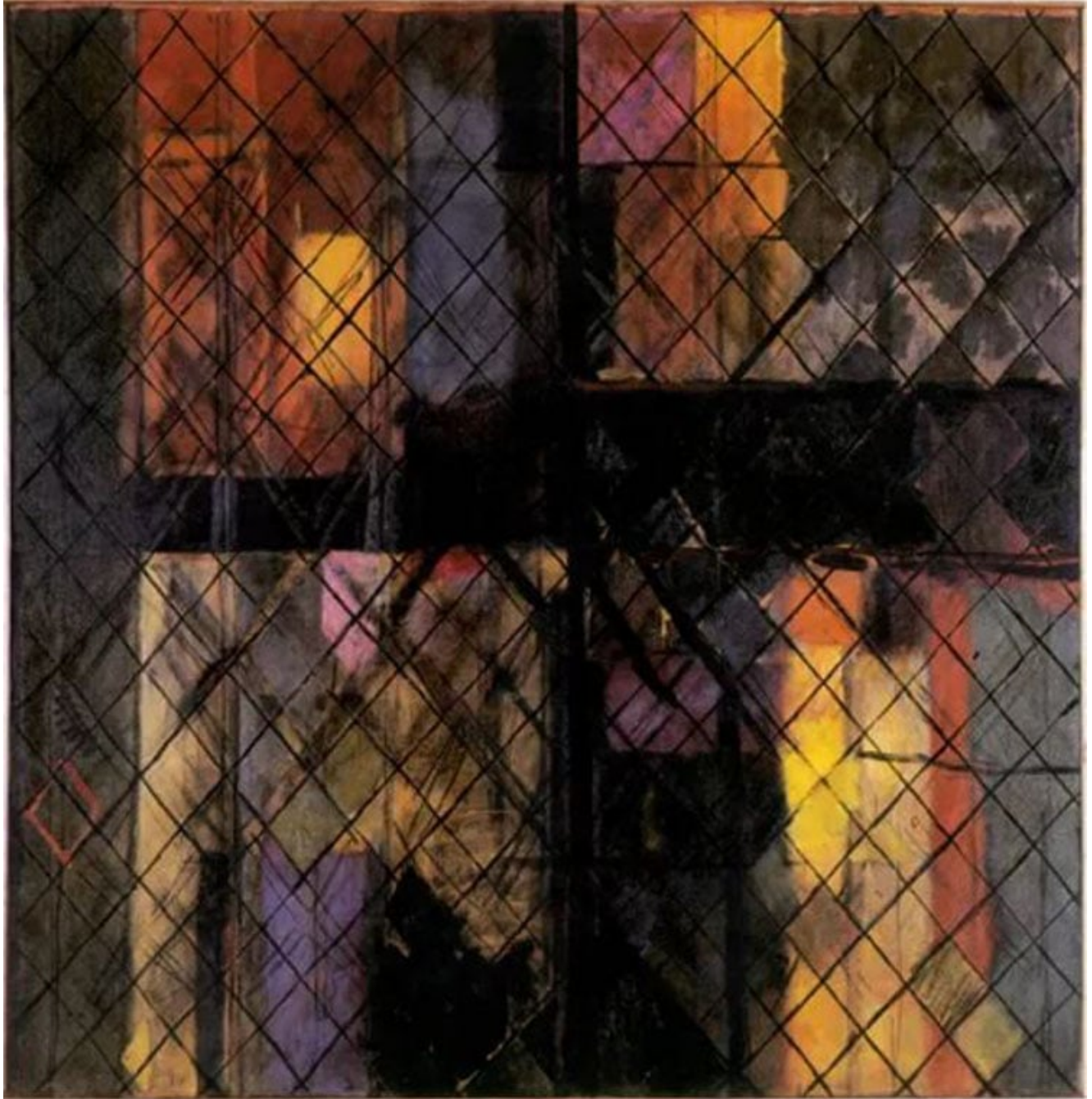


# Guilt, Obit, & No Man

by [Chris Bullard](#) (June 2024)



Gates— Bill Rice, 1980

## Guilt

Leaky as a cracked cement  
cistern, my mind retains  
only a residue of facts,  
circling like fallen leaves  
around the miry bottom  
of the tank, not enough  
in memory's fountain  
for a thirsty dog to lap.

History I've dammed  
behind excuses steams away,  
wisps from a kettle held  
above the gas flame's hiss,  
evaporating heavenward,  
like a summer rain reversed.  
The angel's share departs,  
bearing with it my misdeeds.

Am I thus forgiven? I can't  
be blamed for what I don't  
possess. Like classmates  
in high school albums, my sins  
have names that I've forgotten,  
their number as indeterminate  
as the sum of sleeping pills  
I've taken from the bottle.

## Obit

Seeing in *The New York Times*  
that Kinsella's bought it,  
I think to summon up  
his poems on the internet,

but find "Mirror in February"  
co-opted by pop-ups for Disney  
princesses and Quaker Oats,  
perhaps, the sort of images  
that his line, "idling on some  
compulsive fantasy" presaged.

The framing ads are compelling:  
sleek ships playing on sparkling  
seas, cereals distributing health  
to merry families. This is  
what we're here for in America.  
So much skill goes into making  
everyday things look better  
that the blandishments of the screen  
are more intriguing than the musings  
of some poet reflecting on his age.

Kinsella's words went with him,  
repatriated, as we all will be.  
Swiping left on introspection,  
our electronic reflections return  
touched-up pictures of self-satisfaction.  
Bad thoughts won't make you a star.  
Absent the sag of history at the eyes,  
we can live our own best selfie.  
The magic mirror in the cell phone  
says, "You are a pretty one. Yes, you are."

## **No Man**

Since I abandoned my name,  
I have become unknowable  
to monsters. Though they

drop boulders on my ships,  
turn my men to animal form,  
snatch friends off the decks,  
I am impervious to their brute  
selection, seemingly immortal,  
not by the approval of the gods,  
but by my status as a nonperson,  
an invisible participant in my own epic.

My identity on hold, I travel  
without a flag of convenience  
over oceanic dimensions, unlabeled,  
a zero on the customs form, drifting  
like flotsam not worth the salvage,  
with the freedom of transient goods.  
And yet, I fail at convincing myself  
that all the islands on the flat map  
are equal. I see each as a relay point,  
a connective link to a single origin.

Death cannot follow one  
who has given up his own existence,  
but now I don that possibility  
as I would my old battle gear.  
Deposited at a mostly forgotten  
home, where a single dog greets  
my presence, I take my last  
anonymous pleasure before entering  
the suitors' mess where I draw  
my bow and slay any who do not  
recognize my ancient human title.

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**Chris Bullard**, a native of Jacksonville, Florida, is a retired

judge who lives in Philadelphia. In 2022, Main Street Rag published his chapbook, *Florida Man*, and Moonstone Press published his chapbook, *The Rainclouds of y*. Finishing Line Press has accepted his chapbook, *Lungs*, for publication in 2024. He was nominated this year for the Pushcart Prize.

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