

Literary page

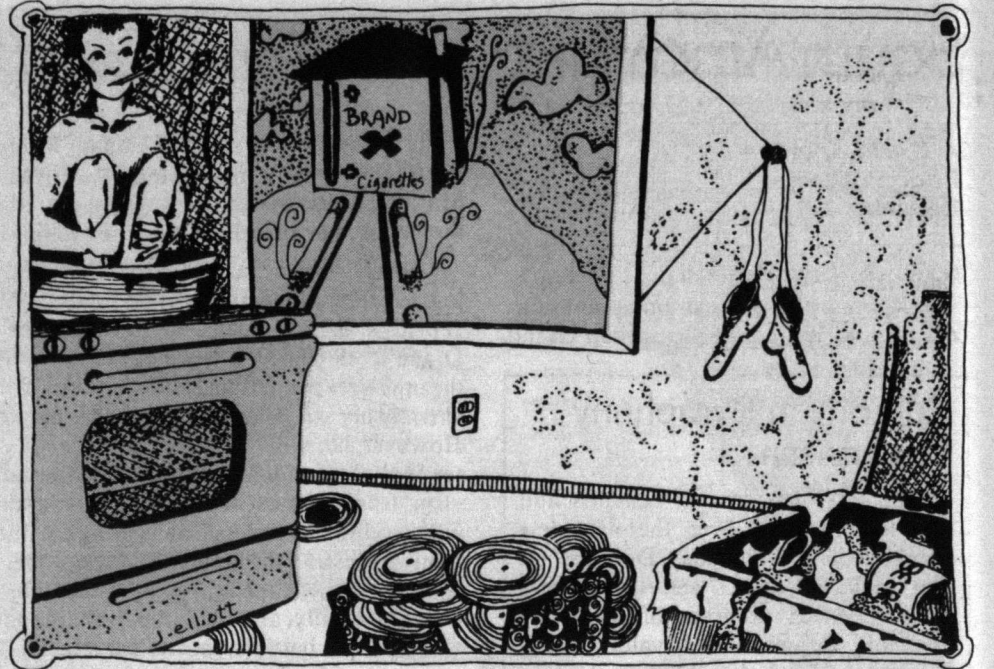
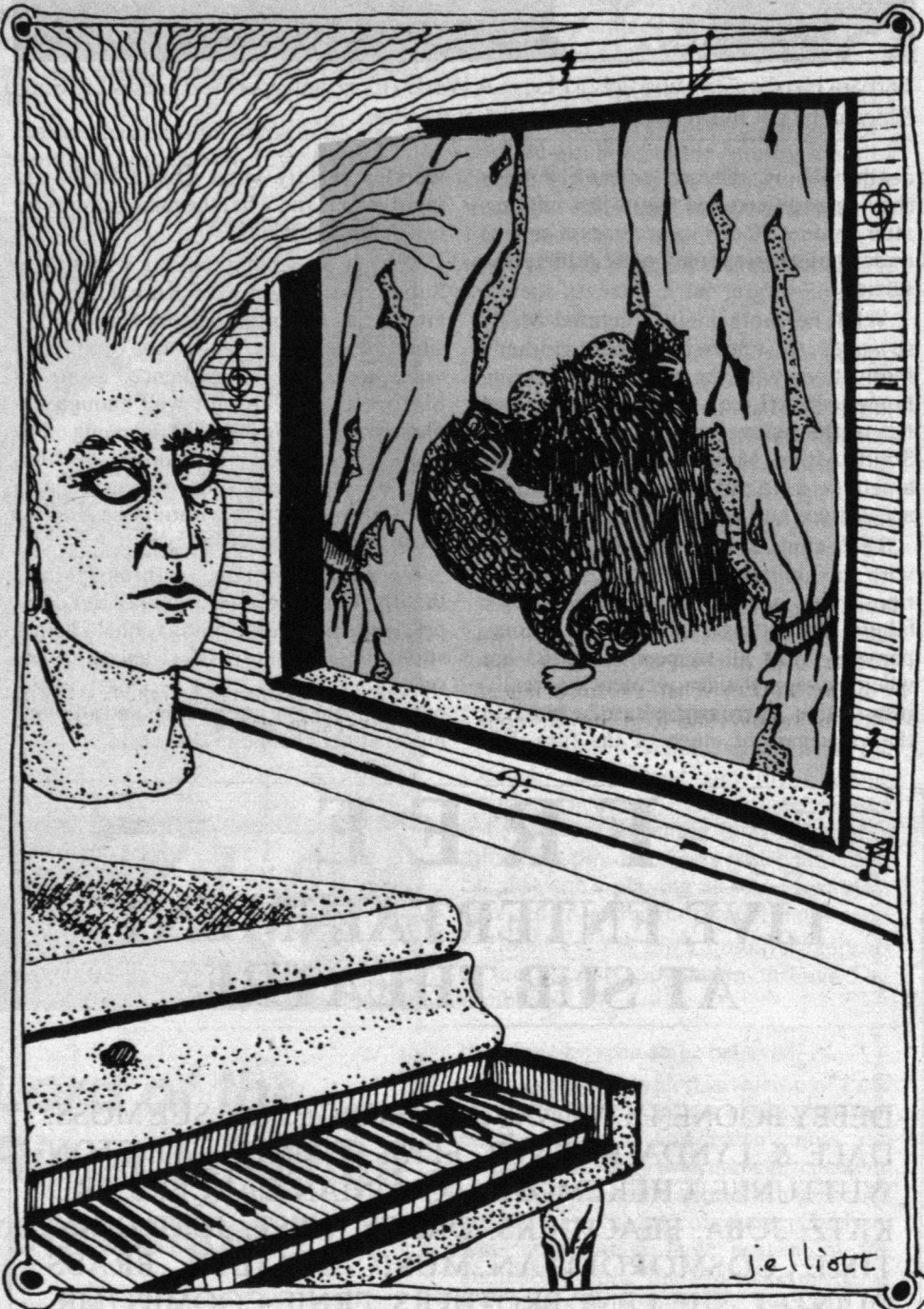
# Cathy

by Neil Scotton

Why? The smell too. Why that jamjar of melting food scraps on the windowledge? Grabs my eyes before they can break through the glass onto the frosted garden outside. I put them in there, why? Bacon rinds, misplaced peas, a crust of quiche, a quarter of tomato. Melted by the creeping green mould into a mulch. Miss go-out-and-get-em' Catherine, not so nubile anymore, Evans BA (Hons), conqueress of three anthropology professors. Catherine and her miniature compost heap, her manure garden. Funny word "manure." Reminds me of a composer. "Why of

course my dear, you're so silly, that's not Mozart it's Eberhardt Manure, symphony number five in T sharp minor, opus 99. Edgar and I saw him conduct only last month. It was *unforgettable*. (Catherine, with vehemance): "Manure would have difficulty conducting a bus and as for that orchestra, they're a rotting concoction of minor homosexuals, living on diminished wages..."

I can't be bothered with wit. Alas alack, I've lost the knack. Augmented, diminished, major, minor, flattened fifths, extensions of the seventh chord, the eleventh and the thirteenth which bring us of course to jazz. Stripy mint humbugs my saviours. "Charlie



Parker, hey man you're cool." Manure again. Confused shrieking of drug-crazed black Americans blowing down hock-shop instruments with nicotine-stained lungs. Or in translation: a bad sound. Another thing destroyed by the fashionable trumpeting of the glossy magazine.

Concerned and caring Jane calling at two. We'll kill time together. Jane, a devout non-career girl, benefactor of the Third World and of the mentally handicapped. The West created the Third World so that they can feel better. Buy a bag of rice for an Ethiopian to show you care, preferably before you have the jacuzzi refurbished, or before you enroll for that stress management workshop. She'll wear her green and pink salvation army pixie boots, a bit of daring to set off her proletarian fancy dress. George Orwell said that or did some old Etonian communist homosexual say that about him?

A sluggish fly explores my compost heap. I'll trap him in there with my humbug wrapper. More disgusting. Its wings vibrate against the slip of plastic. Reminds me of squashing flies that had caught between the plastic sheet of our neighbour's do-it-yourself swimming pool when I was little. Why kill? My brother and I, pressing until their abdomens burst. Working round both sides, leaving a trail of brown smears against the plastic. Maybe I always lusted after ugliness. Memory always has these treats in store, one moment amnesia, the next a parade of past horrors come crashing in.

It's got free, exploring, buzzing against the window. A burst of "Vapona" is in order. Rid yourself of these unpleasant creatures and die yourself of skin cancer when there's no more ozone left. There, a liberal dose, coated from compound eye to abdomen and in it goes. Another addition

to Cathy's compost heap.

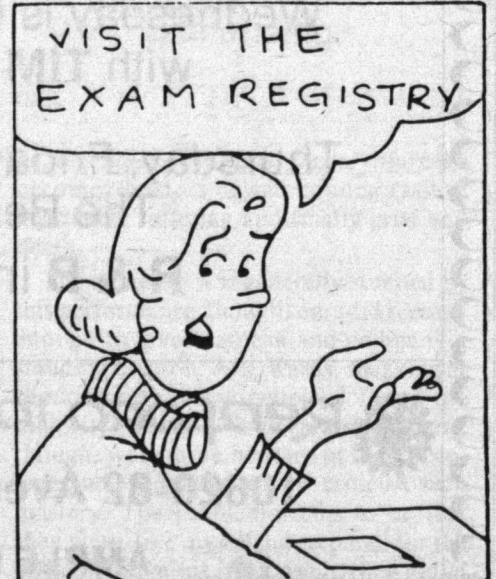
Jane and Cathy, the Anthropology department harlots. Open to all comers, as it were. Three years wasted. Three years trying not to be bright young things and being bright things. Cathy, prize exhibit at graduation, "the girl who slept her way to mediocrity," every professor's bit of fluff, doing multiplication tables in my head waiting for them to play through their erotic symphony. And dependable Jane will arrive and talk about the things I talk about because she's strangling her ego in order to be caring. I'll watch her positive body language culled from her nights spent in chilly college rooms being lectured in counselling techniques by a professor who smells of mothballs. My words tick along, piling up and collapsing through the floor leaving nothing. And all the time Jane's eyes will tell me she has problems of her own.

The mould has advanced since yesterday. Saprophytic, macrophytic, symbiotic, commensalism. "Comment ca va" said the spore to the wilted tomato. Even Cathy's manure heap has a plot to do, a different episode every day. Different rotting things come and go, sometimes even a new arrival and a new smell. My decomposition is complete so I've no plot left, just a brain I've been told that can't stop rotting other things.

Cigarettes are like boot polish in my mouth, yoghurt like emulsion paint. Similes. Diagnosis please: "I can't taste." Lift eyes and see my face staring back. More ugliness. Look long enough and it's not my face anymore but a monster with white pupils that reflect the kitchen light. "Hello glasshopper." Feeling sorry for yourself is disgusting.

Time for another humbug. Wake up my mouth with your 3000 decibel taste. Sylvia

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