

[Home](#)

[Current Issue](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Autumn 2007](#)

[Summer 2007](#)

[Spring 2007](#)

[Winter 2007](#)

[Autumn 2006](#)

[Summer 2006](#)

[Spring 2006](#)

[Winter 2006](#)

[Fall 2005](#)

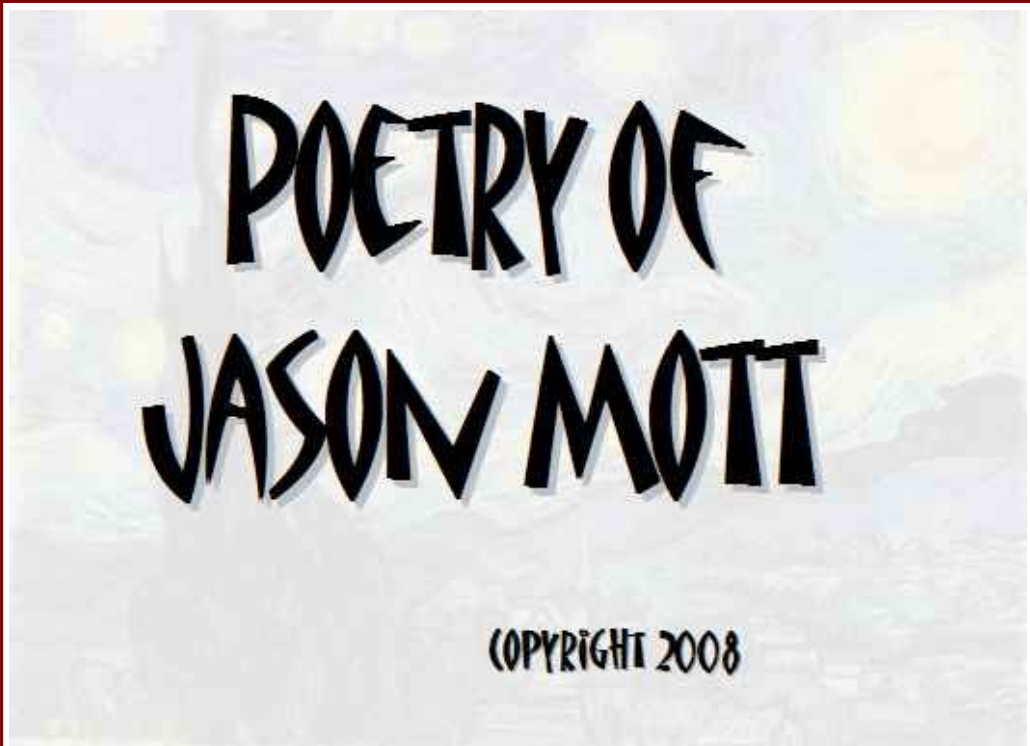
[Summer 2005](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[SNR's Writers](#)

[Contact](#)



## Portrait of the Writer as a Young Man

It is Mother's Day and the young man is not at home when the blood vessel in his mother's head falls in on itself. Boxers speak of being "punch drunk"--the body not knowing that the mind has already fallen so it moves of its own accord, unsteady.

A hull-opened ship dollied on the fingers of a flagging wind, she comes in from the garden and manages well enough to make it to the marriage bed that gave her three children--all of whom are away. Her body speaks to her husband. He hears only the television. In the arms of canned laughter she falls asleep, smiling, not knowing that she is smiling. Through the night, her dreams are wet, black clouds as a red tide rises inside her skull.

It is the next day when the young man returns from his trip, his arms hugging hard-sought comic books that will fill the holes in his collection.

The house is a ringing chasm he will not see as he adds his new gains to his collection--row after row of hero under mylar:

Silver Age X-Men, Golden Age Flash, Bronze Age this and that, high quality issues of the earliest Captain America--Joe Simon autographed the one far, far in the back of the collection.

This is the one the young man loves most, the one that cost him so much money he had to borrow from his mother because the seller said that it was only a matter of time before Simon was dead and death always increases the value of common things. (If the mother were here the young man would not consider showing it to her.)

She lies in a hospital bed, almost an hour's drive away, her tongue forgetting how to speak, the left side of her body seceding, giving up its ability to hold him--even if he would still let her--and her husband clings to a pay phone, dialing home again and again, as the son sprawls across his bed, eating one comic book after another. He does not hear the empty house. He does not see the half made sandwich drawing flies on the counter, the bucket of vomit in the mother's room, next to her bed, the telephone receiver overturned in the living room floor. His latest acquisition is the story of Captain America

---

regaining his sight after a battle with the Red Skull.  
It is old, but it will outlast the mother. The young man does not remember that yesterday was Mother's Day nor does he smell the scent of decay as his comic books--silent, unmoving, smiling as they lie in their tended beds--decay, completely unaware of him.

---

## **Captain America Visits the Veterans Hospital**

Even if a man has been chopped down  
to leglessness and lingering, worshipping  
at the alter of what used to be, he is not without  
his will to be so incomplete and gnawed--  
so human--that he cannot unwrap the bandages  
on his dangling hand and, with groaning  
effort and malice, offer up his middle finger--  
"middle" being inappropriate since the stump  
holds only two branches in its entirety.  
But, it is definitely the middle finger  
that he gives to me, shouting: Hey, Captain  
America, now that you've fucked me, pay me!  
Pay me my severance so that you can walk away.

---

*After Alan Dugan*

## **An Open Letter from the Red Skull**

Would it be that much easier if I went away?  
If I gave up the vintage wardrobe patterned after the SS  
and Death? If I disassembled the repulsor rays,  
the secret submarines I keep beneath arctic waters  
just in case of rainy days and governmental coups?  
What if I turned in my standing army? The militia of minute men  
waiting to march on wherever, whenever, and for whatever  
reason I happen to make up this week? Then what? Peace?  
Do all of humanity's murder plots cease because I give up mine?  
Am I the fountainhead of Evil? Do planes suddenly fly straighter  
upon my retirement? Do guns transmute to flora? Knives  
to knitting tools? Can Steve Rogers or Stephen Hawking  
honestly make such an argument? No. Of course not.  
But, still, even I fall victim to the occasional belief  
that I am the one and only God of War. So I take some time off.  
I curl up with a few good books in some quiet corner  
of some far away castle--windows shut, doors locked,  
no incoming calls, no internet, no newspapers, hardly even sunlight--  
and I call myself a pious monk of peace  
and I call the world a cogent mathematical formula,  
a logic circuit that, without me as a conditional,  
will eventually follow its own path to Truth, to Utopia.

Imagine my surprise when, starving, half-mad from loneliness,  
I emerge from my sabbatical fully confident that without me,  
without this face, this visage that so much reflects what humanity is  
most afraid of--bloody Death--the world has become warm, wet roses,  
and I find the Earth still swelling with graves, the sky thick with ash  
and gun smoke, every boney face of man trying to hide the blood  
beneath mere millimeters of flesh.

It is during these early moments, these heady times  
of rebirth, that, like any unwanted child, I know  
how much of yourself you see when you look at me.

---

---

**Copyright 2008, Jason Mott.** © This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.

---

**Jason Mott** has recently received his MFA from UNC Wilmington. He has published fiction, poetry and nonfiction in various journals including *The Kakalak Anthology of Carolina Poets*, *The Thomas Wolfe Review and Measure*.