a salon!

BONFIRE LUSH
~ A Prose Piece by Mark R. Drost ~

Like the palms that overhung, her dirty mane draped over her face parting only at the level of her plump bitten lower lip, rising falling and turning in circular throes in synch with her swollen tips, colored cream and glistening heavily with pungent secreted oils, giving his palms challenge in holding her anywhere. The grasses licked at them, splaying and drawing in around the two, the seaside mist rivered up through their air passages and iced their lungs. She planted her feet, rose high as she cupped the weight of his steeled barrel thighs not allowing their cradle to be broken, sat her hearth on the earth oppositional to him and with feet still firm and open hands flat down edging out from her backside she set the motion again, with less ease and more urgency. The grasses became dragon's tails and whipped them making their flanks purpled, their chins tipped higher with dropleated faces and head full of freeze, the fields around grew cooler, the golden sun that shone upon their backs turned silvery, the downdrifts from the beating waves slowed, crystaled, and permeated the organia with frost

LUPO GUY
~ A Prose Piece by Jerry Vilhotti ~

What bugged my father the most was when my mother, his wife, would remind him how she had ridden a white horse in the land of Brazil-wood where she like he had been born but while she could roam the many acres her father owned, his father was giving away an acre at a time of the ones he owned to any woman who would do him a womanly favor. The fact she could read and write and had taught farmhands to do the same and even taught him their first four years of going steady producing three girls before her mother would give her permission to marry “the cafone” just because all the towns-people in the province of Benevento—which the Romans changed from the name Malevento to try and rid the whole place of evil eyes and witches—were laughing up their sleeves and she added after his family came back to the town of stairs situated among the rocks his family ate twice a day didn’t sit right with him either. That’s when he would come back that it was he who had protected all the De Cielo women and children from the family whose son her kid brother had killed in a fight with the valley town’s major whore in a knife fight and her father all ready dead of the Spanish flu and brother Sensio who was losing part of a hand in the war that was advertised as the war to end all wars and he had sat on their front porch with his big Lupo gun in hand waiting for a vendetta that never happened.

That didn’t sit right with her.

GANGSTAS IN THE BASEMENT

~ A Short Story by Robert Hyers ~

John overheard the two white men standing at the stairway entrance. Both were holding beer bottles. “Thank God they keep the gangstas in the basement,” one of them said. He emphasized the word “gangstas,” giving the two “s” sounds an exaggerated slur. “If they were up here I’d have to find a new club.” The other agreed and took another drink. The first must’ve been very drunk to say this, since John was clearly within earshot. Of course, in his pink button down shirt and tight blue jeans, John was no gangsta. But he was the only black face in the crowd. At 18 years old, he’d heard these kinds of comments more times than he could count. Normally he would get in the guy’s face, perhaps create a scene. But he wasn’t in the mood for that tonight, so he passed them and continued downstairs.

John wanted to see the new room. He’d heard that the owner wanted to steal some of the “down-low” clientele from the club a few doors down, so he revamped the basement and hired a hip-hop DJ. Fluorescent tubes arranged every few feet at the ceiling produced a dirty, forbidden feeling and gave John a slight headache. The walls were cinder blocks painted black, and there were two empty couches against one wall. The club’s plumbing ran through exposed silver pipes right below the ceiling. The DJ, behind his decks at one end, wore an over-sized undershirt tee and the obligatory over-sized headphones with one phone covering an ear. John saw the DJ’s face as he pulled a record out of the crate on the small table next to him. He had blue eyes, set against pale skin. A hint of black stubble ran from his sideburns down to his chin. He pulled the record up towards the ceiling to examine its label, and the artificial light reflected off the black vinyl into John’s eyes. John turned away. At the other end of the room was the bartender, another white guy, wearing a tight black shirt that showed off his slightly muscular chest. He moved the liquors and glasses from one place to another and then back again. The dance floor was empty except for one white queen. “There’re no gangstas down here,” John thought.

John heard a female voice being looped. He recognized the song. It was too dirty to play on the radio, but it was all over the clubs. Sometimes the DJ upstairs played the house remix. John didn’t particularly like this song, but he wanted to

give this new room a chance. So he sat down at one of the couches and moved his head back and forth to the syncopated beat. Apparently the white queen liked the song much more than John, because when he heard the chorus comparing tootsie roll pops and fellatio, he became highly animated. John watched the queen's thin, cherry-red lips and ivory facial muscles lip-sync every dirty word.

John wondered what the queen saw in this song. Maybe he identified with its message of liberation through the control of one's sexuality. Probably not. He probably just liked to piss off his white, middle class parents. John imagined the scenario. After a hard day at their respective offices, his parents were relaxing with glasses of their favorite wine on the dust busted couch and heard this coming from their firstborn's bedroom. They walked in and saw him dancing and mouthing the curse words to this black woman's filthy music. They were filled with horror and disbelief. They quickly turned the music off so that their son could hear them clearly tell him that this music had no business in their house, conveniently forgetting their 12" of Love to Love You Baby buried somewhere in the basement.

John inspected the queen's hair. It was short, blonde, and stiff from too much styling gel. He had twisted some of it into little spikes which shot out, almost forming a crown. John wished he could do that with his hair. He lifted his coffee-colored arm and felt his hair, rubbed it with the white palm of his hand. It was a trimmed mass of tight curls and impossible to style. And it definitely wasn't blonde. Maybe he should go blonde. He needed a change. But who could dye it for him? He was young and gay; didn't he know a hairdresser? No. What about somebody in beauty school? Just Michael. No, never mind. He's a beauty school dropout. So John would just have to dye it himself. It couldn't be that hard.

He pictured himself with the blonde hair. He would be striking, turn all the boys' heads. He'd look like Grace Jones on those old album covers in the garage. He would walk slowly with his head held high so that everyone could take it in. He would walk slowly through the school halls, through the clubs' bars, up the stairs to his bedroom at home. But wait. What about home? What would his parents think?

They always told him black is beautiful. They made sure he knew all the pioneers before him, in politics and in the arts. The bookshelves were filled with everything from Chesnutt to Morrison. They regularly volunteered their time (and John's) to charities associated with the poor neighborhood they grew up in. A few years back his father had lectured him and his white friend on African struggles for independence, after he saw the two playing a video game based on the Algerian War. His mother had told him that while her white friends played Mozart for their

unborn children, she played him Miles Davis.

One evening, after a long day at work, they'd have to see it, when his mother called him downstairs to set the dinner table. There'd be no way he could hide it, unlike the sparkle nail polish he sometimes wore, or the bellybutton ring they still didn't know about, or his secret string of white boyfriends. They would have to see it and he would have to show them. They would yell and scream that he was destroying his body, that he didn't need to look white to be beautiful, that they raised their son better than this. Frustrated, his father would stop his yelling in mid-sentence and storm into the garage. By the time his mother finished yelling, the food would be cold, and he would be yelled at for that too. Then she would tell him to get back up to his room and wait for the "verdict." Both of them always used that word when deciding his punishment. John smiled. He'd stop at the all-night drug store for the dye kit on the way home.

John watched the DJ prep the new record. He let go of the record's label with his index and middle fingers and moved a slide situated to the right of the spinning vinyl. Then he put his fingers back on the label and spun the record a few turns backwards. He released the record again and moved a few slides and dials on the mixer. Fellatio and tootsie pops slowly faded and the voice of a male rapper John didn't recognize was introduced. The white queen stopped singing and sat down. John was bored now. He went back upstairs to the main floor. He heard that same female voice again singing those same dirty words, but this time it had a rich house beat behind it. Those two men were missing from the stairway entrance. Come to think of it, John never saw them again that night. Maybe they found a new club after all, fearing the gangstas' rise as inevitable.

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