Literature
This section of Essence is dedicated to the now-defunct Bonzo Dog Band. A special gala tribute is extended to Rodney Desborough Slater and his parrot.
Prelude to a Siam Summer

The clouds, that morning, hovered with no peculiar sign of pain as he left the warmth of his still sleeping wife to shave. He eased the bathroom door shut and quietly thought, "At last here I am Lord." In minutes his air of authority and knowing seemed to mix with the billowing steam from the hot water tap creating, at most, a fog-like curtain. Fumbling in the mist, he found his razor and shaving cream can and looked to the mirror in search of his form. He wiped off the steamy mirror with his hand and perceived a blurry image. With the aerosol can in his right hand, he began to shake it in vigorous, mechanical jerks. He pressed the top to deliver a soft foam into his left hand. He gazed at his steam enshrouded face in the mirror and saw:

The Founding Fathers ejaculate stars and strophes,
To conceive The Birth of a Nation.

"Ah, if only to taste the love from that impassioned freedom's bed," he thought while applying the shaving cream to his face. "Only a taste," as the steam forced tear-shaped sweat beads onto his forehead, "for a soldier of the land."

His face was soon clouded by a foamy-white lather. He liked to shave and to sculpt his white, premature beard. Today he was a rational Greek pondering universals along the fog covered shores of the Aegean Sea. Ontological realization was just
about to focus as he nicked his chin. The Aegean Sea was again the blue porcelain bowl. After rinsing his face with cold water he put a small triangle of toilet paper on his cut and thought of his wife.

"I'm leaving today," he said through the disappearing mist. "I must have faith and trust her, although she may try to deceive me."

With his shaving finished, he walked back into the bedroom where his wife had kicked the covers aside. With half opened eyes she seemed to sip the new light as it revealed itself across the ceiling.

"You're leaving today," she said in an early morning tone which was more of an appraisal than an explanation.

"Yes."

He detested the matter-of-factness of her life. She employed the same hygienic methods in washing dishes as she did to mating. He pitied her because there was not an idealistic drop of blood in her body.

"You must have packed last night after I went to sleep," she said, seeing the green bag resting in one corner of the room.

"Right again. Still battling a thousand," he seemed almost to hum with a tone of superiority.

Outside the bedroom came sounds of a broom sweeping yesterday's dust from the pavement.
to a waiting gutter. He looked from across the room to his wife whose eyes once again greeted the blank ceiling. The regular strokes of the sweeping was broken as his words floated through her vision.

"Once upon the melody of a dark key whistled tune, I heard the notes of harmony like the swishing of a broom."

"Like it?" he wondered aloud, almost passively. The broom continued with metronomic monotony. Her eyes narrowed to a critical sharpness as her sight seemed to transcend the ceiling's flatness.

"It's all right, Zero. It can function by itself, and the imagery is good, but there isn't much affect to you know, feeling." She turned her glance downward to him. "You cut your chin again, Zero."

"Damn you," he thought as he peeled the dry red triangle from his chin and began to dress. "She always calls me that name when she's angry. What does she know of feeling." His Romantic Hairs bristled as he regretted that he had told her about that name those illiterates in his company at basic training had given him. He did not like guns. No, not because they were used to kill. He knew killing was as essential as living. But because they were instruments of precision he could never master. It showed on the firing range. One day he shot thirty-two rounds and never quite hit the target. His sergeant reprimanded him: "You're a Zero!" The title stuck. From then on he was "Zero" Shulster.

"Don't call me that name."
"I'm sorry I called you that name you don't like. I'm sorry I called you Zero."

"It's nothing." he said, wanting no bad feelings between them just before he left.

With the buttoning of his coat, he finished dressing. His wife began to get up from the bed, but he stopped her. "Don't bother driving me to the airport. I'll get a cab. Anyway, good-bye are better said in private." They had been married a year, and he was sentimental now on saying good-bye to a year long habit.

"Think of my absences as a few grains of sand along the infinite shore line."

"A year would take a fairly large hourglass, though."

"Can't you be serious?" he almost shouted, nursing a prodded anger.

"Yes, I can." she said as she rose from the bed and walked to the dresser.

"You are going to be away for a long time." She opened the top drawer of her dresser. With her back toward him, she held an object in both her hands. "And you are going far away. I shall miss you."

"Zero could not resist." Sometimes your acuity amazes me. I'm leaving today for Thailand for a duration of one year in defense of God and Country."

"A medieval morality play flashed in Zero's eyes. Country", holding her star-furled banner seal 'high' was walking among bodies as God looked on approvingly. His wife returned to
face him. She outstretched her arms, causing the object to become a focal point and a separation. "I thought you might like it," she said, handing him the object. "It's a book of Francesca Paolo's collected poems. You can read it on the plane and while you're gone. Many of her poems deal with loneliness."

"Thank you." The book slid into his inside coat pocket. "Although Paolo is a lesser poet, she has her moments. I'm sorry I have no parting gift for you, but my absence will be, in my way, a present." The walls of the room seemed to embrace and smother him. "But I'm sure in my absence you won't be all that lonely."

She looked past him a moment and then stared upward to the ceiling as if to contain tears. "Sometimes in loneliness there is freedom. But most of the time there is just pain and silence."

He looked to the cracked mirror above the dresser and saw her reflected stare. A silence like eternal suns bursting snowflakes prevailed. The crack in the mirror seemed larger than before as he tried to penetrate its depth.

"Yes. Silence."

"She's taunting me now," he reasoned, "even though I'll be early. I must call a cab and get out." He looked down and across to the phone on their bedside table. In the hushed tones of a conspirator he ordered a taxi. It would be there in five minutes. His green bags were in the corner.

"They must be put under by the door," he thought. While he was telephoning his wife moved to a
high ladder-back chair in another corner and sat down. Her head tilted back. His eyes held thetags.

"I'll get my things together. There's not much time."

Her back went limp as she slumped in the chair reaching for the top rung.

"Time may be the only thing we have," she said as her hands curled around the uppermost rung.

"Don't spill your metaphysical glup on me, it stains." laughing silently at his humor, he moved along the wall to the window to watch for the taxi, telescoping his wife into a far corner, as outside a sharp rain began.

"Besides your personal metaphysical theories are completely erroneous. Like putty, they melt under heat," he continued.

The sweat of her hand was a natural oil to the wood. She seemed to polish the grain with her tightening grip.

"I'll still miss you in the silence."

His eyes closed as if to perceive the future.

"The only silence for you," he thought, "will be the empty words from your lover."

He looked to her but she looked aove and beyond him.

"Anyway when I get back we can say how much we have missed each other."

"Yes, really missed." Her eyes held a knowledge he would never know.

A horn blew, and he looked down to the street. "The Taxi That Hurried," he said in a relaxed comical air.

With that a non-existing puppeteer moved
them both to the middle of the room. The entire scene appeared to move with the motions of a wrestling match. They drew one to the other; each seemed to grasp for air as they kissed the taxi's horn signaled the end of the round.

"Good-night, my only love," he said. "May God hold you as close as our love."

"Good-night, Zero."

He hurriedly picked up his bags and within seconds was descending the stairs to the waiting taxi.

"Damn her," he thought as he looked up to the vacant bedroom window. The rain coated it in a fluid plastic seal. "She's angry again."

Some grey light perked a puddle to mirror a part of his waxy outline.

"Drive around a while," he said inside the taxi.

-Edgar Bartholomeu-

love poem

Winter Suite

A dance in the winter frostlight
A sultry suite in frozen mist
A waterfall in icebound stillness
A sign of scented vapor beneath the crystal-laden chill

Two shadows blush the wind pure snow
Disturbing only
The slumbering glimmer of the moon.

-Barry Greenawalt-
Eulogy

Sweet smoke of memory
i see sun on a brown hill
in the medium distance
i can remember.
wine and poetry,
the trip we'll never took
to rockport and almost-cold
wee for christmas eve
at home, instead.
I'll never think of a sunrise
without seeing the
bunches of icy rose light
you gave to me
one morning
in snow-piled river weather
and i can think of love without remembering you.

David

He is only four.
David didn't know
how to draw
a sad face
at first.

— Betty Hatch —

— Joseph V. Egan —
my yellow enveloped feet
kicking at the fallen leaves
blasts them from slumber
enliven once again
days passed by
only to have the morrow never come
as it did before in the
green certainty
of summer

- Joseph R. Egan -

Afternoon, Late

you can watch the rain
slant-splash
in lopsided circles
on the pavement
and polish the sky
silvers, leaves shiny green
and remember child's
hot summer rain-smell
rain-spell
thundering from the hills

- Betty Hatch -
The House by the Cemetery

The big house watches,
oldest now
but there are a few years left
and character
Character is what really matters
character at human expense
and human years
Once, it could not dampen
a child's joy of afternoon
but tense it waited
cold in winter, dark like fog
Children will grow up.
and will take their wives.
The house knew human passion
every corner, every room
has that odor, that damp odor
that is brought on by the years
and the tears of manhood
parting with a life;
parting, if not from lack of love
then from the inevitable—death
At death, there is a revelation;
"It knew, It knew,"
is the flash at the end
and death is the quietness
which prevents the young
from the knowledge and interpretation
in the mutterings of the old.
They come again,
with children this time;
a man, a wife.
Stately people might suspect,
but these are young...
There can be only one way!
While the wife, fair and beautiful
takes the sun with her limbs,
the man finds evidences;
peeling paint there.
It escapes him,
and he thinks only of repairs.
His wife's affair is with the sun.
Prevent, prevent, the end is begun.
The big house by the cemetery
has given its only warning:
now it no longer watches.
It has swallowed them.
... and sleeps.

-Daniel K. White-
The House by the Cemetery

On the wall. Years now.
people sitting
in a monotone
(I hate the new part of it)
You wouldn’t know...
I watch
electric lights
in tree branches
enjoy
warm winds

God help
me from
confusion...

It’s you now—
me—that I am
more alive
with me

My feet and nerves hurt,
I always
have
to deal with living
at the least.
(break shell!)

I live at all
and sometimes
almost well.
I liked summer—
I felt you there
flowering and I
could not stay
could not hitch to
Canada—
With you God is alive and well in Canada
But I wanted to
jump down into
the bubbles of
my mind—
Splash!
You like it.
And that is all.

But
sometimes
Gears grind...
Is there no gland to
lubricate my soul?
Ease down into bubbles—I came up
Laughing—and there was no spotlight—I could not answer—or speak—and I wondered
But life is not price

—Tracy Green—
in a tornado
look for a purple sun
if you can't find one
look harder
i know it's there

in the rain
look for daffodils
there somewhere
around the cross i planted
circle of yellow

in the snow
look for our spot
because how many people
make snow castles
shaped like hearts

in the wind
look for my kite
it flies the highest
it is a 10-foot chinese fish
on an upstream sky to span

in the summer night
look for the darkest corner
that's where you'll find me
drunk & stumbling
'looking for a star

-Kalman Morris-
Day Night Ocean

The walk at night
evening oceans are different
a perpetual motion device for
attracting and distracting

At night,
the ocean assumes an unnoticed
posture. It is there, but most
ignore it. The moon, talk and star-
speak can not cover it.

The Ocean
is still wet. New born sand-feet are
also very unpredictable, and dizzy
bodies are playing tag with night.
Oceans

Someone, or two
perhaps lovers, will wish well
the oceans health, or worship
its freedom, or its night time
serenity and pretend they, too, are an
Ocean

-Bruce Wehrle-
Cinderblock
Message to be read to Myself:

They came down today
the trees
it was strange
almost wouldn’t take the time
to feel what I felt
there will be a void there now
and only vague impressions will
remain of
the trees
have I taken it all for granted?
what with all those subjects
to care about
slowly it will be filled by where
the trees
are not
and time pulling at least
one thousand ways
eventually be replaced by where
the trees
never were
but stop! isn't it time now
to feel what I feel
and it will be easy then
having time to be real
but the saw
the trees
the saw keeps on buzzing

cutting

killing

the trees
and being hard to take
another page of history

comes easy

--Joseph v. Egan--
that you were dead
i might mourn you
but you've stolen that right
and still i mourn

wearing blue-jeans
and a black mind
i walk the same grass
you made green

here where i christened you
named you and we'd you
even the grass denies us
now sprouting up with spring
crushed brothers passed along

this then i designate
to be our child's grave
crushed by new grass
over our wedding ground

there then is your grave
in black i walk there
to pick wild-flower children
and drown then in the river

—Kalman A. Moris—