

VIEW FROM THE METROLINER

Abandon them. Leave them to rot,
These grimy precincts dying here,
Each boarded mill, each tire-choked lot,

Each torn fence patched with razorwire,
Where even hope no longer comes,
Beside the oily Delaware,

Where tidal flats cut off the slums
Along the Eastern Corridor,
Their shattered windows, rusting drums;

From pasteboard-peeling Baltimore
To Trenton, Newark, Hackensack,
Each oozing sump upon the shore,

Dead baby doll, wrecked Cadillac,
Each hopeless crime and reckless blot
Cries out to heaven on the rack,

Where nothing is but what is not,
And everyone has turned his back;
Abandon them. Leave them to rot.

—FREDERICK TURNER

HANDSET BOULEVARD

As all those noirish shadows grow,
The cell phone fireflies start to glow
Like cigarettes shared late at night,
Except these flares precede delight.

— DAN CAMPION

FROM A LABORATORY REPORT

The culture has flourished unto tedium.
It can accomplish no more in this medium.

—J. D. SMITH

PARADISE CANNED

The screen adaptation of Paradise Lost
that was penned by John Collier never got made.
Columbia Pictures wrote "Nudity nice,
but the ending's a little too dark, we're afraid."

—EDWARD PORTER GRAHAM

A TALE OF A MODERN TUB

From Frisco to St. Louis,
our own passions undo us.
Each SUV what numbers!
a credit card encumbers.
Before the deal goes sour,
vehicles, what's your power?
You shine, take a huge load,
and high above the road
we find life pure and sweet
up in our catbird seat.

Yes sir, that great sensation
as Lord of All Creation,
as universal charmer,
as knight in shining armor
visible from afar,
that is what sells a car;
and sturdy, tough construction,
earth's filth and sticky muck shun,
convince our ladies fair
we'll all be safe in there.

And scientists contrive it
it's so easy to drive it,
controls for this and that,
feather-light...nothing flat...
flat? Foolish fond desires!

It was those Goddamned tires
Firestone had to throw out:
the way they bust and blow out
and make the thing roll over
and dump us into clover.

Poor buyer! Sorely chafed, he
cries, "Where's my lovely safety?"
The matter gets debated.
Those tires underinflated
and all those deaths and mourners
just helped us take the corners,
gave us a smoother ride,
and soothed Company pride.
That's what the mighty buck did.
That's how they were constructed.

We cough and swallow phlegm.
That's how we wanted them,
demanded the whole mess,
that mad top-heaviness,
finding our lives so sweet
up in the catbird seat
above all low Road-Huggies
in our Roll-Over Buggies.
From Frisco to St. Louis,
our own passions undo us.

—RICHARD MOORE

AN IMMODEST PROPOSAL

Vastigirardi, Italy Mayor Vincenzo Venditti has threatened to levy a tax on unmarried people.

Alessandra Stanley, New York Times

The mayor, bent on stopping
The population dropping
And getting questions popping quick, asserts,
"We need a few more christenings.
But singles just aren't listening's
The problem so we'll hit 'em where it hurts."

So many men are lax
In this, the mayor backs
A staying-single tax to force the swells
To marry after all. It's
A choice: spread wide their wallets
Or face the music of the wedding bells.

On this the town must pin
Its hopes: that folks begin
To chew what they have been afraid to bite off,
And bachelors on knees
Will murmur, "Darling, please
Don't spurn my heart's desire: be my write-off."

—NOAM D. PLUM

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

The declining average sperm counts among American men have been attributed to various factors including tight underwear and sedentary jobs. News item

Back when man would hunt and gather
he was never wimpy. Rather,
he was strong, aggressive, feral.
Back then he was virile
clad in loincloths, unafflicted,
vas deferens still unrestricted,
seizing every chance he sees
to propagate his species.

But now he sits there in a chair
constricted by his underwear,
sedentary, prone to whining,
as his sperm's declining.
His reproductive hopes are slim
since they got their Hanes on him.
He's chained all day to his computer,
slowly growing neuter.

If our culture hopes to save man
we should emulate the caveman's
rules for how to reproduce:
Be real active. Dress real lose.

—CHRISTOPHER SCRIBNER

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