

# CARDINAL SINS

all from the tree of knowledge

Volume 4, Issue 4

March 1985

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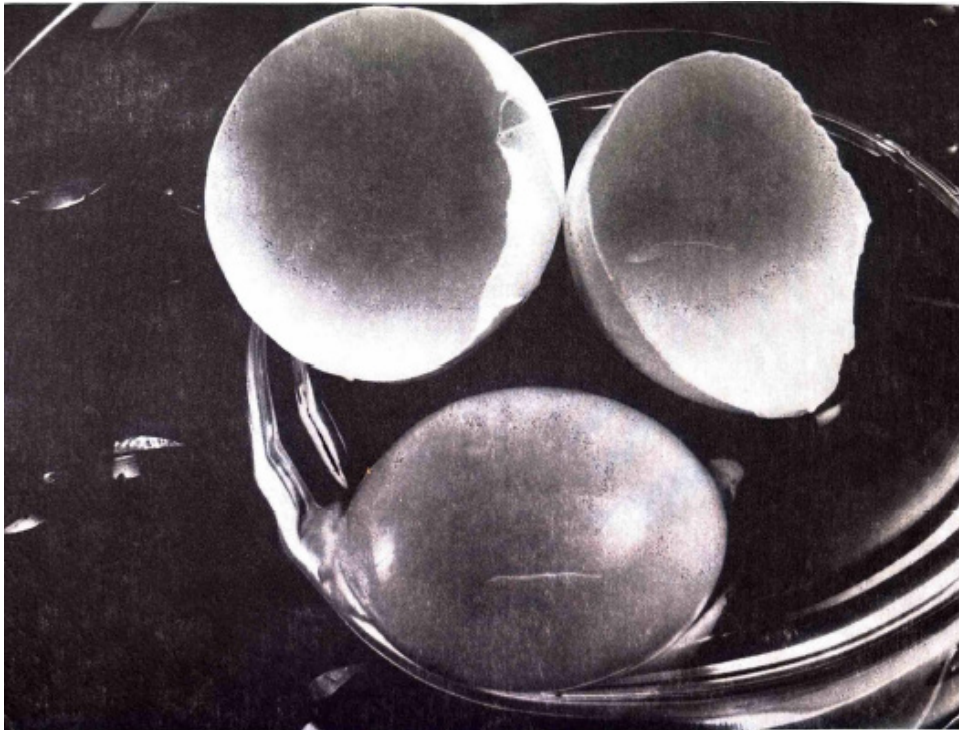
This special issue of *Cardinal Sins* celebrates the literacy and artistic talents of Saginaw Valley State College students. Congratulations to all who won and a sincere thank you to those who submitted material. Thanks are also due Drs, Diane Sautter, Basil Clark, and David Rayfield, who gave up a week-end to judge writing contest enteries, and to Steve Jessmore of *The Saginaw News*, who graciously consented to juge the photography entries. A bushel of Cardinal Sin's golden apples to Beth Medley, NSPC organizer and to Karen Totten, a golden seed.

Guardian Angel for *Cardinal Sins*:

Listening Post and Book Co.  
790-0140  
Marvin Wasseman  
Bay Plaza

*Cardinal Sins* is a literary journal published at Saginaw Valley State College,

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## KEEPING IT IN THE ZEITGEIST

About two weeks ago, Pete Ingall, Jay Oeming, and I were sprawled comfortably about in my apartment. As usual, we were babbling about obscure ideas in terms that were less than concrete. "Mental masturbation" is an accurate term for these sessions. We struck upon a theme of "Keeping it in the zeitgeist." We probably pared down the true definition of "zeitgeist," because in our short lives, history is somewhat fractioned. To us, the span between 1975 and 1980 is a significant historical period. We began to discuss language within the zeitgeist.

While the zeitgeist has no definite bounds, one must remain within the limitations of the thought and language of that specific time period. Delve outside of the zeitgeist and your ideas become impossible to comprehend.

This may seem a bit vague, so let me follow up with a few examples. There was a time when "lesser organisms" (i.e., insects, frogs, small rodents) were thought to regenerate spontaneously. Sexual reproduction in these organisms was not considered. All that need be present for the propagation of field mice, for instance, was some sweaty shirts and grain tucked into the corner of a barn. The mice found there later were a result of those ingredients necessary for their spontaneous regeneration. The first attack on the doctrine of spontaneous regeneration was initiated by the Italian physician, Francesco Redi, in 1668. As it often occurred throughout history, Redi was ostracized by his colleagues. He had operated outside the zeitgeist.

In his essay "The Hidden Teacher," Loren Eiseley describes a spider. While searching a Western canyon for fossils, Eiseley came upon the great web of a yellow and black orb spider. This web was the spider's zeitgeist, and she knew, as much as a spider can know, the meaning of every vibration in the structure. When she felt something, she would interpret the movement and come scurrying in the direction of her prey. Out of curiosity, Eiseley poked the huge web with a pencil and the spider reacted by vibrating her world in order to snare her victim. Yet soon she paused, puzzled because she couldn't sense a returning vibration. She was confused, having no way of knowing a static pencil doesn't squirm and attempt to escape. Because she did not understand this concept of static pencil, she could not fit it into her own zeitgeist. The pencil was not communicated and was therefore rejected.

Language and the zeitgeist are intimately related. Communication is the adhesive that holds society together. But language and the way in which we communicate changes over time. Progress in science seems to initiate some of this change, as parts of technology's lexicon slip into everyday use. Words like "byte," "biosphere," "videodisc," and "lasersurgery" are a result of science creating new terms to describe newly discovered concepts of newly created objects. In this sense, science actually changes the way people communicate and think by giving them new concepts to ponder and new words to both think about and think with.



Is the bulb that lights up over the scientist's head, the scientific idea that we know as the "ah-ha," real or does it become a reality only when it is translated into language? To pick up where Mr. Ken Stroebel (presenter, Fall 1984 Language Panel Series at SVSC) left off "While it is true we cannot believe everything we read or hear, isn't it curious that so much of what we do believe is only that which we have read or heard?" The unfortunate reality this statement reflects is a constant threat to the progress of science. For even though we must "keep it in the zeitgeist" in order to talk to each other, only the scientist who constantly pushes at the limits of his personal reality, only the scientist who constantly questions and challenges both received and perceived knowledge will make progress toward new and more workable definitions of the world we live in.

After handing me the final exam for a freshman course in Zoology, a Professor Earl Rollins said to me, "Please don't believe all of the bullshit you've heard in this class. Be curious and trust no one." The definitions I had learned in Freshman Zoology were the result of experimentation. The experimentation was guided by previous definitions based on previous experimentation based on previous definitions. Wait a minute! When do we start to question the bullshit? When do we begin skating on the thin, dangerous ice at the edge of the zeitgeist? And what happens to communication when scientists crash through a currently-accepted paradigm into another world, another zeitgeist? As far as I can see, Dr. Rollins was urging me to trek upon that thin ice, to challenge myself and others.

Scientists are sometimes accused of being overly cliquish. And although each discipline of science has its own terminology, scientists must communicate with one another as well as with the world outside the scientific community. The interpretation of the language used is critical for the accurate transcription of information. What both the scientist and the lay person understand must be an accurate description of what scientific research reveals. For this understanding, we depend upon language. But language, particularly the kind that we necessarily must use when

communicating with those very different in background, knowledge, and understanding, must be grossly generalized so that writers and readers can find common ground. Does this generalizing limit language in its accuracy? Do we expect too much of language? Generalization in its very essence moves away from accuracy.

Nevertheless, the translating must be done. In fact, Peter's new job as a technical writer confronts him with these actual problems. At Dow Corning, where I currently work, I am beginning to see that concerns other than the desire to share scientific discoveries enter into this transcription and thus potentially into its accuracy.

It seems to me it is the lawyers, not the scientists, who, in the end, do most of the translating of scientific discoveries. Why? Because nothing can be researched unless it is financed by a great deal of money. To be financed, the research must be justified, and justification depends upon profit. Enter the lawyer. Patents and patent laws become necessary to protect financial interests. But how much information is lost in this translation that the lawyers perform?

Alexander Morgan Capron, a professor of law at Georgetown University, is confronted with the problem of translating scientific concepts into language. In

discussions related to the quantum leaps now being taken in biotechnology, Capron must resort to writing formulas. The formulas he uses are presently the only way to translate the new concepts in alternative reproduction that are being created faster than the English language can define them. For example, X1 & Y2 by IVF or Natural/AI w/ embryo flushing with Gestation 3 and Social Parents 4 & 5 very loosely outlines how a baby could theoretically have five different "parents." When the vocabulary finally is created to explain these new concepts, how accurate will it be? What will it do to the zeitgeist? Perhaps new scientific theories actually are overstepping the powers of language's ability to communicate.

Another difficulty that impinges on our ability to translate scientific discovery into language is caused by the religious concept of morality. Galileo, Darwin and Redi all operated outside their zeitgeist and were accused of being blasphemous, as well as mad. Historically, the Church has attempted to stagnate the progress of science, since scientific discovery often explains phenomena that were previously credited to some Supreme Entity. Today, ethical questions restrict progress in genetic engineering and alternative re-production, forcing science through a moral filter that limits the accuracy of its translation. Science's information flow becomes restricted.

In order for science to progress, thoughts must drift to the precarious edge of the zeitgeist. Only when the current reality is broken down and a new zeitgeist pops out of the old constricting carapace can we find new knowledge. Through the language of discussion, Peter, Jay and I peeled off a restricting layer at the end of our seminar in zeitgeist; we redefined our "time spirits." Has your zeitgeist broadened?

--Steven Wilkowski  
First Place, Essay, Cardinal  
Sin's Third Annual Writing Contest

## AMATEURS

At some point in their lives, everyone has looked to the stars and been awed by their splendor. They may have been on a camping trip in the northern part of Michigan or in the wide open spaces of the great west. In either of these areas, they may have noticed a change in the night sky. For the first time they see there are not just a few stars but hundreds of them scattered like diamonds on black velvet. The Milky Way blazes fluorescent with the light from thousands of stars. Soon one may take binoculars and scan “the heavens” noticing still more stars and groups of stars.

Another person may have gone to a planetarium on a field trip or open house and noticed for the first time that there is motion in “the heavens”. Soon after this experience he or she went home and watched a planet or bright star. (Night after night this object is observed and its movements across the night sky are plotted by the curious but casual observer.)

These are two examples of astronomy in its most basic form. One does not have to own an expensive telescope, be able to recognize constellations, or have a Ph.D to look up into the heavens and observe the many wonders of the universe. All that is needed is the human curiosity, the thirst for more knowledge and the amateur astronomer is born. I’d like to share with you my experiences with amateur astronomy from my humble beginnings to the present and prove just that. If nothing else you may very well look up at the night sky and see a little more than just the moon and stars.

When I was young I remember lying on a blanket in the backyard on summer evenings watching the stars appear. Just as the lights of a big city blink on here and there with no set pattern after sunset, so too did heaven turn on its lights. My father would be there with me pointing out constellations, stars, and planets, quizzing me on their locations. Questions such as what stars make up the Big Dipper? or, what’s another name for Ursa Minor? were asked of me and I would answer those questions and more. Night after night we would lie there and learn the heavens until we became a part of them. We had no special knowledge, no book learning; we simply had the curiosity to see what was around the next bend and the unquenchable thirst for the unknown. .

My next bout with astronomy came shortly after the first lunar landing in 1969. I went out on my front porch with a little reflecting telescope and looked to the Sea of Tranquility. I believed I could see where the first men had landed. When I told my father he just smiled. I realized years later that even with the largest telescope on earth I couldn’t have seen the flag the first astronauts planted, let alone the lunar lander itself. Still, the consuming fire for knowledge was not extinguished.

In high school I began to study physics and chemistry. Model rockets were designed, built and tested, some successfully and others not quite as successfully. I read about Euripides, Kepler, Newton and C. Huygens, all of them scientists who at one time as children may have looked to the heavens and were awed by their beauty. They taught themselves the wonders of the univers with no formal education. Kepler, who gave us the three laws of planetary motion, started out as a choir boy with a penchant for mischief. Huygens was a rich man who opened his home to many

amateur artists and scientists so they could ply their crafts. He developed and improved the telescope lens and in turn gave a true description of the ring system of Saturn. These men were all amateurs who sought to excel in their chosen hobby.

A more modern day hero of the amateur astronomer is Carl Sagan. With his *Cosmos* series Carl Sagan reached hundreds of potential astronomers through the television media. You may have been one of those. He showed you and I how chemistry, biology, physics and other everyday sciences all come together to play a part in the song of the universe. He covered not only outer space, but also the inner space of our minds and their part in the cosmos. Mr. Sagan created a "star ship of the mind" and with it took us to these outer and inner spaces. With hundreds of others, you and I would travel in our living rooms from the human brain to the vast wastelands of Mars, and from the brightest of stars to the darkest black holes. With *Cosmos*, the seed that was planted in me long ago received the nourishment needed to make it flower into the dream of becoming an astronomer.

Shortly after the *Cosmos* series I purchased a good 60mm refracting telescope capable of magnifying an object many times. I set it up one night to take my first view of the moon since 1969 and felt my heart stop! The moon was huge. My eyepiece was filled to overflowing with that majestic sight. It was like traveling through Kansas and seeing the seemingly endless golden wheat fields rolled up into one huge field. But the moon is not golden. To the unseeing it is grey and black, but to me it is made of purest silver. I was thrilled and humbled as I looked at the moon. It seemed to rumble while moving slowly, regally through its domain. I felt as if I were a tiny dandelion seed blown by the wind into the presence of a rose. Night after night I’ve viewed the moon and the stars. Each time I’m treated to some new delight like a child at Christmas where each fancy wrapping conceals a new gift. Just as the child had no class in gift opening, neither have I in astronomy. Still, we both share the same curiosity for what’s inside. Be it a beautifully wrapped gift box or a small cold eyepiece, we share the same feelings of expectation, surprise and delight as we open our eyes to each new sight and sound.

The feelings and experiences shared here are proof enough that one needs only to look at the heavens to enjoy them. Degrees and knowledge do not give us feelings and insights into the heavens. Anyone with a little selfeducation, desire and curiosity for what’s beyond the next star could easily become an amateur astronomer and see more than just the moon and stars above them.

--Andrew Peitsch  
Second Place, Essay, Cardinal  
Sin’s Third Annual Writing Contest

## THE PYRITE PIED PIPER

his mind is like a fife  
it is very narrow open at one end  
but closed at the one closer to the mouth  
people blow things into it  
it all flies out the holes  
nothing is stored  
fifes only cost five dollars

--Beth Medley  
Second Place, Poetry,  
*Cardinal Sin's* Third Annual Writing  
Contest

## POP PLAYS WITH ME

Pop has to play with me tonight  
before he goes to work.  
We wrestle a lot  
and he puts his chin  
against my cheek  
when he tickles me.  
It burns my cheek  
but it's a good warm.

He kisses Mom on the porch  
under the light.  
When he's under the light,  
his eyes look like the eyes of those dead men  
in the movies.  
He tries to brush the hair from my face  
but I pull away.

I watch him walk to the car,  
all hunched over.  
Then I go to bed,  
thinking about how we'll play again  
tomorrow night.

--Douglas Byron  
First Place, Poetry, *Cardinal  
Sin's* Third Annual Writing Contest

## THE JESTER

The black Z-28 sped murderously down the center of an empty road. It charged ahead, resolutely following a beligerent path. A few hundred yards ahead, a small rabbit attempted to cross that same lonely road; it darted out in front of the vehicle. One sad instant later, the car's tires spread the animal's contents into a flat blotch of gore five feet long.

Somewhere in the heavens a Jester watched the tragic scene from his starry vantage point. He couldn't help but look away when the small creature was destroyed. To help ease his sadness and sense of loss he moved across the room that he eternally occupied and began to pour himself some wine. He'd been watching Brian Peterson ever since the young man was born. The Jester was by no means surprised to see Brian driving like a pleasure-mad fool but he'd never gotten used to his thoughtless acts of destruction. As wine filled the glass, he thought about Brian's past exploits as a vandalous teenager, about the evil he'd executed during his nocturnal enterprises, about the nights he'd spent under partially cloudcovered moons: nights of rebellious adventure, nights of fabricated danger, nights of impotent revenge....

Blood spattered over an entire quarter of Brian's car. He didn't care though, he was watching leaves blow across the road in front of him; they'd momentarily captivated his attention. The colors and shapes of the dead foliage had a unique effect in the lights of his sports car; they reminded him of lemmings scurrying instinctively off to their deaths. The analogy made him giggle like a psychopathic vivisectionist; it made the Jester frown.

When Brian reached the apartment complex that contained his home, he angled his car into two parking spaces. Brian didn't know he was being watched as he got out of his car, locked its door, and then checked to make sure that it was locked. He'd never been aware of the Jester's existence and probably wouldn't have cared if he had. Oblivious, he walked towards the cold building where he spent his nights in silent solitude.

After a quick-paced walk through the lifeless halls, Brian reached his room. He found the note that was taped to his door. They both read it:

Hi Brian, give me a call--O.K.

Amy

With a look of disgust Brian snatched the slip of paper and crumbled it into a small ball. He threw it down the hall. Wearing an aura of aggression, he entered his dark apartment and marched directly to his phone. Brian snatched the receiver from its resting place then dialed a number from his memory. The Jester listened to the quick conversation that followed.

"Yea Amy, wha'd'ya want!?"

"Bull shit."

"Why should I care?"

"No I'll be over when I want, maybe an hour." Without saying goodbye, Brian slammed the receiver down.

The young man walked into his small bathroom and began to disrobe. His

grimy clothes smelled of gasoline from the long work day he'd spent at the nearby Shell station. The Jester knew the only reason that Brian worked fifty hours a week at a job he despised was to earn the money he needed to keep living alone.

While he slowly unbuttoned his shirt, Brian stared into the mirror to admire his ever developing and muscular frame. He saw a handsome nineteen-year-old. The Jester saw a fool, a fool whose only goal for the future was to get laid again tonight. Brian removed his worn Levi's, black briefs, and wool socks. He reached down to turn the shower water on. He smugly took another glance at his now naked body in the mirror as the water warmed.

He stepped into the shower stall and let the water warm his chilled extremities. The slight pain his fingers and toes experienced as the blood began to circulate again always felt good after a day out in the cold. He put his broad shoulders to the pressure of the water. With a thought, the Jester initiated a process that would change Brian's life.

Brian instantly noticed something different; his back was sensing the same pain his fingers and toes were. The feeling grew more intense. It was as if the drops of water were actually Liliputian arrows being cast into his skin. He turned and faced the shower head. As he scrubbed his face, soap snuck into his eyes. The usually insignificant

discomfort that soap always causes rapidly changed to an intense piercing; the sockets of his eyes seared with burning pain. It became unbearable. Almost in an instant the torture spread throughout his whole body. The young man doubled over in agony, almost losing his balance. The putrid odor of smoldering flesh violated Brian's old-factory organ. Skin seemed to roll off of his trembling muscles with now burning water. The pain wouldn't end, it only increased as time changed. He felt sure that his bones were revolting, attempting to flee his body. He could sense the shards of bone protruding from the pulp of his tissues, giving passage to geyser-like bursts of blood.

Ironically, Brian's consciousness was left unscathed by the violence. Unfortunately for him though, that meant he could clearly perceive the full effect of the experience. It reached a point where all that was left of him was his will to die--getting laid that night just didn't seem so important anymore. In truth, young Mr. Peterson had come to learn despair; his soul would remember the torture well. Brian's mental being then lost touch with the structure of sinew, ooze, and gore that was once its bodily shell. Everything stopped. There was no pain to be felt, no odor to be smelled, no vision to be seen. Brian seemed to be frozen at one moment in time. At once he became dizzy and fell.

He lay there, on cushions of the most elegant sort, feeling cleaner than ever before. The singing of a masculine voice accompanied by a violin tantalized him.

Amethyst scintillates from the maculated ceiling  
As "Little Boy Blues" prompts the misogynist  
To confront the paradox of his fascination.  
Objectification made insuperable by infatuation;  
His diatribes of tyranny lose  
Credibility in the face of a new conviction.

The music realized itself in a manner that both riddled and eased his mind unlike anything ever had before. He was struck by his awesome carelessness. The yokes of civilization seemed to have been thrown off of the sacred cow. The song ended.

"How do you feel Brian?" came the voice.

"Casual" seemed the appropriate reply.

"That's good."

Brian lifted his head in one easy motion to see the Jester. He was tall and wore some of the traditional clothing of a court clown. His diamonded pants were yellow, red, and blue. His shirt was billowy, checked, and partially covered with a yellow vest. The cap he wore was yellow as well, but it had long green flaps that fell on either side of his head, like pointed puppy ears. On top of the cap was a green comb much like a rooster's. Against the white-face of his make-up were blue, black, red, yellow, and green stripes of color that cut parallel angles across his cheeks.

The strange man rested his violin on a wooden counter and filled one of his vacant hands with a cigarette. Again the Jester spoke, "Let's get on with it". He paused a moment, enough time to exhale an invisible gas that had a distinctively rich odor. Apparently he expected Brian to respond in one way or another and was visibly annoyed that he hadn't moved at all. He screamed, "Move it!"

Defensively, Brian said, "Give me a minute--Jesus H. Christ".

The Jester was quick to reply in a patronizing tone, "Aw, what's the matter, never have the hand of God come down and rip you out of your petty reality before?"

"You ever French kiss a razor blade?"

"I'll take that as a 'no'", was the Jester's cool reply.

"If you'd excuse me, I'd like to know what the hell's goin' on here. There's no way I'm gonna believe you're God".

"I'm not God. He's the invisible man over there with the beard. Oh, and you might want to refrain from invoking His Son's name, it puts Him in such a God-awful mood. But It's apparent that you're confused; I keep forgetting mortals never remember". The Jester spoke each word clearly and exactly, like someone who prided himself on his eloquence. "You've just been pulled from your line of time and now you're going to be placed on another".

Bewildered, Brian interrupted, "What in God's name is a line of time and wha'd'ya mean I've been pulled from it?"

"Listen, you don't have to invoke His name either, okay? I can answer your puerile questions easily enough without you seeking divine assistance. I'm going to give you three choices: You can try to find your way back to reality as you know it on your own; you can ignore me and discover what pain really is; or you can stop interrupting and just follow my lead". Giving Brian the chance to consider his options, the Jester took another drag on his unique cigarette. Returning to face the resistant young man, he assumed a lecturer's tone of voice. "Now to begin, how would you define time?"

"In twenty words or less?"

In a less professional tone, the Jester rebuked, "You really know how to make things easy don't you--please don't answer". The Jester knew he'd need another glass of wine to get through this. He poured himself one and downed half of it in one swallow. "You're simply going to be given a new past. The last seven years of your life will be replaced with the experiences of a different seven years. Along with that new past you'll have the attitudes and opinion that you would've developed if you'd experienced that life. You'll almost become another, distinct person, but you'll still be Brian Peterson".

Dumbfounded, Brian's only reply was, "Oh" in a slowly trailing voice. The next moment, he felt a bit sure of himself; he asked, "Why?"

The Jester continued, "At one point in your life you made a choice God didn't like to well. That choice led to a series of events that has given you your present past, if you will. He gave me the opportunity to set you on a line of time that He would've rather had you follow."

Never at a loss for intelligent replies, Brian simply said, "Great."

"At your new present you're ready to overdose on logic and pride. But if all goes well you're also about to meet Anastacia. Heo bi~ me! g libban eft: Don't ask--that's part of your new past. But what I've just said about her is important; it's why she is so good for you.

"It won't hurt this time; that pain was sort of a punishment for your original choice. You won't remember much of what I've just said either." He paused for a moment, biting his lower lip in thought. "Now let's see to it that you're properly repatriated."

\* \* \*

Brian got out of the shower. He had an incredible feeling of *dejavu*. The situation seemed somehow familiar: drying himself off, preparing for a night at the bar, feeling guilty for not doing his homework. He wrapped the towel about his slightly skinny frame and began to ready himself for the evening. He felt cleaner than ever before.

He ascended the stairs of his parent's house to his room. He threw a cassette into the stereo while the hope of meeting a new girl played through his mind. Still, he was sure that was something he just didn't want to do. Relationships only created problems. The purple light of the setting sun filled the room as it reflected off his glittered ceiling. He dressed.

As he left the house he was flooded by the night. He hesitated a moment to look at the sky and remember a story that he'd been told when he was younger. His father had said that every star held a guardian angel for someone on Earth. Brian wondered if he had a guardian angel watching him tonight. A dog's bark interrupted him. Without delaying further, he walked over to his car and opened its door. There was no need for it to be locked; who would want to steal a '68 Chevy Impala?

Brian pulled out of the driveway. He let the road hypnotize him while he lost himself in thought again. His mind wandered from school to work to money to his future and finally to his past. It seemed odd to him that his memory of the last few years was like that of a dream. The experiences all seemed so unreal, but he knew that they

somehow had to have existed.

\* \* \*

When he walked into the bar he scanned its interior quickly, looking for familiar faces. Although he didn't know her, a girl standing by the bar caught his eye. She was gorgeous. The little lassie looked to be just over five feet tall and had thick, dark hair that fell below her shoulders. Brian only allowed himself a quick glance; he feared being caught gawking like a sot. Although a red blousy shirt hid the size of her breasts and the angle of his view denied him a good look at her ass, she seemed to have a shapely figure. Brian couldn't help but smile at her as he walked past her and her female companion. She returned the gesture by blushing.

He made a brief circuit of the bar hoping to find a party of friends to join. After a few brief "hellos" to a mild acquaintance, Brian still had no place to sit. But when he noticed the same girl whom he'd smiled at earlier was looking over at him from the table she now shared with her friend--a table with one other vacant chair. Again he smiled, this time more to himself than to her; he'd just found himself a seat.

Intruding on any privacy that the two girl's had been enjoying, Brian asked their permission to occupy the empty seat. Not waiting for a reply, he sat down and introduced himself. The girl he was attracted to introduced herself a Anastacia and her friend called herself Nancy.

Brian hoped to spend the remainder of his evening evaluating this beautiful girls character. He figured one night was all that he'd need to decide what her personality was like. The only problem was that both the girls had probably assumed personae for his sake. Of course their pretending to be what they really weren't would make the night more interesting but things would be appreciably more difficult. He needed companionship though--no matter how false its package was. Anyway, he'd be able to see the Real if he could just get them to expose some emotions.

Naturally, Brian tried to center any and all discourse around Anastacia. He ran through dozens of topics that he hoped would inspire Anastacia to converse with him, yet she constantly dodged all of his best efforts by shifting the attention towards Nancy. Whenever he got lucky and was able to stumble across something that compelled Anastacia to speak, she'd do so only with great reluctance; she'd look to Nancy for reassurance, hiding her wonderful grey eyes from Brian, and talk in soft tones. Nancy, on the other hand, was quite the opposite. She was rather garrulous and liked to talk about anything, especially herself. She didn't mind one bit that Anastacia kept pushing the center of attention over to her.... As much as Brian was trying to reach Anastacia, he was trying to ignore her friend Nancy; both seem impossibly difficult .

After an hour of conversation and three drinks of alcohol, Brian had become totally enthralled by Anastacia's innocent charm and completely agitated by Nancy's egocentric personality. To make things worse, Brian discovered that the latter was quite interested in politics, a subject he detested. But he decided that discussing the topic would be an excellent way for him to get the girls to reveal some emotions. He talked to Nancy for a while about the subject, hoping to find out where she stood on certain volatile topics. When he was quite sure he knew how to upset her, he saw to it that their conversation got out of hand.

His right fist shook as he tempted Nancy, "You fawning bitch, I wish you'd ... "

"You're pushin' your fuckin' luck buddy!" Nancy interrupted in a tone of voice that implied that she was ready to throttle her friend's new beau.

Betraying the shy persona she had maintained, Anastacia grabbed Brian's thigh beneath the table. She could sense brewing trouble. But her grasp was more than a warning; it revealed in a subtle way that she not only liked Brian, but was actually concerned about him. If he would've realized this he would've been startled. Sure he had friends, but none of them really cared for him.

Brian had never been very good at picking up hints though. He continued gesturing rapidly, "Listen, politics destroys everything good. I don't care how pure its intentions are. Look at the Third Order of St. Francis. He had a great thing goin' all his life. He'd written two good orders but was forced to ignore 'em and write the third-- or it was written for him. Anyway, Franciscan friars became a joke after that; like all of their contemporary reformers, they fell into the morass of secularity--all because of the church's politics.

Ignoring Brian's point, Nancy went on to make her own. You don't know how good you have it. Do you know where you'd be right now if it weren't for politics?"

Brian was waving both of his hands frantically now; "It's society that protects your candy ass, not politics!"

Not appreciating Brian's last comment, Nancy felt quite sure that he'd rather wear his vodka and orange juice than drink it. So she reached over, grabbed his glass, and proceeded to empty its cold contents on Brian's white shirt. It all happened before he could react; it took him a moment to realize what had happened. By the time, the cold liquid had seeped its way into his pants. By being embarrassed for being publicly humiliated and despising Nancy for existing, he had becomes victim of his own plot. Brian left the table trying to collect his loose emotions, fearing that his insecurity would reveal itself; in his diffidence, he sought to cower within himself. Anastacia followed, once again betraying the fact that she, for some uncertain reasons, cared about Brian.

She caught up to him and tried to comfort his wounded male ego. "Don't feel bad. Nobody ever argues with Nancy unless they're on somethin'. I'm surprised she didn't try to rip your throat out .."

"Just leave me alone--I don't need anyone, I never have!"

There was a hint of sadness in Brian's voice; it was ever so slight. Anastacia recognized it as self-pity. She felt that this justified her ripping right into him. Mercilessly she began, "Aw, we're gonns need violins for this story!"

Just then, Brian was sure he heard a deep voice whisper in his ear, "The great essentials of happiness are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for; with her you have something to love and something to hope for." Sensing *deja vu* again, Brian was struck with an incredible feeling of enlightenment and awe. His only gestures became the soft caresses of Anastacia's shoulders. Almost to himself, Brian hypothesized, "You really care don't you."

When Anastacia realized that a change had overcome him, they hugged. The empty feeling that had so long existed in Brian's chest was filled by the warmth that was Anastacia. For a brief moment Brian perceived everything: who had sent him there, why he had met this girl, and the munificence of the forgiveness that he had been granted. "God, don't ever let hat happen to me again."

\* \* \*

The sun rose. Brian left Anastacia's side in the warm bed and raised the curtain. He knew he had found a love that would last. He looked out the window and paused to consider the snow as it fell. The white flakes looked like angels wafting down from heaven--angels sent by a Jester.

--Ron Sielinski  
First Place, Short Story  
*Cardinal Sin's* Third  
Annual Writing Contest

## Untitled

Joshua crossed the room, leaned forward staring intently at me, and said, "I can make you good." That's okay, I tell him. "No, no, really," he says. He draws his arms back and then thrusts them at me. "There!" he says, and again looks at me intently, waiting for my response. I smile and thank him, and he walks away, pleased.

He is in his room now, preparing to go to the drugstore. He will buy a bottle of Dristan nose spray, break the top off, and drink it. Then he will stay in his room the rest of the afternoon. I don't know what he does in there. Darin said one time he walked in there and Joshua was sitting on his bed concentrating on his hands, which were arm's length away and pointing at his eyeballs. "I'm drawing electricity from my eyes," he explained. Darin worries about the nose spray, but reasons we can always use more electricity.

Joshua wondered how I wanted to be made this year. I told him the old model was fine and I would stick with it. He nodded sagely, and said he was waiting until Christmas for the girl he made to come back. "She's really pretty," he said. "I figure she'll come back around Christmas because there was Christmas music playing when I made her." If she doesn't come back this year, he's moving to North Dakota. He doesn't know anyone in North Dakota, and has never been there.

Darin tells me Joshua is 42 and has an IQ of 140. The phone rings, and Joshua picks up the phone and talks to his mother. He needs money, he tells her. When he hangs up he tells me he is only six in chronological Earth years.

Joshua complains that he doesn't understand Earth people. Supposedly the most intelligent species, but he doesn't see why. "How smart can something be that shits everything it eats?" I smile and he follows my gaze, then runs outside to greet the mailman.

Later Darin mentions an art museum. "I saw the secret plan," says Joshua. "It was in a museum." He goes on to explain that it is black and white, with circles and triangles, and he recognized it right away but no one else who saw it knows it's the secret plan. It looks just like a modern painting, he says, and wonders if it's still there. He doesn't know if he'd still be able to recognize it.

The girl Joshua made died, I found out today. When I picked him up from the hospital this morning, he told me she'd made a cut inside her elbow and killed herself; his mother told him. No, he says, that's not right. That girl died of leukemia; the second one he made cut herself and died. I ask what he is going to do, and he doesn't know. Making people is hard, he says. You sweat a lot, and he doesn't know if he has the energy anymore. "Will you make me good today?" I ask, and he smiles.

--Beth Medley  
Second Place, Short Fiction,  
*Cardinal Sin's* Third Annual Writing  
Contest

