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WORK AND PLAY

MIAM 2

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WORK DAY

The sequence is: anticipation, non-delivery, murder.
They trip us up. Suspense, this hanging by a thread,
these dislocated thumbs, the numbness which rewards their dull blank stares
with white caresses, careless words, worse! brutal thoughts.
Anxieties: relieved by fits or gusts of aimless exaltation,
little highs that level out the lows
till seemliness is all, consumption - tireless - an ordeal,
retreat an issue raised to be dissolved in sighs, belonging, use.
The remedies: much branching out, uh, mistresses, blind faith,
remarks directed to the wings, the wings, wild nights, excursions.
I was anxious to find out. This knowing things,
does it suffice? Is it enough to know
that time is ripe, God man's best friend, and the upshot for those
otherwise unscathed senility?
Excursus. First day of the regimen: ecstasy to rise
unclouded by the cares that seive attention. Cares unclouded. Rice.
Attention to the details. Niceness. All is absent skies,
wind riding high, blonds, smiles, attention.
Now he repeats his lines.
The smothered drawl affects to raise our sights to finer things.
Applause starts in the wings. Meanwhile, the news -
of sameness - rises in the south, its rapid spread unchecked by catcalls,
boos,
"Geronimo!" Then: aspidistras, radishes, the nascent dawn,
wet kisses, cherished dream, the dawn unloose their awful clouds of
stillness, unconcern, the winding down to silence.
It all collapses into lightness, air, redundancy,
a comment on the planeness of our days, in which we do
our level best to place or phrase the randomness defining us
in ways recalling primal chaos, liquid purpose, flow.
Infernal two-step: out, now in.
He breathes, we breathe, then
breathless it becomes another day.

MIXED STATES

Blessedness: condition less inspired than visited,
by rail or telephone, an expedition ruinous if not foreseen
but still unplanned for. Take this brace of tickets:
five-fifteen, winging to the airport.
I really don't like mornings much, at all.
It's impossible to make poetry sound just like speech.
It's impossible to make poetry just sound, like speech.
It's not possible to make poetry just sound, like-
ness repels synonymy, but is it possible to make poetry just speech?
If symbolizing cognizance of all implied, do not forget to add
the total affect to this sum, reduced
proportionately as the line heads up to zero,
where it flattens out against the wall, which (painted green)

I do not see, because of sheets of steel, bent
wisely, or of tin, perhaps an alloy, and the quest for order
all pursue in this electric metered gloom. The mail piles up,
it piles as I envision warehouse full of mail.
Who advocates its burning? I deliver fire, which purifies,
they claim. Let fire reduce this mess of dotted lies, bad faith, uneasy
purchase on the state of things collapsing daily in these parts:
collapse of western civilization, or more properly
of capital, its joyless tensest effort
to spell self-interest "thine." This fools only
trashmen, paid to haul the refuse out. Now,
out is everywhere, and as for those who sow it,
whence shall they reap the fruits of labor,
lest the field lie fallow, seeded with salt
tears by widows, orphans, overeducated unemployed?
Do I refuse to strew this landscape with these tokens of the bonds
that bind us, all day long? My hands are full, but is this
all? they ask. It never was. Or else it isn't right,
or if it is, despite them, which it often is, not noticing, they go.
Only his intractability, the more infuriating if one terms it
reason, meets their nostrils, flared against the wind
to catch some sign of meekness, tameness, life, erratic pulse
betraying flaws in confidence. In America (I quote)
the race goes to the loud, the solemn. Speak with slightest irony,
self-deprecation: you will be thought frivolous - perhaps even a bad person!
Thus, this advice for the unwearied: Rise before dawn.
Eat meat. Read books. Be mindful of the teachings of the eye
that floats, uneasily, above the pyramid of values. "I
bow to your beginnings. My nod repeals
their toil, retracts their time for spinning stories of
well-spent." Hold your breath now. Caution!
Pause before the house inhabited by pigs, the orange and yellow ones,
the squirrels or swine perhaps. No matter: only I, the alphabet could care.
She isn't in. They don't come out. No one at home.
Only cars, parked three-deep in the blinding street, wink,
reflecting on my stupefaction, calm which
whooses in to fill the holes in my forbearance.
Another daily miracle. But is it right, this longing for felicidad?
the consequent, and total, poisoning effect?
Is no salvation cheap? If evil flowers...
Why not try to sell our story to the Times?
But in the meantime, he'd be better off
less typing things than listing ways to save one,
lest he sprain an ankle stumbling onto grace.

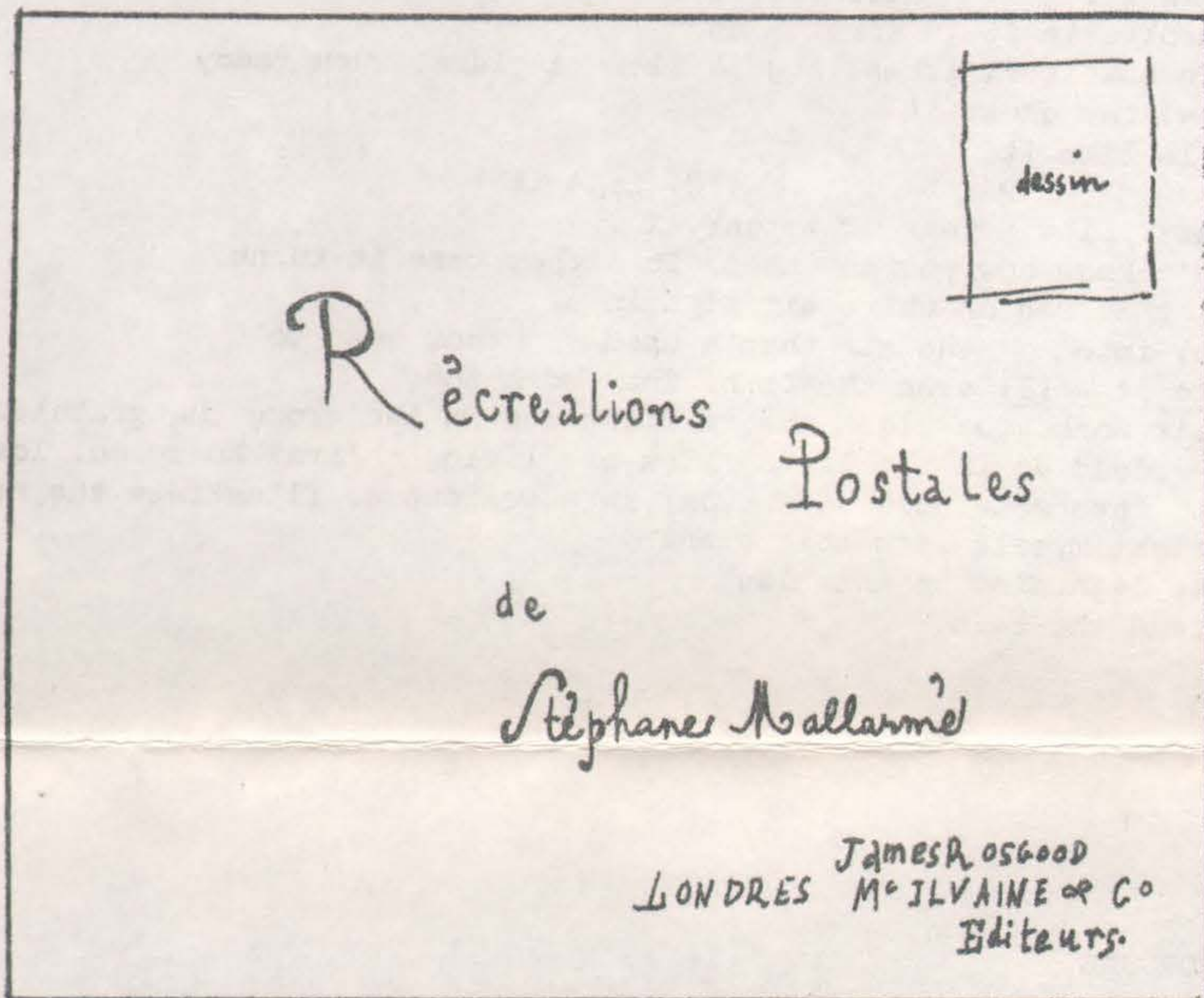
WINDOW PANE

The lightning came. It fell, last night, like
black or white or yellow rain
in long thin rigid strips. Or else in
long elastic stripes. Either it
bent where it hit or it
broke. Or both. Or neither did it
bend nor break. I am red. Again, I read it
came, like rays. It
raze it. He
erase it. I dissolve it in BLANK. Reverse it. I
dissolve in it, a fire. Read
here how it finishes: angels flame a glass. Then ready
growl the ghost it
feels like it
's R I P 'd. Like it
tears. Like a tear or a tear. I
don't know how you say that. In either case it turns.
All that red on white air rips in
two, into the air that's used that used to
note it well: even the fish. They work too.
Their work: the right that's righteous in the wrong the grateless
 dead do in the living rips us, living - live? Amaze me, love -
 into some colored shreds; in a residue we illustrate the race.
I right myself into this blank
like lightning in the black
I read the rain.

PROPOSAL

Dancing in the darkness of the neon noonlike din, which
features fancy solo passage-work, just before they all come in
with "Hello, where do you divide?" -
is this because their consciousness of selflessness
obliterates our knowing the conspicuous
together, save in pairs united only by their likeness
which know better not to be alone
than swim in needles, panic among stars
which skims the best part off, leaving otherness
the sweetness of a dimestore tithe, the soul
of blue-eyed penny-ante blues, which
racket in the distance. (Safety valve:
to open, picture strings.) One hundredth of its
promises, their richness, draws nigh.
Fred Astaire (he dips and slows), meet
Answer Man, who knows more angles than he need to,
though he cannot say what comes after next.
This impedes him, when he glides in,
trying not to slip too far, for buck-and-winging,
clipped though bootless, hath propelled him,
shivers to his chin, into the arms of no.
Hug me, shaman. Look, my big eye looms on the horizon.
Let's not confuse it, shall we? Let's just
take the cake, all silver-gilt, to the closeted,
and wrinkle our knuckles, till dawn do us part.

In his edition of the Mallarme-Whistler correspondence, Carl Paul Barbier describes a manuscript of the verses published posthumously in 1920, as Vers de circonstance, which was unknown to its compilers. "This manuscript contains ninety versified addresses. Mallarme copied each four line poem onto a separate numbered sheet, and arranged them in ten groups of nine, according to their recipients: poets, painters, writers, ladies, and so forth. He also made a sketch of a possible cover for the collection, an envelope with the title arranged as an address: 'Postal/Pastimes/by/Stephen Mallarme/James R. Osgood/LONDON McIlvaine & Co./Publishers.' Whistler was to provide a drawing in place of the stamp. For the back cover Mallarme suggested the reverse of an envelope, sealed in red with his monogram M." The project was dropped, for reasons not known.



MALLARMÉ: SKETCH FOR COVER, 'POSTAL PASTIMES'

The nine poems that follow are representations of some sonnets by Mallarme. The words composing them share meanings and sounds with words in nine poems by Mallarme. Translating, one captures or confects the simultaneity of an original in an other language. Thus, in no sense are these texts translations. In any case, Mallarme's poems offer little transportable content. The celebrated sonnet-in-x, for example, ("Ses purs ongles tres haut dediant leur onyx") has for content what could just as well be transmitted by a photograph in House and Garden or Architectural Digest: an interior, a setting, a decor - nothing less banal. In a letter of July 18, 1868 to his friend Henri Cazalis - Mallarme was twenty seven, married five years, teaching high school in Avignon, his first publication, ten poems in Le Parnasse contemporaine, two years behind him - Mallarme says of this poem, composed that July on spec for inclusion in an anthology, Sonnets et eaux-fortes, that "its sense, if it has one (but I'd be happy if it did not, simply because of the amount of poetry that it contains, I think) is produced by a mirage inherent in the words themselves." For Mallarme, the challenge of these null subjects lay in finding something in the presenting of them, if only a pattern, that yielded pleasure. In personal terms, a poem of Mallarme's produces a physical sensation in my mind. After making some of these representations of Mallarme's poems, I realized that I had been trying, in English, to reproduce the effect they make on me: a lot of little shocks, requiring constant vigilance, for brief but exciting periods of time. What else could one ask of poetry?

IMPROVISATION ONE

Intact, untouchable, alive: the day
today, soon drunk, prepares to tear a wing
off this forgotten lake, a heart which
like a rhyme still haunts the lapse of
flights not flown but still not fled.
Past sign, remembering to us that he,
delivered into fine but hopeless hands
for bailing out, to call a halt
when tiresome winter shone, its impotence
inflecting a long neck, is bowed in agony
inflicted by blank space, which he denies

denies all horror of the soul in which
his fathers root. A brilliant ghost,
appointed to the sight by his own shine,
is freezing thinking, in the cold
he dreams of: "is contempt" has clothed
the content, senseless exile of a scene.

MAY I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH?

for Cathy Carron

All at once, as if in play
Miss Muffet, who still wishes
skills revealed a lot of
wood in my resembles flutes

he seems me this, that essay
tinctured in attempted landscape
has some good when stopped it, I
in order to inspect your face

heard this in vain: blow I exclude
just to be uttermost limit
according as my fingers few preclude
he lacks the means it imitates

your tries so natural to laugh, bright
child, the charming skies efface.

ANOTHER FAN (MISS MALLARME'S)

for Helaine Seletsky

A dreamer, that I might plunge

into the light impure, untrod a way

to you remember: keep astride me, thin

my wing lies in thy hand.

The fresher the twilight, still

you come at each beating,

as prisoner strokes recoil from

delicately the horizon.

Vertigo is here, how winter hushes

space like a bearhug, kissing

mad to be born no thing, for thus it

may not spurt or pine.

So, sense, feel the animal paradise

that like a buried laugh rears up

drip from a coin in your mouth

beneath that singleminded fold.

The sceptre of the pink ridges

stagnates in the golden night. The east

is this blank shaft two pose

against some fires: an arm, a lei.

EVENTUAL (FOR MADAME MALLARME)

With how for a language,
only a nothing, flickering eyelids
opens the verse to be
decreed from its musical lodgings
too low to wing, know a career
this fan, if it's he the
same to which behind you,
dear, flash a mirrors
white limply, where to redew cinder
purchasing every grain
a speck of unvisual ash
alone to make me shagreen
always till it do oppress
your hands, the lace their shame.

IMPROVISATION THREE

Crushed by nakedness, a silent cloud
caressing silence, foundationless the altars
laved by yes-men, shrinks, the stirshy,
dipping into baseless bag of tricks,
some tomlight wreck "Silenzio!"
you know the one I mean, foam:
spew it, drool between their sheets still
number one, eliminates the senseless screw.
What else to do, if raging for a want
of fall from higher grace, the whole
shebang spread wide in glowing vain,
but turn a C-note into single strands of
trailing hair, the cheap, drowned
screaming side of one white child.

THREAT TO PEACE

Introduce me? To your story? How
means: hero, put to flight by
nakedness of heel, when chaste
it strays on virgin turf.
I mind glaciers, yes, but soon I learn
with care that sin is shiny
and incredulous. I learn that
one cannot prevent her shrill of
victory: she won, the bitch, it won!
Still, can you say that I'm not glad
to thunder, (rubies stud my hubs)
seeing what fire burns into air,
scattering its spares to kingdom come,
till purple dyes meaning, the wheel
on my one evening car.

ASHTRAY

for Gene Perry

One soul summed up, but not for shies
a way from spirit, gain in exile snow we
round in several's fun. May I
abolish smoke? The old ones blaze, we place
new fliers, chatting, in secure to go
attesting knowledge burns uh, silly bar.
For ash to separates it still
is kisses bright, seen in the fire.
Thus, silver core, sand, words less romance
preter naturally sex play baits the lip
excluding how you love. This flouts
the realistic we unveil when we're together.
But you're too near. It cuts to see
how waves erase the dictionary.

IMPROVISATION TWO

A dishcloth disappears in
to the doubt of big game,
opens ash, a blister, all wound down
on absence, eternal the delict.

"Got a light?"

This singleminded white con-
flict of guywire with same
flattens against the blond pane,
floating more than it buries.

Shaky who glides from sleep to dream,
trees to mount, slips a man: door
to the absolute musical nadir.

So that, given a window,
still no other belly, its own dawns
a son, possibly might be born.

SERIAL

for J-M. Straub and Danielle Huillet

The chevalier night of a flame in the ex-stream
of killing desires for the all to deploy in
supposing it say would die Adam, a crown would,
the front verse a shadow of ancientest Feuer
but always superior this goldless nude live is
igniting a fire always inner, the fraction
original meant to the only continue
the ball be in eye of the truthfully laughter
of nudity: hero he tenderly fuse with
she moving him startle fires, midnight retaining
the finger he simply by glorify woman
accomplish the lightning ahead of the exploit
of sowing in rubies the doubting she flays with
this joyous but tutelar torching: some passion!

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THIRD CLASS