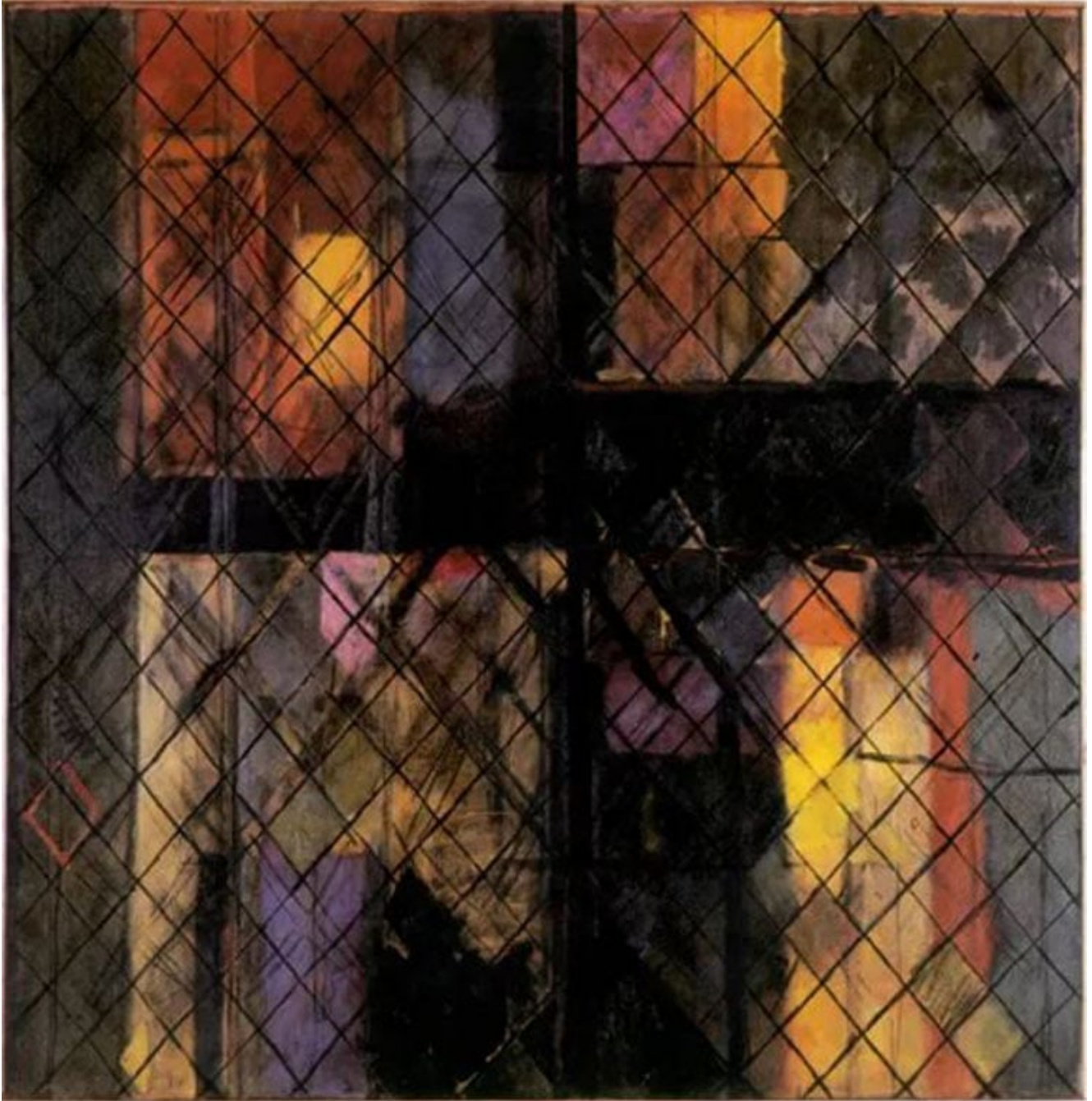


Guilt, Obit, & No Man

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.

[Table of Contents](#)

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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