

How High the Walls

By Gary Beck

When some folk grew tired
of horsemen ravaging their crops,
wives, food for winter,
they built walls,
not overly imposing,
but an obstacle
to annual degradation.

And as the hordes increased
desperation for sustenance
possessed the riders
and they stormed the puny walls
to take what they needed.

Then the folk built bigger walls,
learned to defend them
against incursions,
until the raiders moved on,
riddled with sickness
desperate for water,
and the tantalizing treasure
behind resistant walls
would not be theirs
for another year.

When the raiders returned
the following spring
they brought ladders,
scaled the walls,
sacked the town,
slew the people.

Survivors reached another town,
urged them to build
bigger and stronger walls,
the only remedy
for the threat of invasion.

Horror Show

By Gary Beck

There is an illness in the land,
a spreading disease
of economic terror,
millions herded to poverty
joining the already overburdened.
And as the roots that bind us fray
acts of madness become normal,
as demented rampages no longer chill us
accepting the occurrence easily
of lunatic's plans resulting in slaughter
of roommates, schoolmates, colleagues,
massacred in a blood bath
that should horrify the nation,
instead we stare for a moment
then dial on.

Questions of Life

By Gary Beck

This morning
while I was eating
a tiny bug
walked across my table.
Without thinking
I crushed it,
rolled it in my napkin,
tossed it in the trash.

I did not consider
its need to live,
its value,
its purpose,
its right to exist.

I idly wondered
for a moment
before I went on
with my meaningful day,
did it have consciousness?
Did it do more
than eat, reproduce?

I do not know enough
to place this insect
in the scheme of things
where many creatures
are inimical to man,
just not as inimical
as man to all living things.

Did I erase
a genetic building block?
Did I commit murder?
Then I remembered
our war on nature,
the endless destruction

Writing Raw

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of our home planet,
and the death of a mite
faded to insignificance.

Collision Course

By Gary Beck

The roads of man
scar the land
pale reminders
of violent assault
on the resisting earth.
As concrete spreads
and greenery declines,
our atmosphere may weary
of supporting respiration
and only the wealthy
can afford to buy oxygen,
to breathe a little longer
than poor folk.

A Day in the Park

By Gary Beck

A homeless man
brought two cats
in cat boxes
to Bryant Park
and let them out
on a short leash.
They looked fat, torpid, slow,
but intently watched
the park sparrows
hopping around,
searching for food,
oblivious to feline menace
never having seen cats before.
The fattest cat
watched a baby sparrow approach
oblivious to feline menace,
cat muscles tensed, sprang,
fast for an obese beast,
snatched the sparrow in its claws,
bit it savagely.
The baby fluttered for a moment,
died without knowing who killed him,
for the birds of Bryant Park
have a protected enclave
in the violent city,
and unlike urban people
face few dangers.

Gary Beck bio: Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director, and as an art dealer when he couldn't make a living in theater. He has 11 published chapbooks and 1 other accepted for publication. His poetry collections include: Days of Destruction (Skive Press), Expectations (Rogue Scholars Press). Dawn in Cities, Assault on Nature, Songs of a Clerk, Civilized Ways (Winter Goose Publishing). Perceptions and Displays will be published by Winter Goose Publishing. His novels include: Extreme Change (Cogwheel Press) Acts of Defiance (Artema Press). Flawed Connections has been accepted for publication (Black Rose Writing). His short story collection, A Glimpse of Youth

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(Sweatshoppe Publications). His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City.