

COMMENTARY / Robert Kroetsch

I liked "Above Two Forks" because it makes a ferociously anti-symbolic reading of an archetypal situation. The writer takes a loaded situation and keeps the focus on (my careful misreading) the mouth of the barrel of the gun. History, by a perverse reloading, becomes fiction. We are made witness to the phenomenology of experience, and at the same time denied symbolic reinterpretation. I got mad when I first read this story; then found myself going back to it.

I liked in "White Rabbits" the sheer presumption of someone thinking Joyce is still a mode of fictional presence for the contemporary de-authored author, and then his acting on it, and then his getting away with it. Yes: the transfer into the local of what has become a characteristic of defunct Modernism and (against Joyce's intent, surely) an international mode. A grotesquerie of *déjà vu* and the New (going, going, gone) World.

I liked in "Lily and the Salamander" the beautiful (yup, I mean it) opening sentence. It both disarms and dares, taking us into and out of the world of fictional conventions. I liked the "maddening" attention to domestic detail. I liked the prolonged meditation on predicament, the exquisite pain of delay. In the end I (came to) like salamanders.

Most of the submissions could have used another rewrite, with more attention to language. There was not enough writerly awareness of language itself as subject.

Violence is an integral part of many of these stories. I was interested in the degree to which violence has become a part of literary discourse. Traditionally, form accommodates or swallows up violence, but here violence resists that coercion. It's not violence for violence's sake, but violence as the place where individual speech breaks through inherited language and its forms. We live in a time, in a place, where we must speak violently to break the stasis of a homogenized world.