

The Cenacle

Number 45 • April 2001
6th anniversary issue



Once there was a way to get back home ... —THE BEATLES

The truth is pleasurable.

Ric Amante, 4/20/2001

"Hello, is this the FBI?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I'm calling to report about my neighbor Billy Bob Smith! He is hiding marijuana inside his firewood."

"Thank you very much for the call, sir."

The next day, the FBI agents descend on Billy Bob's house. They search the shed where the firewood is kept. Using axes, they bust open every piece of wood, but find no marijuana. They swear at Billy Bob and leave.

The phone rings at Billy Bob's house. "Hey, Billy Bob! Did the FBI come?"

"Yeah!"

"Did they chop your firewood?"

"Yep."

"Happy Birthday, Buddy."

From Soulard's Notebooks

April 19, 2001
7:30 p.m. (or so)
On board Harvard-to
Downtown Crossing redline

Parent, Leni,

It was good talking to you again today—
I found myself smiling across the day, thinking
hopeful thoughts—recent state of blue diminished
— I'm ~~getting~~ assuming that the rest of your
day was swamped with work—

I'm going to be 37 in 9 days—strange
thing, Leni; I've liked being 36 for the most part—
many good things have happened this past
1 1/2 months— I've gotten used to it— 37 daunts
me somehow— to ascribe any meaning to an
age is silly, of course— but people do— a
birthday seems to involve both beginning &
conclusion—

that night I'll be in Connecticut with
old friends & I hope have Cenacle 45—
April 2001— 6th Anniversary Issue— neat, huh?
37 years of age, 6 years of magazine—
victories, delights—

-46-

[now on DC-to-
Malden Cr. orange line ①]

- Tonight after work sat in my armchair at Charles Hotel in Harvard Square - not napping like often, but copyediting my friend Barbara Brannon's story "The Darkroom" for new Cenacle - it's kind of a creepy Southern Gothic story - pretty good (really - changes I suggest are mostly of the cosmetic kind -

now toward home & first business there is to set up my computer's DSL connection - I hope that having a new computer & a fast internet connection will help me in varying publishing projects - it's been a protracted effort, essentially, for me to have the technology & know-how to run a small underground press by professional standards - to someday perhaps do this work for a living - I don't know how - work-in-progress is my Scriptor Press, first conceived when I was 18 years old (1982) & revived when I was 31 (1995) - & I am a continuing apprentice whose developing skills & natural abilities go completely unrecognized by Harvard Business School Publishing -

-47-

Perhaps for the best - Scriptor Press is mine & thus reflects what I'd call my traditional radicalism - the Magazine, the books, the website, the radio show, the literary meetings - these each & every one are rooted in the traditions of radical Art & thinking - I freely honour them & proudly carry them forth -




Though I don't know how or what, I am sure that as I get to know you better I will find among your thoughts the ideas seedful to the activities you will come to pursue - I sense your similar longing for both independence & meaningful work - together, I hope, we will support each other in these efforts -

the night won't be a long one - need for sleep whispering within - but the work done already & that in the next few hours will press additional worth from a day whose value was not found in what I was paid to do, but in what I chose to do additionally - HBSP is a stone - Art is a feather - Love always,
Ray ☺

The Cenacle

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Edited by Ray Soulard Jr. 

Secret Joy Amongst These Times by Ray Soulard Jr. 	1
Poetry by Joe Ciccone	7
The Darkroom by Barbara Brannon	11
36 Nocturnes (Third Series) by Ray Soulard, Jr. 	23
Aces and Eights by Gerry Dillon	55
A Short Guide about Psychedelic Drugs for the Explorers of Inner Space by Donald J. DeGracia	67
Boxes Redux (Immutable Phalanx) [a new fixation] by Ray Soulard, Jr. 	79
Poetry by Ric Amante	101
Notes on Contributors	105

Front cover illustration by Ralph H. Emerson; design by Barbara Brannon

Accompanying cassette features highlights from 9/23/2000 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting held at Roma Restaurant, New Britain, CT.

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Thank you to Barbara and all the many contributors who helped turn this one out in just four weeks!

With this issue I turn 37 and this magazine turns 6 . . . I guess it's still all good no matter how mysterious it continues to seem . . . love . . . desire . . . this life . . .

Ray Soulard, Jr.

*Secret Joy Amongst These Times:
The History of Scriptor Press,
1995-2001*

This book is dedicated to my Phamily in all times & places. You are not alone :)

Much thanks to Douglas Clayton & Jeff Seglin

*"Think for yourself
& question authority"*
Dr. Timothy Leary

Abstract

From its beginning in 1995, Scriptor Press has published the writing, art, & music of contemporary artists who work outside the current artistic mainstream, whose work is not regarded by this mainstream as legitimate work because it is intended for other than commercial consumption. It is the deeply-felt belief of this press that the artistic mainstream has isolated itself from the subtle but true changes occurring right now in the world on all levels, that devotion to commercial gain has blinded many to the secret joy amongst these times, a joy growing & spreading everyday.

This book will discuss the founding and history of Scriptor Press. It is intended to offer instruction & hope for those who feel isolated from their spiritual kin & yet who pursue the higher calling of Art day by day, whatever their circumstances. Blessed be.

SCRIPTOR PRESS IS NOT SO MUCH A BUSINESS ENTITY as a continuing mission, an advocate for artistic & social & individual freedom, a vehicle for disseminating reports of various kinds from what Aldous Huxley calls the "Antipodes" of consciousness. Its projects offer greater connection among persons, & seeks greater connection among persons. It is a laboratory for developing & mature artists alike to experiment with various kinds of expression. Its overriding concern is no less than aiding in the reinvigoration of the world. Love, not money. Art, not commerce. Nature, not war. Scriptor Press is a project entwined with countless historical movements bent on redefining the human landscape from that of brutal battleground to that of cosmic playground. This book will address these many matters in discussing the history of Scriptor Press.

Antecedents

Throughout the history of American literary publishing, there have been underground publications of various kinds; many of our most highly regarded writers and artists initially encountered rejection from the mainstream of their day, only to gain eventually widespread esteem.

Scriptor Press acknowledges several major influences from past countercultural literary movements. The first of these is Ralph Waldo Emerson & the Transcendentalists, a movement that flourished in the mid-nineteenth century. Emerson wrote of his times:

[A] number of young and adult persons are at this moment the subject of a revolution. They are not organized into any conspiracy: they do not vote, or print, or meet together. They do not know each other's faces or names. They are united only in a common love of truth and love of its work. They are of all conditions and natures. They are, some of them, mean in attire, and some mean in station, and some mean in body, having inherited from their parents faces and forms scrawled with the traits of every vice. Not in churches, or in courts, or in large assemblies; not in solemn holidays, where men are met in festal dress, have these pledged themselves to new life, but in lonely and obscure places, in servitude, in solitude, in solitary

compunctions and shames and fears, in disappointments, in diseases, trudging beside the team in the dusty road, or drudging, a hireling in other men's cornfields, schoolmasters who teach a few children rudiments for a pittance, ministers of small parishes of the obscurer sects, lone women in dependent condition, matrons and young maidens, rich and poor, beautiful and hard-favored, without conceit or proclamation of any kind, have silently given in their several adherence to a ..

Emerson was writing in 1839, but he might have been writing in the early 1920s or the late 1940s, or the early 1960s for that matter, when countercultural movements again brewed among people who "do not know each other's faces or names [and] are united only in a common love of truth and love of its work." In the early 1920s, these disparate persons began to gather in Paris, but their presence and influence ranged from Moscow to London to New York to San Francisco. Like Emerson's *Dial* literary journal (a publication that he edited after Margaret Fuller gave up the position, and whose roster of contributors included Thoreau and Bronson Alcott among many others), the figures of the 1920s depended on literary journals to transmit their art when they had no other options. Another version of *The Dial*, *Poetry*, *Secession*, & T.S. Eliot's *Criterion* were among the many "little magazines" that first published the likes of Hemingway, Pound, & Joyce. In the 1950s, it was the *Evergreen Review* & *Chicago Review* that were publishing Kerouac, Ginsberg, & Burroughs & their brethren to a small but devoted audience of readers. This tradition continued into the 1960s with such underground magazines as *The Floating Bear* & *Ramparts*.

What these several time periods, many periodicals, & countless numbers of artists have in common is that they faced a resistant artistic mainstream. They faced a conservative, even timid publishing industry too often concerned with the formulaic & the familiar. Yet what is also true is that in each period a ferment grew until it eventually re-invented the industry that had resisted it. The beneficiaries, of course, were & continue to be all of us, for it is the artists who are beyond the visible bend of the road who are in a position to tell us what we are going to encounter when we get there.

In the 1990s, the revolution in digital technology has led to

earthshaking occurrences in desktop publishing. The Internet, once a government & academic toy, has put human society into a state of rapid development undreamt of in past times. The publishing monolith will never again enjoy the power & influence it has had heretofore. What happens hereon is up to the leading-edge artists who have more control & freedom than ever. Will they acknowledge that mainstream acceptance is no longer the main impediment they face & press the boundaries of Art even further, even faster, ever deeper, ever vaster? Scriptor Press chooses to believe that many of them will, & it acts in accordance with this faith.

The greater truth, too, is that the mainstream ain't what it used to be. There now so many different kinds of outlets for creative expression, so much home technology available for dissemination work, so many different kinds of people spreading one kind of message or another, so much interaction between persons of different nations & cultures, that it is harder & harder to discern what stands guarded behind the ramparts & what still pounds upon the door from without. Since the late 1950s, & especially since the late 1960s, the counterculture & the mainstream have been infiltrating one another more & more. The battle is no longer generational nor even squares versus 'heads so much as it is vision versus fear. A vision of individual power & liberty versus a fear of giving people the choice to live their lives--trusting them to be decent, care for the weak & young, appreciate the beauty of the universe be it manifest in a grove of oaks or a young woman's smile, trusting that love & not selfishness is at the root of the human soul. It is a risk to give people their freedom; but while things are still shaking down, it is even more of a risk to be on the side of freedom. People who advocate legalizing marijuana & LSD, abortion rights, even greater sexual tolerance, one & all face harassment, if not worse, from those who fear the power of the free individual. But like the movie says, you have two choices: get busy livin', or get busy dyin'.

The Jellicle Literary Guild

In 1988 I read a book called *The Inklings* by Humphrey Carpenter about the WWII-era Oxford literary group whose members included J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, & Charles Williams. During the years in & around World War II, these three & their colleagues would meet at the Eagle & the Child pub as well as various of their homes-- on a weekly basis for years to read & discuss their works-in-progress.

I excitedly took this book's story as a blueprint for what my friends & I at Central Connecticut State University could do. We'd already been gathering informally at each other's homes for poetry, music, beer, & laughter for a few years. This book inspired me to up the level of ambitiousness.

For our meeting place I chose the back room at Roma Restaurant in New Britain, a congenial establishment close to the university. On December 29, 1988, we met there for the first time.

The mix of readings, guitars, strong drink, good food, and tavern atmosphere was a success from the start. In 1998, the Jellicle Guild's 10th anniversary came & went with the group still doing well, averaging eight meetings a year & twice-yearly being held around Boston where I have lived since 1992. By 1999's end, the group will have gathered eighty-eight times at Roma's & elsewhere. Forty to fifty men & women have over those years brought their stories, poems, plays, confessions, prose, music & songs to Jellicle Guild meetings.

The Cenacle

On April 1, 1995, I sat with my friends at Roma Restaurant & outlined for them a project I had conceived. The Cenacle would be a magazine that I would produce in my apartment in Cambridge, Massachusetts, & distribute to Jellicle Guild members. But this, I explained, was only the beginning. I would use my residence in the Boston area to find new writers, artists, & musicians, bring them to the Jellicle Guild meetings at Roma's & publish their work in *The Cenacle*. I emphasized that I meant this periodical to aid us in expanding our circle as well as a vehicle for getting us into print on our own terms. Disappointing experience with submitting work to publishers, with depending on commercial businesses for producing the magazines we had made years earlier, & with open-mic poetry readings around Boston led me to decide that we would do all of this ourselves—finance, produce, & disseminate *The Cenacle* & other projects exactly as we chose. I planned ten issues of *The Cenacle* a year to go with the 10 Jellicle Guild meetings I was scheduling at that time.

On April 29, 1995, I arrived at Roma Restaurant in New Britain, Connecticut with an armful of copies of *The Cenacle* #1 April 1995, a magazine whose pages my friends had helped me fill. We were all delighted. I was ecstatic.



To be continued in Cenacle 46, June 2001

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If Burning Man didn't exist, we'd have to invent it; why don't you?

11 01

Poetry: Joe Ciccone

New Day

The guns of the assassins were dismantled
and built into a stairway

Our brains
were pulled from our noses and our
heads filled with all the old folk songs

And tomorrow it never came

The railroad ties were painted like rainbows
The sun faded and the moon rose

And no one was laughing anymore

We followed trails of circumstance into the woods
Looking for any two things that would fit
We were promised something better than this

We longed for our working-class tragic dawns

I set my clock to the boiling of the compounds
Praying to science for a chance discovery
Though it owes me nothing

Railroad Bill

Then I realize there is all about me
a low humming tune
and the outline of ivy crackling in flame

When I arrived there was RAILROAD
and it hung 'like a noose round my neck'

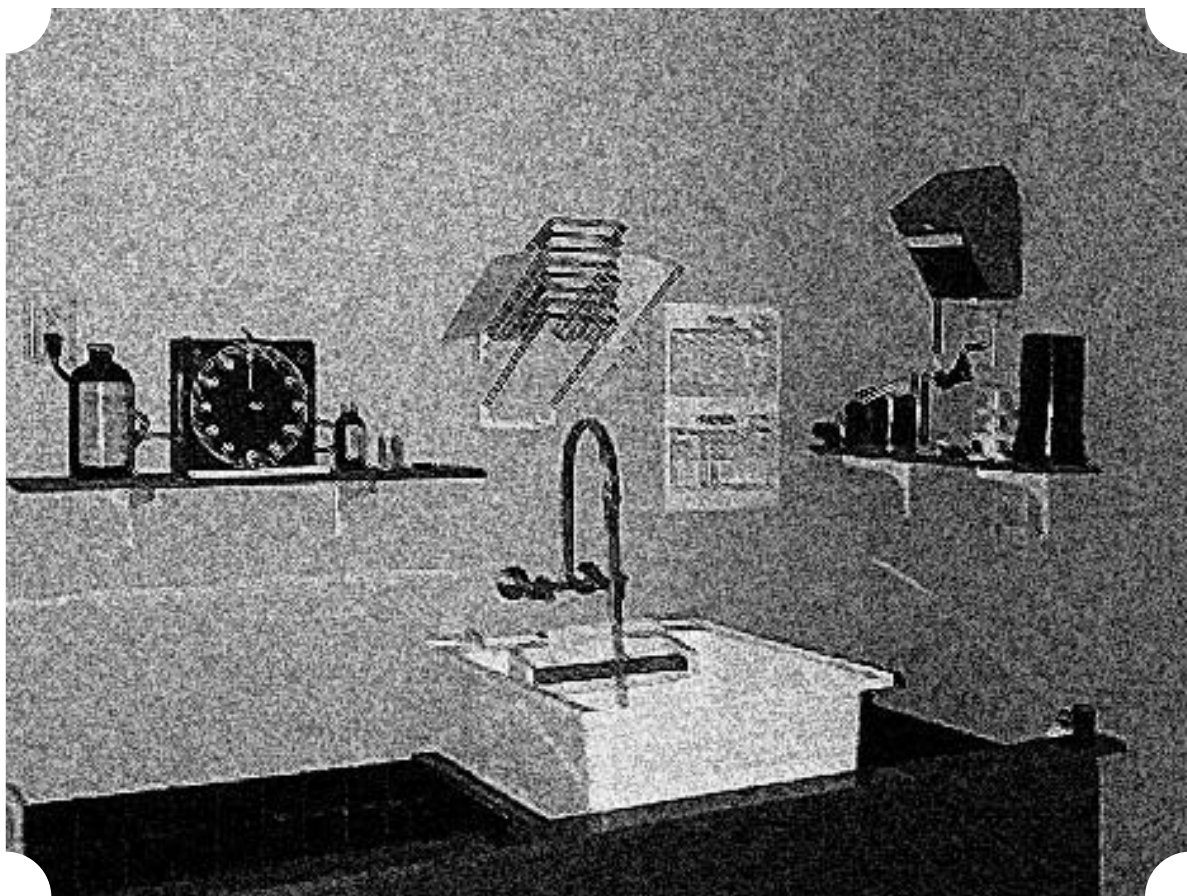
Now there is IRON ORE
the moon washed out by the sea
solidly becoming longingly DREAM
I see it from the pasture parking lot where a thousand wires
shoot through the crumbling pavement
like nerves

LANTERN must be used
to see the heart with a few beats left

NO. 43 has fallen from its trestle
into the mud of eternity

Tone Poem

I've been dancing 'round these bass notes
like a ribbity frog bouncing among his lily pads
higher then high
lower than low
snaking 'round corners
trailing off
then bounding back from above
moving forward up horizontal ladders while the earth
turns off its course and gravity is drunk
with shame
my name is all I have left my friend
my name



Fiction: Barbara Brannon

The Darkroom

THEY HAD BOUGHT THE HOUSE for virtually nothing, even knowing that Chimneyville was too dangerous a place to live, really. The district had been steadily drained of the cachet it enjoyed a century and a half ago, when the elite of plantation society maintained homes in both town and country. But virtually nothing was all they had, starting out, and at any rate the prospect of restoring a run-down, ruined house with a history appealed to their sense of adventure. Their friends and families unanimously thought them crazy for not choosing a less extreme course.

You never did learn the meaning of moderation, son, his mother had said, shaking her head. I have to admit, when you make up your mind to do a thing, you for damn sure never do it halfway.

In another few years, perhaps, their foresight and tenacity would pay off. Even now, the eastern edge of the district was lauded among preservationists as a hopeful instance of what young professionals were doing downtown, and an architectural brochure featured a photo of their street, though tourists were still cautioned against venturing into that quarter after dark.

Lucia and Heath found that the big Victorian house gave them room to work, separately or together, as they wished, in an environment more conducive to their creative pursuits than suburbia. *This is a place we can make truly our own*, they had told each other during the daring flush of optimism that led them to dial the agent's phone number, *a space where we can make love and art without interference.*

But at the outset, Heath's name would have been recognized by no one who hadn't seen his photo credit in the community magazine, and Lucia's first novel existed only as a hesitant outline in a spiral notebook. Cash was tight.

They came to an agreement: Lucia would keep her full-time job as an advertising copywriter until they had renovated the house and built up some reserves. Her regular paycheck and Heath's occasional freelance assignments would cover the bills, while he devoted as much time as he could to noncommercial work. *The Goal Is Freedom*, they lettered in colored chalk on the little blackboard in the kitchen.

Other old houses appealed to them somewhat, and they almost let Heath's parents talk them into a nice bungalow on the outskirts of town that needed only a few minor repairs. Nothing drew them, however, like the White House.

It was called that—the Rather B. White House, actually—because its widowed owner at the turn of the century, a woman named Rather Brown, married a man named Mr. White and then outlived him too. Fifty years before that it was the pied-à-terre of a spice merchant who also occupied a white-columned mansion up the river. There were tales that outlasted the home's prime of a romantic liaison, a child, a scandal. Scattered bits of the story had come to Heath and Lucia.

None of that could do much for the house's desirability once the area in which it was located fell victim to urban blight, as fashionable families deserted and formed new centers of society and succeeding generations became unable to keep up the properties as they required. The scions of comfortable commerce allowed the elegant addresses to lie vacant or be sold to absentee landlords who rented for what little they could to the lowest-income segment of the population. The White House had been boarded up for some time, light fixtures wrapped in old sheets and plumbing shut off, when Heath and Lucia rescued it.

The side streets, never wide enough for two-lane automobile traffic, had been provided with a rude paving that was not regularly maintained. When rain filled the muddy potholes, the roughly crowned lanes took on an appearance much as they must have had when the grid for this corner of town was originally laid out. Yard fences, some iron, some wooden, came right up to the shallow gutters, and when hedges once neatly confined inside the railings were allowed to grow tall and leggy over them, the effect produced was of an ancient forest through which narrow paths cut and above whose moss-draped branches only the turrets of crumbling castles showed. It was in this latter-day incarnation, in the 1930s, that the neighborhood had been given the nickname by which it was now known.

Heath and Lucia had wandered the paths by day, examining the tops of some of these towers: here a mansard roof with a dormer left windowless to admit the elements; here the rotting cornice and ornate corbels of a Greek Revival; here a loose shutter of an upper-story plantation-style window. The wanderers were an odd sight in the black slums. When they bought the house few could see how they found any hope in it—but all watched.

Work on the house progressed week by week as they could afford it. When enough repair had been accomplished on the roof to make the house dry and on the doors and windows to make it secure, they moved in. This they did by night, to keep their belongings as little in evidence as possible; not that their furnishings were opulent or their collections valuable, but they thought it wise to keep the cameras and enlargers out of sight.

Heath took the small, narrow, windowless space off the kitchen, at the back, for his darkroom. Perfect, he judged: light-tight after sealing a few chinks in the clapboard; adjacent to the kitchen plumbing that, though outdated, was at least present; isolated, for

privacy while he worked. Heath liked to operate alone and, even in later years when he could easily afford it, employed no assistant on his shoots or in the darkroom. He did all of his own lighting, processed his own film and made his own prints, carried his own equipment, used timers and remotes to give him more flexibility. Not even Lucia ventured far into that aspect of his life, however faithfully she shared his artistic vision.

His studio, such as it was, occupied a cheap warehouse loft elsewhere in town. For the sort of commercial assignments he did, vast, well-lit, but otherwise empty spaces were needed, and he would no more hang out a shingle there than he would at the house. As another security measure, they often alternated their schedules; during most of the daytime hours when Lucia was at the agency, Heath would take care of his darkroom work at the house. When he had to be out on long shoots, she would find a way to bring work home. During the twelve months they had lived there, they had experienced only one minor incident of theft—a wicker settee had vanished from the front porch. After that they discreetly chained the back legs of the rocking chairs to eyebolts in the floorboards, and had no further problems.

The presence of Lucia and Heath was of course widely known through the neighborhood—it would be hard for the white couple and their occasional deliveries of supplies or employment of tradesmen to go unnoticed. But after the first rustle of curiosity, the normal activity of the neighborhood seemed to go on without them just as it had before they arrived. People walked to the little grocery store on Front Street. Cars passed on the way to the Saturday -night juke joint by the river, or to church. There were sounds of basketball being played on the dirt drive of a vacant lot at the other end of the street that served as a primitive court. The regular wail of sirens could also be heard nearby, but emergency vehicles never had need to use their own narrow lane, which led eventually to the waterfront and provided only limited egress.

A few of the quarter's residents must have been long-timers, judging by their well-tended yards and the cars that drove by with recognizable frequency. Some were just as evidently transients. And some people, surely, came to the neighborhood for less-than-respectable errands. The house immediately to one side of the White House on the block was vacant; the other harbored a rotating assortment of tenants and late-night visitors.

Heath and Lucia came to recognize some faces, but they spoke of these faces only as images, divorced from names: Fat guy with gold chains in landau-roof Cadillac. Man gathering tin cans. Girls jumping rope. Welfare mama 32AA. Welfare mama 40DD. Deacon and wife back from church.

With none of these figures had Heath and Lucia yet exchanged more than a passing nod. It was not, they thought, that they considered themselves superior, and they were not afraid, but they wanted to get things more settled before integrating themselves more wholly into the community. And since the house was not quite ready for entertaining, no

one but their parents and a few close friends had yet come to see it. Those things, they told themselves, would naturally come in time. Right now their work—and the all-consuming renovation—were paramount.

So they passed their early months in the place in near-solitude. Lucia, particularly, who was at home relatively little, and when she was, was absorbed in some project, came in contact with no resident of Chimneyville for the best part of a year. Unless you counted the night when, right after Heath had come home from a late shoot at the studio, they answered the front door to see a young black woman, hand lingering on the knocker, whose eyes and mouth both opened in surprise as the porch light went on and revealed Lucia, and behind her, Heath, at the open door. Lucia barely caught a glimpse of her ebony skin and catlike figure before the girl fled into the night, disappearing behind the tall green wall of vegetation. She did not see her again among the faces on the streets.



For his study, Heath chose the odd-shaped room at the front of the second story. The fact that on one side of the house it encompassed a bay window—as did the dining room directly under it—and on the opposite side a section of walls that mirrored the bay, with a doorway in each angled side, made of the room a perfect octagon. Through one door this room adjoined the large bedroom on the back of the house occupied by the couple, through the other the hallway.

In the course of outfitting the octagon room they made an interesting discovery. The floor had been mostly covered over with a thin linoleum floorcloth that in turn was partly masked by a worn wool carpet. They had lived in the house for five months before they were able to devote their energies to the study, stripping up the old floorcovering with the intention of restoring to its natural glory the heart pine that showed only a few inches around the edge, like a silk slip peeking from beneath a cheap housedress.

They had already disposed of the ragged rug and loosened the tacks on the perimeter of the linoleum, and had rolled the cracking plastic a third the way back, when they uncovered the grille. In the center of the room, in a rectangle about four feet by six, was a fretwork of open squares, each frame about three inches on a side. They realized that the pattern corresponded to the one they had observed in the dingy dining-room ceiling, thinking it a decorative touch.

The grate was set in flush with the floor and was made of a lighter wood, which was lighter still than the grimy border. Through its grid, the dining table was clearly visible nearly ten feet below the high ceiling, obscured only slightly by the chandeliers that hung on either side. They pulled up the rest of the linoleum, hauled it out to the street, and speculated about the grate in the floor. Did it serve some purpose of ventilation, or perhaps communication?

In due time they transformed the place, restoring to it a good deal of its earlier charm but also adding enhancements according to their particular tastes. The living room—the salon, as the agent had called it—they wallpapered in a woody floral pattern, accenting its moldings in glossy white. In the dining room, they painted the walls a rich crimson, repainted the tall white shutters, and cleaned by hand every crystal teardrop in the two chandeliers. In their bedroom upstairs, they did walls and drapes in a deep red similar to that of the dining room, and the bedroom opposite the study, which served as Lucia's office, in a cool green. Heath's study they left as it was, except to strip the particolored floor and its grate down to nearly-bare wood and apply a light sealer.

But all this choosing of colors and decor was proceeded, slowly, by the tedious, unglamorous, and costly chores of replacing damaged ceilings, running new electrical wiring, ripping out cracked plaster and hanging sheetrock in its place, reglazing windowpanes. What portions of the work fell within the scope of their abilities, they handled themselves. Even so, the contractor's bills mounted, as did the Home Depot account. That they were pouring every dollar they made into the house became, at times, a point of contention that spilled over to expose deeper resentments.

One particularly chilly evening in January—colder than usual in the mild Southern winter—Heath and Lucia sat under lap blankets in wingbacked chairs in the salon, huddled close to the antiquated gas heater that was insufficient to warm the large empty mass of icy air.

"The new show is going to be spectacular," he reassured her. "Think Stieglitz. Think Ansel Adams."

"Hmm, over-modest, aren't we?"

"No, I mean it, it'll be unlike anything I've done so far. It's going to be fabulous. I still have a lot of work to do on it, though. I'm thinking of letting the magazine go for a while."

Her glance in his direction, eyebrows only slightly raised, told him more than if she'd spoken her thoughts aloud.

"I realize we need the money, Luce. You're bearing way more than your share of the burden these days."

She half-nodded. "You know your art is important to me." She hesitated, then drove ahead. "But so's mine. It's been a month since I even looked at my last story draft."

"Hang in there with me, won't you?" he said. "I just need to hit on the one thing that will set this stuff apart, the twist that'll put it over the edge. *The Goal Is Freedom*, remember?"

She sighed and pulled the blanket tighter. He always would find a way to get what he wanted.



The day came in early spring when Lucia turned her attentions to the outside of the

house. One fine Saturday when Heath was off on location, Lucia spent the afternoon happily in the gardens—an unusual undertaking, as the interior had demanded so much of their effort just to make it livable. Toward dusk, she was kneeling under the overgrown oleander near the iron front gate, uprooting stray vines from the base of the hedges. The soil was rich and yielding, offering little resistance to the removal of weeds, owing to its loosely tossed mixture of white sand and fine dark dirt.

Lucia paused for a moment in her pulling, feeling that someone was watching, though she had heard nothing.

“You be the lady of the house?”

Lucia looked over her shoulder with a start. She partially recovered her composure and mumbled something of an answer.

“That some place you done took on,” the voice said.

Lucia stood, and as she turned, fumbled and dropped the grass shears from her hand. The tool landed, one knife-point stuck in the soft ground, an inch from her foot. She winced.

“I ain’t meant to scare you,” said the voice, which looked to have come from an old man standing in the lane two feet away from her, draped in the shadows of a crape myrtle. His footsteps in approaching had made no sound.

“No, I—it’s okay. You didn’t,” she lied.

“I been in that house,” spoke the old man, in a tone implying just a hint of challenge, and then, so quickly that it entirely displaced the rising intonation of the first statement, simultaneously softened and became the voice of a woman. “I *knows* things ’bout that house.”

“Oh?”

“That house got a history.”

The figure stepped out of the shadow of the crape myrtle, and Lucia got a good look at her for the first time. She was gaunt and bent, of an age not possible for Lucia to determine, and dressed in polyester trousers, a man’s long-sleeved plaid shirt, ragged loafers, and a mesh-back cap of the ubiquitous faux-baseball type favored by promoters of company logos. This one was imprinted with the words PROFIT BEARINGS. As she moved forward into the half-light, Lucia could see a gold stud earring glinting from one ear, almost hidden by an irregular frizz of hair like steel wool.

“Yes, we’re sure it has,” Lucia replied. “The real estate agent said there were some rumors about its past.” She managed a friendly smile. “Do you live around here?”

“Short Street, two blocks over. I walks round here sometime. I seen you and the mister doin’ all this fixin’ up.”

“Yes, we thought the house was worth saving. It’s got real character.”

The visitor at last came close enough for Lucia to see, in the fading evening, her eyes,

under the protruding bill of the cap. They were deep-set into sockets over which a thin veneer of skin stretched like shiny walnut, polished and luminous and dusted with the thinnest hint of gray brows. One brown iris functioned normally, while the other eye seemed to move slightly out of harmony with its mate. Its large pupil remained open to its full aperture, unchanged even when the other responded to the increase in light.

Lucia was not a naturally distrustful person, although she was a private one. But she was also curious, and her curiosity on this occasion overcame any worry of inviting a stranger into her home.

“Won’t you come in for something cold to drink? I’m Lucia Holmes. My husband is Heathwood Holmes, the photographer? Oh, I’m sorry, I’ve been in the dirt—”

The stranger reached slowly with her own left hand as Lucia removed her glove and stretched forth her right. She gripped it not in a handshake but in a clutch of mahogany fingers folding around Lucia’s humid palm. Her right arm remained tucked close to her body, stiff and arthritic.

“Queen Esther Hart. Folks round here call me Queenie, you can too. I’d be honored.”

Lucia brushed her hands on her jeans, bent to retrieve the clippers, and motioned for Queen Esther to follow her.

“Please do come in, then—*Queenie*.”

The dark, unrestored entryway was a cavelike cool, the unmoving air shielded somewhat from the day’s heat by the shuttered windows. Tongue-and-groove paneling finished in a cherry stain ran from floor to wainscot, and above that a mottled wallpaper clung stubbornly to the plaster despite some obvious peeling. On these walls hung, in neat, narrow black frames with generous white mats, some of Heath’s nudes: unexpected angles of bodies, close up, cropped almost to disguise their subjects as landscapes. The crisp blacks and whites and grays of the models contrasted markedly from the muddied colors of the chinoiserie walls.

“You’ll have to pardon the work that’s still going on,” said Lucia as she pushed back the pocket doors leading into the parlor and led them into the dining room.

Even on a lengthening spring day, the light had faded until there were no rays remaining to filter in between the louvers of the shutters, and it was almost too dark to see. Lucia switched on a table lamp. The garnet-tinted Victorian crystal spread its beads of illumination across the wood furnishings and gilt-framed canvases, glinting on the chandeliers above and the curved glass front of the claw-footed curio in the corner.

“Lemonade?” asked Lucia, but then, her eyes falling on the decanter on the sideboard, “Or something stronger?”

“Gin if you got it—but a nip of anything else if you don’t, thank you.”

As there was not, indeed, gin in the cabinet, Lucia poured them both cordials from the bottle of Amontillado that had her parents had brought as a housewarming gift and tried

not to dwell on the incongruity of the situation. Queen Esther slowly surveyed the room, taking in the newly painted walls, the cherry table and chairs, and, at last, the chandeliers. Her good eye squinted as she looked toward the bright lights and narrowed further as if to see through the grid that was obscured above it. She said nothing.

Lucia sipped her sherry; no sooner had they taken their seats in the cool salon than Queen Esther downed hers. The room's brown walls were lighted by another lamp, a yard-sale find. Lucia adjusted the shutters to admit a whisper of evening breeze.

"My husband and I have not had the chance to—"

She was cut short by Queen Esther. "That don't matter. It ain't what I come to say."

"I—I'm sorry," Lucia responded, afraid she had somehow offended her guest. "I didn't know you had a particular purpose."

"Ain't nothin' worth doin' without a purpose."

"Alright. Tell me, then."

The room seemed to settle softly, as did its occupants, Queenie sliding back on the sofa, Lucia leaning forward in one of the wingback chairs to catch the old woman's words.

Time was, this street weren't chock-full house to house tight as spice tins lined up on a kitchen shelf. They wasn't but a few in the neighborhood to begin with. But peoples started to build.

Big houses. Planters and bankers and such, they build they mansions up on the boulevard. Town grow. Ships come, bring in new folks, rope-makers, sail-makers, and sailors and the like. Ship captains, you know. They build down here, closer to the river.

They was this one captain. Captain Charles Moore. This was in my great-grandmama day, she tell my mama, so I tell you true. Captain Charles, he decide to settle down and raise a family here. Marry this sweet fancy new wife who come from a plantation up the river. He go to live there with the wife's family, in the plantation house. Start to make his fortune.

But he gone from home long at a time, gone to sea. And whenever he do come back, he ain't at home too much. He out doin' shady deals, come in at daylight, bring in more money.

He get rich enough to build him a house, and he decide on this spot. He do it just to his plan, draw what go here, what go there. Make room to grow, for new wife and little babies and plenty room out back for servants. See, Captain Charles, he ain't no planter, but he got slaves for takin' care of the house, lookin' after that wife while he gone. It take folks to do the cookin', folks to do the washin', folks to keep the kitchen garden.

He build in some things other houses don't have, too. He put in a secret door for such peoples as can't come through the front and don't want to be seen comin' to the back. Bet you didn't know about that. He build in that special floor upstairs, too.

Lucia interrupted her.

"The grate, you mean? The one over the dining room?"

"That right. He use it for spyin'. For keepin' track of the slaves. For watchin' who come and who go. For keepin' peoples honest. Nobody ever know who he got watchin' for him when he gone from home neither. They all knows about that spyhole. He might be watchin' from other places, too."

Lucia shuddered at the idea of maids polishing silver, houseboys delivering messages, the young wife greeting guests . . . every movement under the all-seeing eye of the master.

Due time he take a special likin' to one of he house servants, you know what I mean. Girl get big with child, try to hide it. They all think she run away, but she just stayin' out of sight in the shed in back. She come in through the secret door some nights, when her mama get her somethin' to eat. She birth the baby right there in the servant quarters where her mama live. Captain Charles, he hear the noise, he discover what goin' on, he threaten girl and mama both if they don't smother that girl-child right then and there. Girl mama cast the evil eye on Captain Charles and he back off.

But that baby mama, she don't know what to do—cain't run away and get caught, cain't stay neither. What she gonna do?

Next night she sneak in by the secret door. She latch it behind her. She bring rope from the shed. Nobody know what happenin' till they hear the dining room chair knock over where she kick it out from under herself.

Captain Charles, he make the girl mama bury the body in the yard before sunup, before anybody else find out.

I tell you true what my mama told me, what my great-grandmama told her. The girl—she were my grandmama.



Despite the effects of the sherry, and a late supper that Queen Esther did not stay to share, Lucia did not sleep well. The following evening Heath returned from his shoot in Atlanta, full of talk of success, and new commissions to come, and a hopeful entry for a national award. There was a possibility of a big assignment in Miami, a fashion spread that would no doubt boost cash flow, giving them both a little breathing room.

I've just got to get through the show first, he told her. *I told them I'd try my best to work it in.*

Heath's nervousness about the looming May exhibition date had made him edgier than ever. Granted, he pushed himself hard. With this show, he looked for nothing short of fame.

As they finished dessert at the white-linen-covered table under the sparkling chandeliers, she told him about the visit of the strange woman.

"The floor grate, Heath—she told me why it was built. The house belonged to the

captain of a merchant ship who custom-designed it. It was to let him spy on his slaves and keep track of comings and goings in the house.”

“That so? Hey, that tale ought to raise the value of the property!”

She left out the parts that most disturbed her.



Over the next month, while Lucia worked long days at the agency, returning after dark nearly every night, Heath made steady but secluded progress on the body of work from which he would select the exhibition. He did not resume shooting for the local magazine, but in mid-April the Miami job came through for the following week. Lucia, who was wrapping up a major campaign, could not break free to accompany him—not that they could afford it anyway. Heath would be in his element on that shoot, she thought: working with gorgeous women all day, women who could be persuaded to pose and pout and turn their most lovely angles to the camera’s eye. His natural talent for bringing out an inner spark was beginning to pay off, though, and she could hardly argue with that.

Lucia planned to work at home for the first part of the week. She was making a little progress on the novel at last, and found that if she stayed away from the office even when creating ads and collateral she could snatch some time for her personal project. Now that the chill of winter had passed, too, it was more comfortable to write at home, upstairs in the breezy east-facing room. The sharp light falling across the golden woodgrain of her desk inspired her to fresher ideas and greater energy.

On the third morning of her homestay Lucia was deep in concentration at the computer when she thought she heard a soft noise downstairs. The window of her studio was open, and she could hear the customary flutter of leaves in the branches just outside and, beyond it in the distance, the lazy music of midmorning street traffic in a small city. What was inside the house was a distinctly different sound: a click, a footfall? She was about to attribute it to her fully engaged imagination when it came again. She listened more intently, but there was only silence after that.

Lucia had deliberately not, over the months of their residence in the White House, allowed herself to become overly worried about her own safety. It would not do to be fearful if one was going to choose to live in Chimneyville. The commitment itself required a common-sense routine of caution backed by a confidence that if she minded her own business, everybody else would mind theirs. She knew, however, that Heath kept a .44 in the house just in case. Was this “in case”?

She was surely overreacting, she thought. It was nothing. She decided to take advantage of the disruption to go downstairs and fix a second cup of coffee, and check the doors to reassure herself.

The front door seemed undisturbed; she could see out the sidelights that nothing was

missing or misplaced on the front porch. The ground-floor windows, she noted as she walked through the salon and dining room, were all open just as they had been, but blocked by the tall, latched shutters. The kitchen door was, likewise, closed and locked.

It was the door to the darkroom, just off the kitchen, that was not right. The door, because of its tendency to pop open a bit when the house settled the wrong way, had a hook-and-eye latch on the inside to keep it tightly closed when Heath was developing or printing. It had a similar latch on the outside, which normally stayed fastened when the room was not in use.

The latch was undone, and the door stood ever so slightly open.

Did Heath forget to shut it when he left? She had been so busy all week she hadn't noticed the door at all. Now, the spring breeze had probably nudged it. Silly to be hearing things, she thought, but she wanted to check it out thoroughly just to make sure. She pushed the door farther inward and entered the unaccustomed space, which was totally dark except for the little sunlight that entered from the doorway where Lucia was standing. She flipped the wall switch.

The red glow from the safelight showed nothing amiss. Lucia had been here so seldom, she hadn't even seen Heath's most recent work; but from a cord strung across the room there hung strips of four-by-five negatives, attached by one end to the cord with rubber-ended alligator clips. Intrigued, she moved into the room to get a better look. She held up one of the strips closer to the bare bulb. The images on the transparent film were closeups of human anatomy, abstracted portions of a whole that was recognizable to her because she knew his technique so well. There were several frames filled mostly with the curves of torsos, thighs, breasts, ghost-white—a woman's slight curves, behind some of them the dimly discernible form of a male abdomen or hip, and intertwined with others Matisse-like cutouts that focused into dark and proprietary hands. Interesting compositions, Lucia thought. The latest images for the new show.

She reached for the next strip. But then she saw the note.

Box was empty. MUST have \$300 Teus. The words, nothing like Heath's controlled script, were crudely penciled on a half-sheet of notebook paper. And in the lower corner, apologetically, an afterthought, *XOXO*. What—

Lucia looked around for the other switch, the one that turned on the incandescent bulb. Under its brighter light she could now make out other details of the room: a plastic shoe box for spent film canisters, its contents spilled across the floor. And something else that was not as she remembered it: a panel of the back wall out of kilter with the others, leaving a two-inch gap opening onto a dark hole.

She pulled another strip of negatives from the line. In this one the marble-white female nude could be seen full-length, here ranged sensuously as if on a black-sheeted bed, here rigid as an unclothed effigy carved on a catafalque. The striking feature in all of these

images, though, was the dark shadow of the grid obscuring like an ancient prison each of the outstretched bodies.

Lucia's cheeks burned with sudden awareness. The female figure was a young *black* woman. Lucia looked closer at the negative: a girl, even—too thin, her features contorted, eyes closed. She recognized nothing about the model except a flash of haunting face, but she knew the set. And she realized, too, that she knew the man.

How imaginative, compelling, breathtaking . . . how maddening. Even in the heat of anger she could coolly imagine the critics: *Fresh, arresting views . . . black woman's body imprisoned by starkly lit white bars. . . captivated by, but captivating, the white man . . . a postmodernist examination of enslavement.* When had he done it? *How could she not have known?*

Lucia grabbed the negatives in a single clutch, snapping them from the clamps that had held them on the clothesline. She unlocked the kitchen door and took the lot of them into the small back yard, where her garden tools stood in the corner of the shed. She flung the strips to the ground, took up a spade, and furiously dug until she made a foot-deep hole behind the lush clumps of mint. Into it she then deposited the limp film, covering it over with the black soil she had freshly removed. She worked the dirt in the herb garden until it was no longer evident that one patch of ground had been disturbed. Her hands, gloveless, were stained the color of the dark earth; her face, where she had wiped her fingers to brush away tears, was equally grimy. She knelt, finished, next to her work.

Queen Esther's voice came, unbidden, from beyond the hedge at the side yard.

"I done told you, child. Ain't nothing worth doin' without a purpose."



Poetry: Ray Soulard, Jr.

36 Nocturnes
[third series]

*"But my words become stained with your love.
You occupy everything, you occupy everything."*

Pablo Neruda, "So That You Will Hear Me," 1924.

For Erika

i.

What burns in you is beauty.
My life grazes your soft hands,
mother's, child's, hands of goddess, hands of beast.
My dreams rest astride your belly, looking
onward to burning strokes, onward to mutual
sway & thrash, love's rain beyond desire's cloud.

*

ii.

Kindness seems more important, now,
in the tangle of burning candles, erotic trance,
fingers spread thigh as heart nudges heart.
Suddenly, laughter. A bite. A memory.
You taste like flying. I can think of you no other way.
Slow. Slower. Then not. Our carnal notes grip the Earth.

*

iii.

More colors, wilder music, the beginning of a
new freedom. Torching the grains leaves
your body raw with magick, each of your
pores open-lidded. The music beats, beseeches,
arouses. Our beast twists newly powerful.
We swarm the window's winter light.

*

iv.

The night's new rampage. A gleam. A way.
My lips recall your breast to me. I'd lunged at you
earlier, beginning to reclaim you. My desire is
desire resumed. You near & elude me like steam
its source. Soon is not soon enough. Each passing
moment shouldered with new touch & revived echo.

*

v.

All that is, is kin. Two or three cats range about your
room, ignore us. One is curious. I tell you between tumults of
other lovers & other cats. You laugh without jealousy.
The curious cat is orange, male. My rival, my brother.
We reckon each other friends because he does not
fear my knowledge of you. When I am gone, he will lick you clean.

*

vi.

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer a dream at
all. Our first night burns past us to return in
variation. Each touch is news, each taste is
poetry. We fuss & play with this reality.
We fly it. Land. Crash. Again. To see what will
happen. Your eyes a tender blue. Your fine wiggle.

*

vii.

Midnight sprinkles from the blue guitar, the walls
thicken. Ghostly candles conspire. The moon is fast
but we are slow. Awakening. Initiation.
The blue guitar thrums bundles of twisted notes.

The floor is earth. The ceiling is mystery.
Toss knowledge to the flame blind with a
childly want. Pages of empty scripture vibrate
with carnal bass probings. The moon ceases

as we accelerate. I lick your toes as you
squirm. The cats stalk elsewhere. The building
is quiet. Drums tap & throb. Lips on lips, Beauty
is summoned, crowds, & chants us deeper within.

*

viii.

I am learning to make you butterflies
from fire. A song in the forest's native
alphabet. A kiss so familiar you will taste me
tasting you. Nothing impossible between us now,
or ever. The butterflies for the corners of your
bed. The song to quell rogue spirits in
your heart & home. The kiss a promise of my
love, of our bonding. The impossible slithers
as we stride past it. I am learning to watch
how you manifest in my streets & dreams.
Our loving raves, recedes, raves higher. Beyond full
moon & spell, it is a new being, arising.

*

ix. *Another Montreal dawn*

All is maya. Dream. Art. Play. Illusion.
The pathways of Love are filled with strangeness.
Dream. The road back to you doubles back,
& again, upon its intentions. Art. You pose
in my mind, for hours, I know not why.
Play. Nude beneath a sheet, you writhe &
smile to the wilder music. Illusion. The miles
between us sum to nothing. All is maya.
A grey snowy dawn shot with wordless calm.

*

x.

This universe a mist, a light, a shimmer.
She sways & eludes, music's dream
of manifestation. Fingers of fire,
thighs wet for brighter kinds of knowing.

A mist, a light, a shimmer. Death yes, no,
whatever. She drifts through music,
changing how it dreams, with her tongue,
with every trip of her breath saying

I want more. A light, a shimmer. Danger
delight. Not a plan nor an alphabet. I
watch her cheeks trance into shadow &
know nothing but love. Nothing but love.

*

xi.

She pulls me deeper into embrace,
her teeth gleaming with hunger & fear,
& we fall continuously as her fingers
etch my back with possession & we
begin to lose daylight & language,
her breasts gnaw me for a lengthy moment's
touch, & we lose more & more to
accelerate our symbiosis. I grasp her
thick hair & bite her bare shoulder, &
something will come around after this
to teach us what to do, how to tap these
body-wild dreams, fuck righteous every day's every hour.

*

xii.

I disappear along the path riding away
from you, remembering the spirit-roused
candle at our meal, & so we were
watched by the invisible world as well
as your several bemused cats. What longing
do spirits retain for human electricity?

Along the path away from you I remember
watching you suck a cherry mocking carnal
acts with strange names & for a moment I
looked out the window to a brick wall &
a colorless sky. You asked me what I saw.
I shook my head til the moment broke & scattered.

*

xiii. *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.*

To play one true note. To play
her very own, play it from sweat
& desire, from dreams of nameless
acres of pines & growls, play it
like he touched her that one time
amidst the carousing smoke & the
candles atwist with pressing spirits,
to play this note beyond the child's love
& the man's need & the companions'
gnawing familiarity, to play it & scream
YES THIS IS ME! I am the one you've
curled around all these years & none
of you knew my true note, I've just
played it, first time, did you hear it?

Returns to the midnight brushings of
her thick copper hair. The candles
flicker quietly again. The smoke settles
among the kittens & strewn nightwear. Did you hear it?

*

xiv.

This morning, my love, & thus I approach
you, the light soft as flaming wax, the courtyard
empty, these words scawled wetly on a dry leaf
of mud, I approach you, through madness & magick,
anguish & anticipation, recalling tomorrow's
better dance, the gleams & crackles of finer

clothes, I approach you, shedding sinews & blue
fancies, forgetting your name to better
remember your eyes, forgetting my own
better to dance with you through this
empty courtyard, better to know nothing
but love for you, better to know

nothing at all. This morning, my love,
& thus I approach you, with questions, with
answers, with daisies & sparkling candy, with
words of feather & chords of glass,
with a tale of nameless groves, yet untold
you, save it for another morning, keep it for another dance.

*

xv.

Riding the wave of bliss, flow just flow,
completion begins in despair, emptiness,
her copper hair frames your dreams & you

imagine finger interlocking finger interlocking
finger, flow just flow, seeking her light
in the candle she gave you another time,

dream of it not burning away in this
silly chamber but falling toward her from
a hand held high, flow just flow, her mouth

senator & songstress, but not now, riding
the wave of bliss, each limb clasping its mate,
energies twined brightly, pur, now rumble, now

roar, flow just flow, the wider sky, the deeper
magick, the completion in unity, emptiness.
Empathy. Friendship. A touch, A smile. Chocolate.

Flow just flow. Leave behind what is
understood. Stroke her copper hair. Breathe.
Speak the word "mystery" & listen to her heart's reply.

*

xvi. *A Prayer for Health & Healing*

And for warmth our tribes of fingers gather &
mingle, & for laughter my beard
brushes your fullmoon cheek, & for knowing
your breast lays against my breast & for
hope we follow the music's rowdy tumble, & for healing
I hold your strength with my tenderness &

there is a deeper listening in the courtyard's flicking
candles, & there is a tougher affection in
how the colors brush & swarm us, & there is
a better kindness in this moment's giving ways,
& the truth that is king here bows to the
goddess crown of daisies in your hair &

tonight we dance in every kind of our being,
& together we pray for gentleness & clarity,
the way the child kisses her mother's lips,
& our trust weaves brightly with our submission
to the subtleties of this universe's ways, the finer
ways it eludes us, & teaches, & provides.

*

xvii.

Mercy begins at the groin, love at the
fingertips, desire in the eyes or
perhaps along shafts of obscure music
I travel to you along waves of primal
radiation & you shiver at what dance
may follow my words in the later
hours tonight past full moon gentleness

as sonic coherency spirals out in many
paths & the colors say yes yes yes
stars & speed, stroking you furious
slow, goddess, muse, beyond grief,
& chance, what pours in dwarfed
by what blossoms out & we discover

ourselves walking the boulevard with lemon-light
streetlamps, pawnshops, newsstands,
& approach its end near dawn where
gypsies whir & sing, a play, a feast, freaks,
at last a tent, a cot, candy, candles, mercy, & release.

*

xviii.

Years ago, my love, when I was younger
even than you, I worked for a man
with a problem. Cocaine & despair. His
father had been shot dead daylight streets
of Hartford. He fucked women on his lunch
hour & went home to his beautiful blonde
girlfriend. He showed me how to numb my
gums with a bit of blow applied just so.
It didn't work. Perhaps I did it wrong. I was 22.

Tonight Boston is cold, miles & years from
that man & the nights when he taught me how
to drink & looked at me with bleary eyes &
promised me better days coming. Curly brown hair
& blue eyes. Bit of a moustache. Skinny in his grey
suits. Tonight I think of you in Montreal, recovering
from surgery & remember Howard weeping in a car
along a turnpike. Drinking & snorting to hear the boos
better. Love sticks hard. We need to keep breathing.

*

xix.

What burns in you is beauty, far beneath
the blows, this one's violent arrogance, that one's
flopping pride, I've known you these three months
& slowly learned a few of your many lessons, one
being that beauty endures, that the nights of no
moonlight when you were pushed to your knees &
you softly kneaded the man's rage from him,
that the mystery & fear & delight you felt leaving
the hospital sanctioned to hold that sly-smiling
babe in your arms, midnights when you dance nude
midst candles in your room & afternoons when
you coax a friend with a joke & a caress, that
these & more upon the thousands do not begin
to tell who you are, what beauty you contain, I
can watch you my whole lifetime as I could a
candle's flame & never know your beginning nor
your end, your why, or how your love for daisies
relates to what yaws open your wettest passion or to
secret nights when you both laugh & cry. You have
been rent, & rent again, yet tonight I kneel before
your wholeness, your delight, your striving. I seek still
to know you even as I seek still to know myself & yet
the only reply I receive are the bells of Cambridge singing
"Yin & gladness to the one who offers! Yang & clarity to the one who
receives!"

*

xx. *Valentine's Day*

Today my heart thumped right through
my chest & hurried to you. Ignoring me,
my words about health, safety, this
madly thumping organ, this swiftly
hurrying beast gathered its valves &
blood-fuel & hurtled miles of air & land,
it had been denied long enough, simply
this, & it had to embrace your heart &
it had to do this now—

& no matter that here was a day when countless
hearts in countless worlds were embracing
through cards, flowers, candy, curvy words
flattering as sugar, no, here was my
freakish heart with its freakish task, on
a boxcar til Burlington, a Greyhound into Montreal—

For you were ailing in the room where
we had kissed. Blitzes of kisses. A bite.
You taste like flying. My kindly, crazy, madly
loving heart was coming to you to do
what it could to pull you back to fine
thumping. Word reached me it arrived
tonight, whole if a little weak. Passport
trouble but a sentimental guard. I expect
it back this weekend—or never if that is your wish.

*

xxi.

There is a world of land, sea, & sky beyond
that of men & women. We need to breathe more
deeply, more slowly, to glimpse it, its velvet
moments & turquoise rain. Slower & deeper still
& these candies disappear leaving a stroking
wind & infinite wood. Were our breath
to cease completely, perhaps, these
numberless layers would evanesce, perhaps—

But I say keep breathing. Watch stray gull
feathers dance an empty beach, let
the chocolate seduce you with its carnal touch,
listen to your baby's tales of strange dogs
& long movies. Breathe deeper & slower
for release & connection, & if the man
calls you dream-wife smile with him
& his dream & wonder at the world he proposes—

More colors. Wilder music. The beginning
of a new freedom. He kneels above you
with your ankles resting on his shoulders.
He enters you with quicker & slower thrusts.
What is this world you glimpse right now
with eyes closed as you wiggle & claw
his legs? Breathe slower, relax, let
him enter you. Let this world begin.

*

xxii. *A Summoning*

We walk through the branches of this night
 a city of sirens, corpses, beggars. Love
 a perplexing necessity among steps on
 cobblestone & tar. Tonight, dear one, you
 are here for the danger of flashing lights, &
 for the moment of convulsive destruction
 that will occur when we breach identity &
 eternity. Tonight a new rampage. A gleam.
 A way. Another siren. Don't look back.

Tonight walking subsists our warmth
 but a pause to trace the lights around
 a statue brings chill & doubts. What are
 you to me? An Artist. What am I
 to you? A muse. What are we to pounding,
 banging cosmos, shrilling existence?
 The chance of a spark. A breach out
 of this dream, into this life. A puzzle
 worth suffering, dear one. Hurry. Don't look back.

Your copper hair gripped in my hand,
 some dark shadow where a panty can
 be pushed aside, flesh hurried within flesh.
 Brick gives way before crushing fists.
 Tonight I fail to subside. You fail to
 let go. We unriddle the city from its
 unloving existence. We breach the why
 & the pain. Love between us a waking from
 denial. The night is gone, dear one. Don't look back.

*

xxiii.

All that is between us has come before, &
will again, cycle upon cycle, loop within
loop, dream twined to dream, & tonight,
my love, I think of you, the longing in me
for what I have chased in you, chase in
you tonight, afar this time, this moment,
feeling how you watch me, as always,
you possess me as one possesses a heartbeat,
I possess you as one possesses full moonlight,
tonight, my love, all that has come before
rages loss & joy, old fears & new, flesh &
flowing, & will again, cycle upon cycle,
loop within loop, dream twined to dream,
& yet each time a new fury, skin crushed
to skin, a double-flame created by separate
souls, fight, flee, traumas in midnight
country gardens & beneath city bridges,
in letters, on stage, poverty's bitter-laughing
fuck, wealth's nuanced absences, each time
harder & wilder, deaths solitary & those
atwist, cycle upon cycle, loop within loop, dream
twined to dream, how beautiful you are as
you dance & dodge, blue eyes again, how many
thousand songs, Erika? Love a rupture & gestation. Love a pathless road.

*

xxiv.

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer
a dream at all. We contain clashing
realities, we, the us sum, our transition,
our permanence. No longer a dream,
no longer daylight-governed, beyond nocturne
fire & fury. We, the love seed, a bomb,
a bloom, a burst. We contain the conflict,
its formula, its antidote. Flood & flight.

Each touch is news, each word a leaf.
Love an oak, a sparrow, a cobra.
Growing, soaring, biting from desire,
biting for revenge. Biting as scripture,
biting as gift. Each touch a bullet &
a salve. Each word a leaf to feed or fell.
A vow, a cry, a groan of yes. Wings
& tendrils & savages of yes. Crash.

The first night begets the ones still
to come. The love seed contains maps
& warnings. But beyond light & its fragrance,
creature & its impulse, mind & its grail,
what lies beyond is where we began.
What lies behind is where we will rest.
A new dream, a bigger dream, no longer
a dream at all. The answer & its question.

*

xxv. *Parting, loss*

Awakening. Strums of blood. An old woman eats from a small can with no label, adjusts her wash-worn girdle, turns the AM radio louder. Death & taxes. Things newfangled & strange.

Midnight. The storm grinds wetly against the weed-lined road. The world full of pain & ghosts, of orphan joys with green eyes, free. The storm passes. The earth accepts without waiting.

Moon past full. A tavern crowded with pink cheeks & pondering eyes. Spiders paused in spinning among the beer taps. Shadows, some rogue, more kin to stars than souls. The music quickens.

Beauty summoned. Falling, rhythm, upstairs the AM radio's naggings become unnaturally atwist with the tavern's jukebox probings. Noone notices. The old woman removes her makeup with cold cream. The spiders resume. Cars outside spurt muddily away.

Crumpled pages. The limber, drunken man clambers atop the bar, declaims love, the deeper love which manifests only with utter loss. He dances to win the twenty-dollar bet. Radio & jukebox quarrel again.

Initiation. The building now entirely quiet. I've climbed to the top floor. Tonight has happened before. Years ago, years before that. Falling asleep on my couch, shoelaces still tied. Dreams like brave children gird me.

*

xxvi. *Distance*

A new being, arisen. Present tonight in
this old tavern as I drink quietly &
begin to let you go. The other tavern
I searched for long gone, Boston chews
its obscure history, keeps only
sentiments which sell.

Tonight pints of ale to study this new being,
midst the wood & neon, the jukebox that
drawls, shrieks, farts. Remembering other
taverns, other nights, others I had to
let go to feed the being before me, keep
it ever new, ever arising.

What held us together, what shred us
too, moonlight, words, demons, dreams
untold. I don't know. Love loses its
teeth, let's go. The tavern closes at
2 a.m. Some sort of kindness I can't
quite grasp raises my shoulder, takes me home.

*

xxvii.

All is maya. Dream. Art. Play. Illusion.
Let all the clocks slow, stop, it
makes no difference, there is always
stillness, always motion. The universe
is a hummingbird in stillful flight
watched by noone some grey snowless dawn.

Maya, ceaseless maya. Urgent, funny.
You are lying on your bed, headphones,
dark underwear, eyes closes, candles
burning, incense, cats stalking &
sniffing. What are you thinking, feeling?
I do not imagine. I don't try.

Dream. Am I really sitting in this
coffeehouse watching a worn man stare
hard at something, his eyes creviced
obscurely, his tattered body motionless?
I love him. I love you. I trickle a
prayer his way. I do the same for you.

Art. Were you muse? Yes. Were you
more? There is no answer tonight.
I think he's tripping, Erika. His
dreadlocked head leans forward, his
interior spaces engulf him. Are you
too? Spun? high? Thinking of me?

Play. Rhythm & motion. Perhaps he is
only dreaming, childhood, the canyon,
the azaleas, biting winter dawns on
horseback or Harley. You make snow
angels with your daughter. I clutch this
tighter. I want it to mean something.

Illusion. He will soon be for me just words.
His old sweaters, his jagged beard, his
plastic bag of possessions. Every item a
treasure because so few. Erika, you
were real, weren't you? You loved me, yes?
You remember me? You'll remember me?

*

xxviii.

This universe a mist, a light, a shimmer.
 Wherefrom? Where to? It doesn't matter.
 March snowflakes? Tight black blouses?
 Ego & anguish & hunger? It doesn't matter.
 Who to love? Who to crowd by? Dreams?
 Say again: it doesn't matter.

She wears a mint-green blouse glittering
 chest says Rock Star. Long brunette hair.
 Studies her beat quantum physics textbook.
 Drinks her black coffee. I imagine her
 secret taste. Imagine running tongue-wetted
 finger from her lips down into her maidenhair.

It doesn't matter. What hurried my carnal wish,
 no more. Tonight I watched the geese stream past
 the full moon. Diminishing feathers
 against shriveling storm clouds. I shall
 not know your shivering wet begging
 again. Walk on through crumbling leaves.

She clothes her heat for a walk to
 get cigarettes. I remember getting you high,
 leaning you against a wall, unable to
 wait. I don't know where you are tonight.
 The message of the full moon geese
 was clear: the spring is coming &

you are moving on. It doesn't matter.
 Well, not yet. I am moving on too.
 Because it always fucking matters.
 The girl in the Rock Star blouse
 has returned. I'd sooner approach the geese
 tonight than her. Because the heart

skips from one hungry, ecstatic matter
 to the next. I think of her, I think
 of you. I think of — well — it does
 matter & always has. I wish you
 love & content. Not happiness, not yet.
 Not til the spring lands & the geese arrive home.

*

xxix. *Lingering*

Something I learned from you, & now
carry again bright & necessary: want
does not cease. Does not diminish.
Want unsated begins to mumble into
beard, waste its energies strangely. I sought
photos & faraway voices. My music became
stranger until it resembled oaks, braided
dreams, fell into gaps of silence &
exploded them because I couldn't stop singing—

I named you music. Called us
symbiosis. I juiced our myth with
sparks, a flood of imperatives, til fuck
& poem, flight, fancy, your copper hair,
favorite flowers, proved & justified &
encouraged, til it wasn't about romance
anymore, til it was about it, til
something could remain animate weeks
after you left.

The myth smolders. Trees are trees
again. Words are words. The want &
wish still hover, the gnaw within
for symbiosis, mate, muse, they remain
damp & loosely embodied by your voice
& skin, by whatever I was to you
for a short time. But here it is,
past dusk, & to think of you is
more to remember than to anticipate.

I can imagine waking aside some other's eyes.
I will bend & shape my sound to another's joy & grief.
Pictures of you, poems for you, ways to explain who I was.

*

xxx.

I disappear along the path away
from you, remembering moments, words,
remembering many things, understanding
little, you weren't a comet spangling
my sky, no, you were the sky itself,
I am different for having met you, loved
you, won you, lost you, said goodbye.
Tonight the glass wall descends between
me & my memories of you. Tonight I
let you go. The dawn of love dances,
free, the child, the beast, the godd.
The sun of love arcs its sky, today's
history refigures all previous days,
scripture not comet. The dusk of love
is jungle, is careening waves of sound,
distortion, into the night, blood rised &
questions tribal-mad. By midnight the
poison sets in or the sugar begins to
heal. Along the weaker hours a hand
grasps a hand no matter the contortions
& demons, the two hands grasp & watch
their love approved in the many tales
the night sky tells. Along the weaker hours
other hands slip from each other, find
a mute joy in safety, retreat, survival,
thoughts & dreams of other, better nights.
What seemed like love now revealed to be
a comet, dirty ice & minerals burning
awhile, hustling up a scripture never to be
completed. The path behind me darkens. I must walk on.

For Leni

xxxi. *For Leni, After an Absence*

To begin again, begin continuously,
play one true note, & listen for
someone to echo it, deepen it,
twine & stretch it, will you accept
this note again, foreign & familiar,
Will you play with me again, anew?

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer
a dream at all. Begin again, begin
continuously. Neither awake nor dreaming.
Sing to the trees. Trees sing to the
stars. Stars glitter the clouds above
you. Rain dapple you with my hungry song.

Remember you are beautiful. Begin here.
Blue moods rising, twisting anguish,
the distorting stretch to touch anything
soft, womb empty, heart cracked,
remember: you are beautiful. Healing
begins with release, a scream, crazy blood.

Shine: you are ready. Release what is
overcast. Choose to be clear. Burn your
life down. Scorch the rubble too.
Begin with nothing, again. Look at
me. First burn then build. What is
love? Break down. Burn. Build. Begin anew.

Begin again & rightly call any beginning
a miracle. Touch me with beauty, I'll tap
you with balance. We'll renew our language,
test it for music & flight. With every spring
comes the pain of thaw & the burst into
sunshine of things new, wild & green.

*

xxxii. *A Letter on Love for Leni*

A letter on love must sparkle with
glittering music, must be loose with
laughter & curiosity, must dance the
wilder between its every inevitable
droop, must consider its opening list
of imperatives & grinning cut them free—

Written in an empty courtyard where once
I sought you among the pink cheeks &
the clatter, this letter on love confesses
all my godds to you, one & all freak
tornadoes of art, & lays before you
this prayer & plea: listen. understand.

Our love still a fragile stone, yet tonight
you asked me to write a letter on love,
asked me with hope & uncertainty, wondered
what I might do with my black pen &
yellow paper when I promised you filled
sheets by dawn, by the morrow's bright renewal—

I wish to do for you what packs of
dreams preach at me: teach you to
teach me of love's mutual gifting, of the righteous
kiss sparking the night with ecstatic
neon simultaneity—listen. understand.
A letter on love twined with fingers, shared breath—

Dreams of empty beach utopias. Dreams
of you in chambers carved for loving.
Dreams of many eyes that have
passed by leaving streaks of memory.
Dreams of letters on love that
press through delight & daydream into

our first midnight watched, shared,
remembered. Watching the full moon
blow slowly across the sky, the door
manifesting between us, we walk through,
meet each other, smiling burn this letter to ash

*

xxxiii.

She approaches music often, opens the window, pushes the lace aside for view of the garden, the bridge beyond, the ocean soundlessly far, turns back to me, approaching music, this time her strumming blue eyes, her black silk pajamas unbuttoned to the tummy, I toss my fingers toward her, run some riled air her way, raw with want, pending culmination, she is approaching music now as she is approaching me, trembling a dram of power back along the waves of riled air, come to me my other, your other awaits, come to me, my love, your beloved awaits as we kneel before each other, compressing & heating the air between us, carnal greed for a new kind of freedom as I push your black silk pajamas away from your shoulders, sudden conflagration—

The least beginnings of a joined scripture, within each other, riding the waves of bliss, sending them on through the garden & over the bridge to the ocean, hopping a message atop these waves, from our moment, the ways she makes bliss with my young kiss, to tussling & tremble of orgying spray & waves, the metal-framed bed creaks as we receive the pulses of rhythm the ocean chants back, & we hurry & slow to modulate, o my love! o my love! I hadn't found my home but here within us, this room, the lace madly swishing with waves sent through colors & received from noisy glee, there is this moment expanding deeper within itself as we swell together to bursting, hearts shattered & shipwrecked on that shore in the distance, we fall into each other, music trailing away, arriving somewhere intended, but unnamed.

*

xxxiv. *For Leni, First Day of Spring*

A crown of lillies for your blonde head,
 my love, & twenty-three kisses, maybe
 twenty-four, the sunshine of nearing days
 beckons us, upon your head this crown,
 blue eyes smile I wish to serve you,
 blue eyes waver you wish to receive me.

A hill of grass deep in the woods
 where there is human quiet while other
 things hum & buzz & prowl, I unbutton
 your robe to kiss your throat, first day
 of spring, we've been weaving together
 since autumn, now blooming & rising.

An oak tree beneath which we drink
 water & eat cheese & kiss lightly,
 letters not sentences at a time,
 the sunshine massages your toes
 as they curl with passion's delight,
 yes, my love, this pleasure all for you.

A rugged old blanket beneath which
 we lie as fingers tap flesh, as
 knowing coalesces, a cumulating
 music, breaching love, a dance,
 a dream, fear where every door opens
 still our shadows release us slowly.
 The air between us is warm as
 we quiver then still you must have
 me closer & learn this better dance
 anew, I must lead you without
 a word of coercion eyes closed to all
 but this moment, your cheek on my chest.

Our heat carries news to the hillside
 around us, the saplings & critters
 watch our frenzy, no longer fear,
 just fellow critters with need,
 no fuss but being alive, & the compulsion
 to build, to house, to create, to continue.

Hungry for nurture & worship, you
release your garments to one side
here you are, a test, a study, a star,
& me less to possess your body
than to share your spirit, to learn
you like water, like music, like sunshine.

Our afternoon dwindles as we
approach notes low & high, as
we knit more complexly & kiss
more familiar, as we twine a cry
to the clouds, a heavy breath to the
earth, as I hold you, still, days later, you smile & nod.

*

xxxv. *Music for Leni*

Evening. Time of blue fancies & risen growls.
All is vulnerable, wasp & nectar alike, & who
wakens only now kneels before nothing. She does not bid
for attention. She glows blondely. She summons
the moon for word of a new rampage, the ancient
gleam. An emphatic way. Dream beyond death.

To awaken still dead. To walk as one has
many times before but with a difference.
To kneel before nothing. She carries her
baskets of stars throughout the night.
One perceives her as hungry but satiating
laughter. Servants assembling round the righteous.

Heartbeat amplified through hope. Just listen.
It's here. Princess of dark passages.
Muse of endless silent nights. Mistress
to those who long to shape sound with
their fingers. For those who long to,
even more for those who know how—

Evening. Time of bluer fantasies & driven
prowls. All exudes more utterly,
star-bright hopelessness. Then a silence.
Then another note, & another, & she
returns again, she really does, this time
blondely, it seems, chalice of light, feathers of shadow.

To begin again, by any means, fire,
forgetfulness, freedom's seeming sacrifice,
to begin again, now, but with a difference.
To look toward her, estimate into
her trailing hues, the exciting strums of
her possibilities. Servants eager to clear the land.

Heartbeat amplified through hope. She moves
newly danceful, accumulating, deepening,
blonde music learn to listen, watch
it teaching itself, her glance draws
impressions across my heart, my world—
she leaves words, & gashes, & a familiar touch—

Evening. Longing to jitter the blue hues,
to mingle in amber & blonde. What
will prove dangerous are the moments
on high shelves, the gusts, snapping spray,
the moments of blonde imperiousness &
fatalism. Impish, too, kittens & critters galore.

To awaken, to begin, gather the curves
& summon the notes, utter the several
blondest words known, & hope, & more, & hope,
Receiving her dew-makings, her sunrise
hurryings, & then she slows, panics, then
learns to flow, blonde mullings,

Heartbeat delighted, daisies, silly delirium,
giving to something that which is something's,
what matters is how she holds the pitcher of water,
arranges the lillies, what she may be thinking,
smiling, adjusting the curtains, fussing, then
returning to bed, to embrace, to one moment's lingering safety

For Someone. Anyone.

xxxvi.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what
remains. The beginnings of a new
freedom? More colors? Wilder music?

Full moon. Disintegration. Fuller heart.
Emptier hands. Spring arriving,
unplanned as ever, crown of wasted
speculations by gods & men.

This universe a myth, a bite, a shiver.
Morning mist astride an unknown
cheek. A dozen spoken words. The tide
remarked. A moment of green clarity
as her hands troll for a cigarette,
then matches, none, jitter—

Embrace it all. Let it go. See
what preaches on. Watch who listens
& how. Do the old eyes mock? Do the
younger ones mull?

Desire is resumed perpetually, yet observe
the fearful attraction of hands, contact
forever a new being, arisen. To bring
even this moment I played you
butterflies from fire, & wondered toward
when this would no longer be enough—

You await simply for me to play one true
note. Tumble the castle. Trippin' scriptures.
Keep breathing while nothing happens.
Keep breathin. Something always happens.

Embrace it all. Let it go. Does
anything at all remain?
There were pink blooms in the humming
winter light. What remains?

Love the pathless road treks remembrance
ever moment, every stone, comets
among the weeds—butterflies from fire—

Tonight the release from constrictions &
liberty. I don't know who I am. I don't
know what to expect. Love has unbraided
tonight, guided by glimmers of erotic
full moon, trembles & tendrils, a rhythm
flowing unto tonight, this teardrop pool.

Disintegration, the music toward which
sadness moves, speaks across the night's
hours, tappings toward renewal,
strummings toward a what-if when
I am discovered brushing your strands
of light with a brush part granite,
part onyx. Your neck insists a kiss.

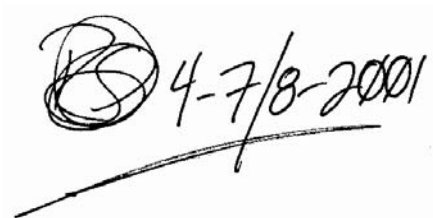
Embrace it all. Let it go. Everything
remains. Kisses of light, kisses of water,
kisses of sound. Of stone. Of gone.

Soon beyond moon as rhapsody toward news
of a different kind.

Toward neural firings that leap the
gap, pangs & hues of what lays near
the breach. Submissions. Twinings

Another time. Another field of blues.
Another girl. Every time.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what
remains. Full moons & new rhapsodies.
Good news every night. Begin to believe now. Continue.



A handwritten signature, possibly 'DS', followed by the date '4-7/8-2001'. A long horizontal line is drawn below the signature and date.

Fiction: Gerry Dillon

Aces and Eights

**I believe that men are generally still a little afraid of the dark,
though the witches are all hung, and Christianity and candles have
been introduced.**

Henry David Thoreau, 1854

That last, sharp turn of the maglev overturned your briefcase. Yes, that's better — wedged between your leg and the plastic ergonomic seat. You return to your crumpled newsfax. You peruse the advice column, not finding anything interesting. You ignore the daily affirmation and the political cartoon. You begin to read of the construction lobby's attempts to suppress an environmental impact study on Savage Point's Barking Spider habitat. Then she enters the car. She walks directly past you and assumes the final seat in the train: the one facing to the rear. She sticks her left foot up against the wall and stares out the window. The car is dark except for your inadequate reading lamp. What illumination is present seems drawn into her. She dresses in black: high black boots, black tights, long black tunic. Most of all you notice the leather jacket. An ancient brass buckle hangs on a short strap. You notice a lone chain inching up her right arm. She's not all dark — Caucasoid, her hair is blonde. Short, it rests upon the crest of her jacket. A contrast, a yellow yang to the jacket's yin. She turns. Seeing you. Not seeing you. She turns back to the swiftly passing darkness beyond the window's steelglass. At the next stop, a brace of Regular warriors board the train. They also wear leather, tho' theirs are dirty and stained. Greasy manes fall about their shoulders. They make a comment as they pass her. One bends, putting his ugly face near hers. She looks up and gutturals, "Chour eI Varpas!" The Regular's face contorts. His purple lips part to reveal filed-sharp canines. His comrades guffaw and tug on his shoulder. You relax in your seat. You hadn't noticed how tense you'd become. She looks your way again. Then back. She stares at her boots now. She casts a spell of aloneness. A spell even Regulars are powerless against. She conjures herself an island cut off from the continent of humanity. Even the seas surrounding her are infested with sharks, and Kraken, and Arcturian eels of her own devising. You hold your fax up to your face to block out the harshness of her walls, the boiling oil set to spill from her turrets. She gets off at the next stop. She stands. Shorter than you'd imagined. She holds the rail, waiting for the maglev train to set down as its electromagnetic cushion is

extinguished. You glance up. She's looking down at you. She smiles and is gone.

The maglev moves on into the night.

Izzy Rosoff exited the maglev at Soho station. She placed her hands deep in her pockets and walked toward the escalator. She passed a clothing hawker, who claimed to be raising money for Teffan peasants by selling authentic native handiwork. Bonsontu hides were illegal to export off its home planet, she knew. She walked past the fraud. She dropped some Confederation chips into the guitar case of a street musician and stepped onto the moving stairs.

Soho was a ragged collection of odd buildings inhabited by ethnic shops, ill-lit bars, art galleries, and cheap flophouses for artists, students, and other eccentrics. It was in Soho that Rosoff maintained her planetside domicile. She was the first officer of a space freighter. The *Non Sequitur* was currently in synchronous orbit about Peregrine's outer moon.

She punched her access number into the apartment house's computerized concierge. The lobby beyond the doorway was small and dark. A few hardback chairs comprised a haphazard decor. Rosoff barely noticed this as she passed to the lift. She owned the condo on the sixth floor; it was a tax investment, or so her cousin Isaac maintained. She spent barely four of Peregrine's ten months in the condo; most of her time she was in space or on some far-off planet like Bellatrix, Canopus IV, Gaeltacht, or even Earth. She had a roommate who she rarely saw. Tracey Labardia was a steward on one of the big starliners—The Astral Queen, or something equally pretentious.

The door parted at her command to reveal a neatly-kept apartment. She stripped off her leather jacket and discarded it to the floor. She went straight to her bedroom. It was a Spartan affair, for her home was the *NS*. This was just a bolthole to come to if need be. The room had a spacious bed, a dresser with a few changes of clothes, and a mahogany rack hanging on the wall. Her bookdisc collection was overly stacked onto the rack. She ran an index finger along the titles. A few were taken down. Pablo Neruda, Bob Bly, W.B. Yeats, of course. Rimbaud? Yeah. Grethveon? No, not today, thank you. She paused over Nachman Bialik—one of her Pop's faves. She placed it along with the others in a disc-case and put the case into her musette bag. Next she took down her black Spacer's vest from a peg on the wall. Less a garment, more a uniform, the vest contained her emergency equipment, an atmosphere mask, anti-STD devices, radiation patches, and her handcomputer. It slipped on easily. She grabbed the musette bag and locked the room behind her.

Rosoff activated the household computer. She transferred her itinerary from a private file to a public one. She left a note to Trace that the rent was late, and a command to the computer to restock its larder with Izzy's favorite foods and beverage a week before her next ETA. She pulled the leathers on over the Spacer's vest. Before leaving, she grabbed her last bottle of lager. She deposited it in a streetside recycling bin, once emptied.

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

11 June 2133

Peregrine

10-A-9 by E-0-0-6

Dearest Brigit,

I have come to the conclusion, little sister, that you are a relic of a passing age. I'm one, too. We are members of the human species born and raised solely on the Earth homeworld. Alien gravities, foods, and the hard radiation have not created any known changes to the deoxyribonucleic acid of our genes. So, biologically, there is no difference between you and a human sister born on Nova Nippon. Yet, psychologically, you are truly light-years apart. When you are away from the garish lights of Glencoe, you can look up into the night sky and trace the true lines of the constellations. You see the same Perseus and Andromeda as our Ptolemaic ancestors saw. Even going farther than Rigil Kentaures, the night sky is slightly skewed. Centaurus lacks its brightest star, and an indistinct sixth sun burns in Cassiopeia. Colonists on faraway planets see a different pattern in the sky; they think of the stars in a different way.

First Officer Izzy Rosoff made her MMU dart and wheel in space as she travelled between the lunar surface and her spaceship. The sled slipped facilely onto the hanger deck and landed gracefully, pinpoint on target. Bay doors silently slammed shut. Atmosphere leaked into the vacuous chamber. When a green safety light flashed, Rosoff broke the seals on her helmet and took off the tie-dyed headgear. She punched in the commands to power down her engines.

A four-foot-tall crewmember came hopping toward her. He was named Karazagrip. He was a monoped from a planet in the constellation of Bootes. His people were titular allies of Earth through the Protocols of Arcturus. The alien was bald with small pointed ears. He dragged a clumsy instrument over his shoulder. Nonchalantly, he thrust it into Izzy's MMU decontamination filter. Photons pulsated through a transparent conduit, zapping away pollutants.

"Welcome back," he said. "Good journey did you have?"

"Yeah," she replied. "Where is everybody?"

"Extravehicular the captain is."

"Why is Church in space?"

"His Mjolnir. Testing it he is."

Rosoff brushed one rebellious lock of her blonde hair back into place. Why was the Captain testing out a space fighter?

"The galley," Karazagip continued, "crewmans Kazinski, Fernandez, and Orel are—"

"Stop!" she ordered, hoping to keep him from running through the entire crew complement. "Where's Ian?"

“The bridge he is on.”

“Thanks.” She opened a storage compartment on the sled . She picked up her musette and shouldered it. She headed for the lift.

“See-ya, Short Stuff.”

“Watch your yaw,” was the first thing Izzy Rosoff heard as she entered the *NS*’s bridge. “Another two degrees starboard, Captain.” The voice belonged to the ship’s EVA specialist, Mustafa Ali Mustafa. The Syrian officer was seated at the Scanner console. A screen before him only contained a red dot. It was set for holographic display directly upon his retinas.

The bridge was an oval-shaped chamber, dominated by a five-panel instrument desk and two large wall screens. Both screens were presently blank.

Rosoff typed in her ID code to activate the Helm console. A sensor searched out her eyes and calibrated the heads-up display to form at her height and location. If she turned her head, the image would fade to translucency. She set the controls to mirror Mustafa’s display. She saw an ugly spaceship and scrolling information. This was Captain Sunghai’s *Mjolnir*. A wave of her hand dispelled the hologram.

Rosoff looked across the instrument station to Ian Palmer, who sat at the Engineering position.

“What’s up?” she asked.

He glanced up. “I’m fixing a nasty resonance pattern in the gravity generators. It’s just greater tide interference from the two moons than I’d programmed for. *Mea culpa*.”

“No.” She shook her head. “I mean with the Captain.”

“I’m not sure. I assume we’ll find out at the senior staff meeting when he comes back to the ship.”

A cratered lunar mountain peeked back at Izzy Rosoff through the viewport. At her fingertips were the means to respond to the irregularly shaped rock. She could blink the freighter’s navigational lights or she could send the massive space vessel into a lover’s orbit—closer and closer to the surface, rocked by the moon’s gravity wells, until a silent explosive hug took place. Rosoff waved to the moon. Nothing dangerous, nothing noticed. She locked down her console. The craft was on hold to countdown.

“I’m going off duty,” she said to the Zelonian engineer opposite her. “You’re elected Watch officer.” Her crewmate waved a tentacle at her as she stood.

Thick bulkhead doors spread before her. The observation dome was at the fore of the bridge. It was an open blister onto space. The only illumination in the room came from outside. A shadow passed across the dome as the ship orbited to the dark side of the moon. Trillions of newly visible stars shown down on Rosoff. She stepped up to the steelglass surface of the dome.

She wondered for a moment what was out there. She thought back to Captain Sunghai’s briefing. The meeting was long past; it had faded subtly into whispery memory. Yet its meaning, the words spoken by

Sunghai, resonated. Just as a star's light travels unceasingly to reach an Earthbound observer, so the meaning sped ineluctably across the narrow confines of her universe.

Rosoff looked about the observation dome. She normally came here to think. *Thoughts eluded her today. Only emotions—primal, raw, animalistic—spewed from her today. Rosoff had known immediately something was amiss. Her normally stoic commander had worn a tightly-drawn grimace across his face. His security blanket hung at his hip: a laser pistol. The Captain only wore his LZR-37 when he was worried. He wore it in the same way a child might clutch tightly to a Teddy bear or the way she plays with her blonde hai—it was a symbol of the certainty they did not feel. The Captain's words had not been so monstrous. He described the fear of the officials. It was a one-word-fear—a deep fear, an old fear. It was a fear known as Inskarchin.*

Access any computer panel for a history of the Inskarchin War. See the horror of the Kepler Encounter. Read the Sigma Message, a short burst sent to hibernating colonists warning them of attack and urging them to build defenses. Learn of bravery, like that of Jackson, and of perfidy, like Perkins. Review the Massacre of 70 Ophiuchus, the Battle of Barnard's Star, the Liberation of Peregrine, and the Final Assault on Achernar.

*And, she thought, there was the literature. Stories of heroism; sometimes of hype—propaganda after the fact. She never read it. Holo-thrillers were avoided. Spread-eagle lectures by space captains and planetary commanders were bypassed. She did read some of the histories, like Manubis's *The Survival of Humanity in Space*, but most of what she knew of the war came from her own memory, from her life. She had been on Peregrine. No one says that lightly. It was like saying I walked naked through hell one midsummer morning. Rosoff had arrived on the planet just weeks before the occupation began. She was placed into an Internment Camp. She remembered every detail of it. She dreamed of it. She could never forget it.*

Rosoff ran her hand through her hair as the Captain ran through the Inskarchin fears. Seven ships had disappeared mysteriously in the last few weeks. Pirates had been suggested . . . some pedestrian evil was hoped to be the villainy. Speculation increased when a broken staff had been found on a distant asteroid. It was an Inskarchin cudgel, an instrument used to obtain labor from human slaves. Izzy's chest constricted when it was mentioned. Her breath shortened. She, herself of fifteen years ago, had been a captive, the subject of the cudgel's harsh blows. Bruises, long ago faded, pained her. "It could all be nothing," Sunghai said, but his face betrayed his true feelings.

On three colony worlds, there had been unexplained cattle mutilations. That had been the first sign of the aliens so many years ago, hadn't it? The word mutilation struck her. She had seen Inskarchin handiwork, she did not shout. It's nothing but vivisection! She said little at the meeting, not because she had nothing to say. She had too much to relate. Too much to tell . . . "It could all be nothing." She clung to the shibboleth like a liferaft. "It could all be nothing" scrolled endlessly in her mind. The cudgel could be a relic from twenty years ago. Just as a radiowave takes time to span the cosmic ether, the rowan staff may be delivering its message of terror after the threat was dead. Dead. Dead. She tried to remind herself that she was no longer that little girl. She was older, grown up, capable now.

The door to the dome cycled open. Second Mate Ian Palmer stood there. He stared a moment, then said, "We're on an indefinite hold. The C.S. *Doberienier* spaced in-system six light-hours from Peregrine. All

civilian traffic has been ordered to wait until she arrives.” Palmer paused, a smile spreading across his face. “Want to visit Walter in the meantime?”

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

We have taken the Earth for granted. We feel she has always been there and always shall. Earth is like a watchful mother. Colonists find a hostile stepmother waiting for them, rolling pin in one hand, hearty bread in the other. Newly-found worlds are not so patient, loving and charitable as our true mother. These planets must be tamed, like the Badenveld government is doing, cajoled, as on Gaeltacht, or made a pacific accord with, Sigma Colony, for example. I have first hand knowledge of all this. I have been poisoned by the Rechabite fruit of New Carmel and bitten by an Augean isopod. I have swam in orange oceans and trekked across deserts devoid even of oxygen.

But I would not give up one single instant of it if called to!

In space, there is no up or down. Those terms only operate in a gravity well or in the minds of humans who escape one. Thus, some bays on the *Non Sequitur* are situated upside down when the ship has landed. These are mainly ‘space only’ areas. The main cargo monitoring room is one of them. Rosoff and Palmer stepped onto what was the ceiling. Gravity was lighter here than in most parts of the spaceship.

“Kazinski, where are you?” Izzy shouted.

The far wall of the room was dominated by a series of monitor screens. A single screen flicked on the instrument desk. The World Galaxy Association football game was being broadcast. A score flashed. It was a rout. The Dublin Bangers were trouncing the Frankfurt Paladins.

Walter M. Kazinski entered the room. He was known as *Sir Walter of the Planets* to many. The large man needed to bend to get beneath the bulkhead’s crossbeam. He was well over six feet, but a body layered in muscles and flab belied this fact. His belly hung over his belt. He had a bald plate on his skull and large hands like spades. Walter was a space-age cross between a grizzly and a Teddy bear.

“Raht cheer. Shoot, whar else youse ek-spect me ta be?”

“We’re hoping to get some of the good stuff,” Rosoff demanded.

“Falla me.” Walter went back the way he had come. A holographic triangle hung above the deck. It said WET FLOOR. “Ah spilled some lee kwid ox-eegin thar last week.”

Palmer asked, “Are you still hiding the still in the reactor access tunnel?”

“Gnaw. I-all moved Jinny.” He picked up an emergency ration bottle, brought it to his lips, and took a long swill. His pinky was held up in the air. He maintained the proper “eddycut.”

“Shoot. The radyashun deelaidd the furmentashun proh-cess.”

Walter sallied over to his workbench. Rosoff grabbed for the bottle. She took an equally long drink and

passed it to Palmer. He wiped the bottle's mouth thoroughly with his sleeve before taking his own sip. Walter waved frantically for his bottle.

"Sowz we all waitin' on some dirtside bureau-kat to let us fly free," Kazinski said with a wide flourish of his right hand.

"That's correct," Palmer replied.

"Yup. Whay don't the Cap'n slip 'eem a bribe? Shoot, that's the way thingz work on mah planet!"

Izzy took her round at the bottle. "If this stupid hold lasts too much longer, we'll miss our launch window; Inanna will have orbited into our flight path."

Walter leaned back in his chair and let his breath out slowly. "Kain't ya steer 'round a littl' ol' rock, Isadora?"

Rosoff fixed him with a lethiferous stare. "I'll do a delta v that'll make you spill your drink."

Walter hugged his bottle, his eyes becoming glassy, and his face contorting with mock fear. "Youse a hard woman, Isadora. Gettin' sose a fella' kain't even speak the thawts in his skull wuthout sumbutch makin' a cah-ment or three. A man kain't say any-thang."

Izzy leaned forward, taking a deep breath. "From what I've seen, most men—"

"The Planetary Corps is concerned about possible Inskarchin incidents in our expected trajectory," Ian interrupted.

"Wanna say thaht in English, Mistah Boss-man sir?"

"No," said Izzy, reaching for more of Sir Walter's Good Stuff. "Don't make me hear that twice. You know what he means."

Walter rocked slowly back and forth, his hands behind his shiny head. "Ah reck'n youse mean them civies so feared o' bug eyed monsters, thay'r ready to bend over an kiss thay'r arse goodbah." Kazinski leaned forward and folded his massive hands on the desktop. "Mankind—and womankind too, Isadora—ben seeing na'htmare in the sky since they all come up with the concept of Civ-ee-li-zashun. Thar wuz chariots of th' gods, Master of the World airships, even cow-killin', crop-crushin', folk-filchin' UFOs."

Izzy raised the bottle to Sir Walter and took a drink. "Cow-killin', crop-crushin' UFOs?" She took another drink. Walter smiled broadly.

"The Inskarchin aren't exactly crop-crushing flying saucers," said Ian. "Humanity once had childish fears. Today, we've seen what's out here and we're only taking sober precautions. We met the Inskarchin once and we'll do so again if need be. We were primitive but we've evolved."

"Sounds like youse think this be some golden age of humanity. They thought so back in the twentieth century too, but th' twenty-first century saw a proh-liffer-ay-shun of nukes like flies on day-old horse-duhng. If we-all hadn't blasted ahselves into space, we woulda blasted ahselves back to th' stone age. This be nuthin' but a Indian summa in the winta of ahr civ-ee-li-zashun. Thaht's all.

"Shoot. The golden age jest be some a-dults' wish to get back to a time when they neva had na'htmares or wet dreams." Walter snatched the bottle from Izzy's passive hand and drank his fill. Then, pointing the container at Ian like a school teacher's ruler, he continued. "Youse a man, Palma'. Nuttin' more. Thaht be a good thang. Thaht be enuf. We all have more in common with ahr tattooed, brute forebears than the progressive supermen you all be lookin' fur."

Izzy stood. “There are no *Übermensch*. There is no Eternal City. Even if the Universe dies, closing back up on itself, folding its head for a well-deserved rest, even then there’ll be no Eternal City. It’s ourselves we have to improve.” She grabbed the bottle. “Or not.” She headed for the exit.

“Waht got into her boots?” Walter asked, scratching his bald dome.

Ian didn’t say.

Captain Churchill Sunghai reluctantly pushed around his warmed-over Western omelet while wishing for his wife’s home-made jambalaya. The Captain was in the middle of a discussion with Maria Camile Hidalgo Fernandez. She was the quartermaster, a vital member of the ship’s afterguard. Her hair was straight and raven’s black.; it hung down her back and seemed to blend with her Spacer’s Vest. Her skin was colored like strong tea. She wore a pink blouse under the vest to match her boots. Both were humans born on colony worlds. Fernandez came from Bella Europa. Sunghai was from an African colony circling Sirius B (known as Sagala to the colonists). The world was settled by a group of mid-21st century Melanists. Sunghai was from a small island in the Tuskegee Archipelago, the most industrialized area of the agricultural planet. A small gold earring hung from his left ear. It was the man’s only ornament.

Spread before them were the ship’s watch and Quarter Bill, their present hold manifest, and a projected commodity price list for Maria’s homeworld. Their conversation was not ship’s business though.

<<Tengo cabanga por Bella Europa. Me voy de rumba con Mercedes. Deseamos ir de compras por, como se dice, some really nice clothes>> Maria said, switching dialects. <<¡Fue injusto que estoy bruja!>> She laughed.

The captain’s door opened to reveal First Mate Rosoff. Izzy entered the room and commandeered a spare chair. “Hi Fernie. ¿Que pasa?>>

Maria thought to herself: Està cuete.

<<Nada, blondita. ¿Y tú>>

<<Is tuisce deoch na sceal,>> Izzy replied.

“We could finish this later, Ms Fernandez,” the Captain said, tugging on his vest.

Maria nodded and left. <<Okay. Hasta . . .>>

“Izzy,” the Captain began, “I am glad you came by.”

“Sure,” she replied, folding her arms across her chest.

“I want you to up your hours in the *Mjolnir*.”

“I’m not interested in flying your space fighter.”

“We have only three qualified pilots aboard and each of us would be grounded in a second by any flight officer worth his bars. I need you to up your hours.”

“Church, what good is one battle boat going to do against an Inskarchin?”

“It is a delaying action. The fighter will distract the aliens long enough for the *NS* to tachyon jump.”

“The *Mjolnir* can’t jump! The pilot would be stranded.”

“Yes.” Sunghai sighed.

“Divine Wind,” Izzy mumbled.

“In the eventuality, I shall take out the craft, but I want spare pilots available. Do you have a hand weapon?”

“I have a Birmingham blaster I sleep with beneath my pillow.”

“Good—strap it to your side.” He switched his gaze to his computer monitor.

Izzy thought for a moment, tilted her head, and said, “Attention, crew, the uniform of the day will be deadly ordinance. Ear trophies optional.”

Sunghai looked up. “Sidearms will be worn for the duration of the threat.”

Rosoff ran her hand through her hair. “The duration of your paranoia, you mean.”

“The Inskarchin are not to be taken lightly.”

“Don’t you think I know that? It’s just we can’t run our entire lives from a danger that isn’t there.”

“But, Izz, that’s what people do all the time. They just give their irrational fears different names at different times in their lives.”

“You just don’t understand.” Izzy lowered her head dejectedly.

“I do. I saw the War too. I was at Barnard’s Star. I was just a gunner’s mate on the *J. Eccles*—”

“You! A gunner’s mate?” she exclaimed, pointing her index finger.

“It wasn’t much of a job. Ol’ *Eccles*, she had only a forward 20 Å particle beam cannon and a single rack of rear-launching torps.” He turned off his monitor, pulled open a desk drawer, and removed an enormous meerschaum pipe. As he loaded the pipe with a goodly amount of Beta Lyrae shag, he mused, “She was a fast ship, a thin-skinned schooner that could outrace any hulk put against her.”

He quarkfired his pipe, took several generous puffs, paused, satisfied, and chewed thoughtfully on the stem. He spoke: “I was seventeen and she was my first. We were next in the reentry queue for Milnetown. A Confederate troop transport bumped us to a higher orbit. Within minutes, tachyon missiles streaked for the planet. It took out the ship that had our position.

“My grandmother had a dream foretelling the affair. She was an old woman, mighty in *beaucoup ju-ju*.” He stopped, considering what he had just said. Izzy looked at him, herself considering the distance he has spanned in speaking those words, the opinions challenged, and the lifetime away from home illustrated. She saw him for an instant as the young seventeen-year-old he had been, not the endearingly pompous captain she has served with for years. “In her dream, the obeah man danced all around me. Her recounting of this vision unnerved me so that I nearly did not enlist in the Merchant Marines.”

“Why didn’t you? Why didn’t you listen to her?”

He removed his meerschaum from his mouth, straightened in his chair, and put on his ‘captain’s face’. “Because ghost stories are best left to Halloween. After all, this is the Twenty-second century.”

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

Sis , I know you worry about my career. Here I am on a small freighter. I chose to not up in the

Armada or to apply for a shiny suit on a big luxury cruiser. I could easily have gotten a posting at a research station. But I like it here. I am learning a lot here I could not learn elsewhere. Capt. Sunghai has been a Spacer for thirty years. Crewman Kazinski is like no one I have ever met on any other ship. He has taken me under his wing. He hopes to put back all the vices Da beat out of me. And Izzy. I don't think there is another woman like her in the entire universe (Or, at least Ma should pray so). We've spent a lot of the past months together. (She sends you her best and says your last beau sounds like a genuine Crawford!)

I am exploring more worlds than I could in any other way. An indie ship goes places the big corporations disdain to visit. I've been to Bellatrix twice. Few Armada officers make it to that system in an entire career.

Izzy Rosoff rolled over in her bunk and brushed her hand across a light-globe. It sparkled into life, flooding her quarters with illumination. She couldn't sleep. After speaking with the Captain, she walked the ship allowing exhaustion to catch her. Like a latter-day Nelson, she toured the poop deck above the engine housing, the long quarter deck, the elaborate flight deck, and the forward scuttle decks. Still she couldn't sleep. She kicked off the covers and rose. Her image motioned back at her from a full-length mirror. Even alone, Izzy could not resist the temptation to check the cut and fall of the blue camisole she wore. Not just blue, robin's egg blue. *Vanities O Vanities*, she quoted. She walked to her dressing table to fetch her hair brush. Her hair was fine, slightly dry, and blonde—just like her mother Mare's. Izzy wore it short, partly to slice away split-ends and partly to keep it from flying off *volens volens* in free fall. Her discreditor lay on the table. Displayed on its screen was a poem by Seamus Foley she had tried to read.

**If the blood does not dry,
It will seep into our root cellars.
And we need to forgive
More than we need to be forgiven.
It is the same for our forebears and their forebears
Back—back—back to a time
When the wolf would nip at a mother's crib
And the night was a blinding net cast by our foes.**

Izzy cleared the screen. She pulled up the reader's menu and retrieved a classic text from its memory.

A bosen's whistle cut through her ears. Palmer's voice followed: "Attention crew. The ship's hold has been canceled. All hands report to duty stations at two bells. That is all."

Rosoff put down the reader. She switched off Walter Appleton III's *Tom Swift and his Triphibian Atomicar*.

From the personal correspondence of Ian Palmer:

There are times when I wonder what you all are doing at home. I wonder if Da still rises at dawn, if Ma still makes haggis. I miss you all. Give my love to the folks, but save a heaping bit of my affection for yourself.

Your loving brother,

Ian

Izzy Rosoff reentered the bridge. She was dressed in a cerulean bodysuit, hip boots, and her black Spacer's vest. She strode to Palmer.

"How are you acclimating to sobriety?" she teased.

"No hangover this time." He smiled. It was a pleasant smile reminiscent of afternoon memories in vermilion fields under Cimmerian skies. "Walter was explaining the prime necessity of grog—"

"—to dull the pain of hauling the ropes at the fore all call," Izzy interrupted.

"You've heard this before?"

"A hundred thousand times." She laughed. "Did he start to sing 'Whisky Johnny'?"

"Ms Rosoff," called her Captain.

She looked to Churchill Sunghai at the Command Station. "Do we still have our window?" he asked, looking up at her. She shook her head. Taking her seat, she checked her instruments.

"Main thruster burn in fifteen minutes . . . mark!"

"Good," replied Sunghai. He turned to Palmer, still standing behind him. "Inform Peregrine we will be launching in T minus 900."

"Affer," Ian confirmed before moving toward the Comm panel.

Rosoff spoke up: "Still no word on whether this wait served a purpose. No word on what we'll find out there."

"Izzy, even if you knew we were running an Inskarchin gauntlet, would you still go off for the stars or would you go hide your head in the sandy beach at Savage Point?" the Captain questioned.

Rosoff did not answer. She stared at her monitor. After a moment, the Captain looked away.

G.C. Dillon

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Essay: Donald J. DeGracia

A Short Guide about Psychedelic Drugs for the Explorers of Inner Space

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Introduction

There are a variety of tools available to anyone interested in exploring altered states of consciousness. Such tools include meditation, out-of-body experiences, brain and biofeedback instruments, occult-type rituals, visualization exercises, and psychedelic drugs. Each of these tools provides a different doorway into the inner spaces of our subjectivity and consciousness. In this article, I would like to provide a brief overview of psychedelic drugs as one means among many for achieving altered states of consciousness. It is not my intention here to debate whether it is right or not to use psychedelic drugs, whatever one's motive, though I will discuss the variety of opinions that exist in this regard. My purpose here is twofold: to give a broad overview of psychedelic drugs in general; and to show how psychedelics can provide, if used reasonably and responsibly, a valuable and substantial tool for exploring inner spaces.

History of Psychedelic Substances

The history of mankind's involvement with psychedelics goes back thousands of years. Some modern scholars speculate that the soma of the ancient Hindus was an psychedelic substance used for purposes of religious ritual and ecstasy. The use of opiates in China and the Far East is well documented. The religious uses of psychedelic mushrooms by Native Americans is also a well-documented fact, as well as being a point of controversy in modern legislation.

For the most part, the industrial West did not become involved with psychedelic drugs until after World War II. It was in 1938 that LSD was first produced from rye mold by Albert Hoffman, who was at the time looking for antibiotic substances in fungi. Also around this time, mescaline was identified as the active agent in certain psychedelic plants. Within a few years after being recognized, these substances began to cause severe

polarization in opinions about their use and benefit.

On one hand, there were in the 1950s and early 1960s small groups of avant-garde intellectuals who began to associate religious and mystical qualities with the effects of these drugs on human perception. Perhaps best known in this regard was Aldous Huxley's book *The Doors of Perception*, which highlighted Huxley's personal experiences with mescaline. Also in this vein was Alan Watts' *The Joyous Cosmology* which similarly extolled the philosophical and mystical virtues of the psychedelic experience.

On the other hand, during this same period, psychedelic drugs such as LSD and mescaline were viewed by many in the medical and psychiatric fields as substances that seemed to simulate psychosis. Initially, the term "psychedelic" did not even exist. In the 1950s and 1960s these drugs were generally called "psychomimetics," meaning that their effects mimicked symptoms displayed by psychotics and paranoids. Perhaps the crowning tribute to this view of LSD was the book *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, which reflected Kesey's experiences as a volunteer in LSD medical experiments. Incidentally, Kesey, in the late 1960s went on to be one of the leaders of the West coast psychedelic movement with his band of "Merry Pranksters" (whose adventures are detailed in Tom Wolfe's book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*).

So from the outset, psychedelic drugs have been viewed by Western thinkers from

opposing points of view: most doctors initially equated the drugs' effects with psychosis, while intellectuals equated the drug's effects with profound religious experiences.

The story of LSD began to peak in the early 1960s with the research of Timothy Leary at Harvard University. Initially, Leary, who was a Harvard psychologist researching the nature of personality, had only an impartial scientific interest in these so-called psychomimetic drugs. He soon found out however that their effects were so great as to cause him to essentially abandon his roots as an elitist East Coast intellectual and become one of the founding fathers of the psychedelic movement in the United States. It was Leary's contention that psychedelic drugs opened up to human perception things long lost from Western tradition, things that were well understood in older cultures and religions. Timothy Leary recognized, like other intellectuals a decade before him, that these drugs have the potential to cause profound religious and mystical experiences, experiences that could easily be distorted and misconstrued by Western reductionist intellectuals as being symptoms of insanity. Leary, like any other person made sane by LSD, came to the conclusion that it was the modern West that was insane, not some poor individual in a psychiatric ward who was experiencing visions and hearing voices.

I do not think there is a need here to attempt to recount in full the story of Timothy Leary. However, we will return to the contention that psychedelic drugs cause religious and mystical experiences. At this

point, it is enough to say that Leary helped start something much bigger than himself. The psychedelic movement gained much momentum through the late 1960s, climaxing with events like Woodstock. However, quick as it came, it was gone. LSD was made illegal, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin died, Leary got off his soap-box, and the United States, after failing miserably in Vietnam, drifted into the depressing 1970s.

And here we are, some 30 years later. LSD has not gone away, it is simply not talked about anymore. The best of the actual psychedelic movement turned into the Grateful Dead, who rode a successful music career well into the 1990s. And the basement scientists who in the 1960s made and sold LSD turned into the "designer drug" community on the West Coast, giving us such wonderful poisons as "Ecstasy" (which causes severe nerve damage if taken enough - so beware!).

With this bit of history under our belts, I'd like to discuss a little about the psychedelic drugs themselves both in terms of what their subjective effects are and also what is known about how they react in the body. After that, I will then go into more detail about their use as a tool for exploring inner space.

The Effects of Psychedelic Drugs

So doctors call it insanity, and intellectuals call it enlightenment but, really, what is it? What are the effects caused when on psychedelic drugs?

In terms of effects, one of the most important generalizations about these drugs' effects was laid out by Leary when he spoke

of "set and setting." What he meant by this is that what an LSD user actually experienced was critically dependent on the user's state of mind (set) and where he was at and what company he was in (setting). It is very difficult to classify the effects of psychedelics because they are so dependent upon set and setting. If the user is depressed and in bad company, the experience will be vastly different than if the user is relaxed, happy and in good company.

But, keeping this idea of "set and setting" in the front of our minds, we can still make some generalizations about the subjective effects of the LSD experience. Some of the most commonly reported effects are:

1. Visual hallucinations.
2. Audio hallucinations.
3. Sensory mixing (hearing sights or seeing sounds).
4. Weakening of ego boundaries (a weakening or loss of sense of self).
5. Enhanced ability to think abstractly.
6. The uncontrollable urge to laugh.
7. Enhanced ability to sense the emotions of others.
8. Inability to maintain focus or concentration for long periods.
9. Feelings of extreme joy
10. Feelings of extreme depression and terror.
11. A direct apprehension of God.

Now this list is by no means complete. It only states some of the more commonly reported

effects. It is also important to state that not all of these are experienced by an LSD user. As a matter of fact it is possible that none of these effects will be experienced. It is important to be aware that: THE EFFECTS OF PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS ARE EXTREMELY UNPREDICTABLE. The rule of "set and setting" is the best guide for anticipating what the effects of a psychedelic experience may be. As a matter of fact, I have a close friend who is quite experienced at the use of psychedelics, and his rule of thumb is the following: "if you have a garden in your mind, then you'll be in it. If you have a garbage can in your mind, then you'll be in it." This is very useful advice.

Explanations of Psychedelic Effects

At this point I would like to begin to discuss what it is that these drugs are doing in the body. There is no question that psychedelics cause profound effects. The really key question is: where do these effects come from?

To answer this question I would like to lay out two very different theories of what it is the psychedelics are doing to the human being. We will see that these theories are complimentary in that they both shed light on mode of the action of psychedelic drugs. However, these two theories I am about to discuss are products of vastly different world-views that most people consider to be contradictory. In this article, I take the attitude that we can learn from both. The two views of how psychedelics affect humans that I will now discuss are the scientific view

and the occult view. Both science and occultism offer reasonable and useful views about the nature of the psychedelic experience. However, what I intend to illustrate here is that the occult view is simply better. Let us begin with the scientific view.

Scientific Explanations of Psychedelic Effects

Science tells us that our consciousness is somehow the product of our brain; that our psychology is the software, and the brain is the hardware. At first glance, the LSD experience seems to completely support this view for we have eaten a chemical that severely alters the hardware, and thus, expectedly, alters the software (i.e. our thoughts and perceptions). For the moment, let us just accept this contention and work with it.

Modern scientific investigations into the structure of the brain shows that it is made of lots of different layers of tissues such as the cortex, cerebellum and others. These tissues in turn are, in total, made of some one trillion cells. These cells are called neurons. Neurons look a lot like tree branches, branching off in myriad directions touching many, many other neurons. And the neurons align themselves like fibers, making thick tracts of cable throughout the brain. Neurons conduct electricity along themselves; this electricity is created by salts like sodium and potassium, chloride and calcium. These salts act in the cells, much like the salts in a battery work to make electricity.

Neurons do not touch each other directly; there is a small space between adjacent neurons called a synapse. Neurons conduct electricity from one to the next by electrical impulse traveling the length of the first or sending neuron until it gets to the synapse. At this point, the electricity at the synapse causes the first neuron to release chemicals, called neurotransmitters, into the synapse. These neurotransmitters float across the synapse where they encounter the second or receiving neuron. Depending on the nature of the second neuron, once the neurotransmitters contact it, it will either continue the impulse (and this then would be an excitatory neuron), or it will not conduct the impulse (this is an inhibitory neuron). It is important to appreciate that there are two types of neurons in the brain, excitatory and inhibitory. This is important for understanding how science explains the mode of action of psychedelic drugs.

As it turns out, the chemical structure of the psychedelic looks very similar to the chemical structure of the neurotransmitters in the brain. Scientists therefore conclude (and quite reasonably) that what happens when you take a psychedelic drug is that the drug gets into the brain and interferes with the normal operation of the neurotransmitters. The psychedelic drug fools the neurons into thinking it is a neurotransmitter and it then disrupts the normal flow of business in the neurons. Now the specific details of how this happens do not exist. Yet, because the psychedelics expand the activity in one's consciousness, scientists believe that whatever psychedelics are doing in the brain,

ultimately they are disrupting inhibitory synapses. The idea here is that inhibitory synapses serve a filtering function in the brain and that unwanted or unnecessary stimuli are inhibited. If psychedelics disrupt this filtering function, then one would expect an increase in the "noise" level of the brain leading to such activities as hallucinations or even delusions. Thus, the effects of psychedelics are generally seen by scientists to be "noise" (similar to static on a radio, for example).

There is no question a certain degree of merit to this hypothesis. However, one could ask as well: are there perhaps latent functions in the brain that are turned on by psychedelics? This point of view has not been well-addressed by scientific research: how can you look at something if you don't know it exists? If there are functions turned on by psychedelic drugs in the brain that do not normally operate in our usual states of consciousness, then scientists have nothing to compare these states to, and thus are affected by a blind spot. Still, though this question of turning on latent functions is not easily addressed in terms of scientific thinking, we shall see below that occult views provide us a basis to reasonably address this question.

In spite of any hypothesis scientists may provide as to the operation of psychedelics in the nervous system, we must put this discussion in its proper perspective. Whatever scientists may profess to know about the activity of psychedelic drugs is colored strongly by the fact that the current scientific understanding of how the brain and

nerve cells work is highly incomplete.

So on one hand, scientists like to believe that the brain creates consciousness, but on the other hand, scientists have only a partial and incomplete understanding of how the brain works. This seems like putting the cart before the horse to me. It is possible that science will come to understand in very full detail how the operation of the brain leads to memory formation and other psychological phenomena. The bottom line is that science's contention that the brain creates consciousness is more belief and dogma than it is a provable fact.

It's important to appreciate this situation, because what it does is leave the doorway open for alternative explanations. And in this quest for alternative explanations, we do not have to take an attitude that science is wrong and the alternatives are right, or vice versa. We can take a more balanced and reasonable attitude and realize that different explanations will give us a broader scope on the issue and therefore, in the end, make our understanding fuller than if we defensively or dogmatically cling to only one view of things.

So having said this, let us turn to an alternative explanation of LSD's effects (and any other psychedelic for that matter).

Occult Explanations of Psychedelic Effects

Occultists have a much different world-view from scientists, but as a world-view it is no less complex. Occultism teaches that our consciousness is independent from our body. According to occultists, our body (and therefore our brain as well) is but a

temporary vehicle that houses our consciousness in the span of our life in the physical world. Occultism also teaches that there are worlds other than the physical and these worlds are called "planes." Only four of these planes are significant to humans. These are the physical, astral, mental and buddhic planes. According to occultists we also have vehicles or bodies for each of these planes. Thus each of us has an astral body and mental body and a buddhic body.

It is by this theory that occultism explains the plain facts of our lives. Occultism teaches that our emotions are our astral body, that our mind is our mental body, and that our soul or conscience is our buddhic body. Thus, right from the start, occultism does not bother with the idea that our physical body creates our mind, emotions or soul (and this idea of "soul," incidentally, is something science likes to deny). Instead, occultism claims that all of these vehicles overlap and interact and create our life and experience as we know and understand it.

Occult theories detail very carefully the manner in which all the vehicles interact. The interaction of the vehicles is explained by the theory of the chakras. The chakras are seven (or a couple more depending on the scope of the occult theory) vortex-like depressions in the astral, mental and buddhic bodies that serve as energy channels between the bodies. The chakras are energy processing centers that hold the bodies together and unify mind, body, emotion and soul into the one framework of our direct experience. As it turns out, the location of the chakras in our other bodies, line up in a line with the spine of our physical body and they are located

wherever there is a nerve plexus in our physical body.

Furthermore, occultism teaches that there is an intimate feedback and interplay between all of the bodies, and this feedback is effected through the chakras. Our physical body also has chakras, but these are invisible to our physical senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and hearing. Our physical chakras are made of a type of radiation that is invisible to our sense (this radiation is called "etheric matter" by occultists), but they exist nonetheless, and serve as the bridge between our nervous system and our astral, mental and buddhic bodies.

Chakra theory is very complex. Each chakra serves a variety of specific functions. These I will only briefly outline here to the extent that it is relevant to our discussion of psychedelic drugs. Here is a list of the chakras by their common name (the Hindu names can be found in any worthwhile yoga book). These will be listed from the bottom of the spine up to the top of the spine, along with the corresponding body locations:

1. Root chakra—between the legs
2. Navel chakra—at the waste
3. Spleen chakra—over the navel
4. Heart chakra—over the heart
5. Throat chakra—over the throat
6. Third eye chakra—over the forehead
7. Crown chakra—top of head

So as not to keep the reader in suspense, the reason I am going into some detail about chakra theory is that we shall see that it explains much more clearly than science

does what happens when under the influence of psychedelic drugs. To go into this we need some understanding of the functions of the chakras. These are listed briefly as:

1. Root—sex energy, libido
2. Navel—excretion (kidneys, liver), sensation in general
3. Spleen—digestion, energy input, ability to dream
4. Heart—circulation, empathy
5. Throat—communication, speech, hearing, clairaudience
6. Third-eye-sight, cognition, clairvoyance
7. Crown—brain, thought, spirituality

Notable here is that each chakra has not only physical functions or organs associated with it, but also subjective and psychological functions. It is by means of this theory that occultism explains the relationship between mind and body and soul. All of these factors are interconnected through the operation of the chakras. Even though it may seem that we are getting unnecessarily complex here, we are actually building a very powerful theoretical framework of how a human is built and operates. Already at this point we have related biological and psychological functions in one coherent theory. Science, with its reductionist mentality can offer us no equivalent counterpart.. Chakra theory, and occultism in general, does indeed offer this understanding. Furthermore, occultism does not contradict or clash with science in any way; instead, it offers us an expanded viewpoint that integrates the facts known to modern science into a larger view of our total

experience as human beings

So with this minimal picture of occult theory in mind, let us return to the issue of psychedelic drugs. Using occult theory, what we can say is that psychedelic drugs severely affect the behavior of the chakras. All of the subjective effects listed earlier in this article can be accounted for as effects of hyperactivity in definite chakras:

1. Visual hallucinations are in actuality the stimulation of the third eye chakra, leading to some degree of clairvoyance, which is the perception of the adjacent planes.
2. Audio hallucinations are the stimulating of the throat chakra to hyperactivity. In this case, one begins to hear on, for example, the astral plane.
3. The mixing of sensory modalities is an effect of the crown chakra, which is the site of integration, not only of sensory perception, but astral perception (emotions), and mental perception (thinking). Thus, at the point of integration (crown chakra) all separate modalities are blended into a unified consciousness. This effect is enhanced under psychedelics. And the psychedelic effect is even more pronounced because of the fact that we rarely recognize this integration to begin with. It is there all along but we don't realize it, and when the drug stimulates the crown chakra and we are forced to look at this integration

of the modalities of our consciousness, it seems surprising to us.

4. The weakening of ego boundaries is again an effect of increasing the activity of the crown chakra. In this case, it is not so much that the ego is loosened but that the ego is seen in its proper perspective in the totality of our organization as a human being. Again, this is an effect of the integration function of the crown chakra. The ego (which effectively is our personal identity) is but one facet of our being. In our daily lives, however, we tend to over emphasize our ego at the expense of other facets of our being. Again, the psychedelic stimulation of the crown chakra only serves to put things in a more realistic perspective.
5. Enhanced ability to think abstractly. What is happening here is that the psychedelic triggers off such an enormous increase in libido energy (which will be discussed below) that our mind is capable of perceiving a much vaster range of the mental plane. This effectively translates into broader, more sweeping and more abstract thoughts.
6. The uncontrollable urge to laugh is a classic phenomenon indicating enhanced chakra activity. Laughter is a release of tension. Increasing the activity of chakras is also a release of tension. The increased chakra

motion effectively burns up the extra energy. An experienced LSD user is unlikely to have this laughter effect, only a novice who is not used to the sensations of enhanced chakras would express these sensations by uncontrollable laughter. This is very similar to how people laugh when they are nervous or cry when they are very happy. However, on the psychedelic, the effect is greatly increased.

7. The enhanced empathic ability is mainly a function of the hyperstimulation of the heart chakra. Our whole ability to be sensitive to the emotions displayed by others resides in the heart chakra. The psychedelic stimulates the heart chakra, so it is no surprise that a typical psychedelic user is more sensitive to the feelings and attitudes of others.

8. Inability to maintain focus or concentration for long periods. Here we run into a situation that is probably more a function of the brain than of the chakra system. It should be pointed out that experienced psychedelic users will report that this effect only lasts for a small percentage of the time that the drug effects are occurring. Probably what we are seeing here is the maximum effect of the actual chemical in the physical body in which there is a maximum disruption of the normal function of

the neurons in the brain. Again, this effect is short lived (usually about 30-60 minute). And often it seems that this effect is a prelude to the effect of thinking abstractly. It appears that we are dealing with distinct phases of the drug experience here and with effect number 5, again, with number 8 here preceding number 5.

9. Feelings of extreme joy. This effect is literally the opposite of effect 10: feelings of extreme terror and/or depression. What we have here is an amplification of one's normal state of mind by the enhanced libido of the drug. Whatever the user is feeling becomes greatly magnified, so reports of extreme emotional states are common. Also, since emotion is generally a function of the concerted (simultaneous) operation of the four lower chakras, we find here evidence that the psychedelic is affecting not only the higher chakras (throat, third-eye and crown) but the lower ones as well.

10. Finally, the direct apprehension of God. It is in studying this psychedelic effect that we can begin to tie together many elements of this article. We have seen that intellectuals such as Huxley, Watts, and Leary identified the LSD experience with religious experience. Furthermore, all yoga texts worth reading explain that the function of yoga is ultimately to transfer all of

the libido energy to the crown chakra at which point the yogi achieves nirvana, or mystical insight, which, practically speaking, is the total, integrative psychological event. One directly perceives the unity of the cosmos, and one's place in this unity. For all practical purposes, this is indeed seeing God. That Western intellectuals have perceived this in a religious context, and Western physicians have perceived this in the context of psychosis, really tells us something about Western intellectuals and Western doctors.

At this point, I would like to attempt to generalize this picture of the action of psychedelic drugs on the chakras system. One important facet of occult teaching I have not explicitly stated yet, though I have been using it, is the idea of "kundalini". Yogis and occultists teach that housed in the root chakra is a fundamental energy called kundalini. This energy is depicted as a coiled snake and it is the goal of the yogi and occultist to, slowly and in a controlled manner, release this energy. The purpose for releasing this energy is to bring it progressively through the chakras, which in turn confers the particular psychic abilities associated with that chakra. This process is known as "awakening" or "vivifying" a chakra. This energy is brought up the spine (or the etheric counterpart thereof) and its final destination is the crown chakra, which, upon successfully reaching, confers enlightenment, which is the true goal of both yoga and occultism, as well as mysticism. Bringing the kundalini to the crown chakra is exactly the

method by which enlightenment is conferred.

Above I used the word "libido," a word derived from Freud that loosely translates as "sex energy," Libido is kundalini. However, the idea of kundalini is much broader and clearer than Freud's concept of libido, so I will now use the word kundalini from here on out.

So with this background, let us attempt to give a general explanation, in occult terms, of the effect of psychedelic drugs on a human being.

What seems to be happening during the psychedelic experience is that the kundalini is spontaneously activated by the drug. How this occurs is unknown. What probably happens is that the psychedelic somehow affects the gland system of the body (which is called the endocrine system and includes the adrenal glands, thyroid, parathyroid, pituitary and pineal glands, among others), not simply the brain. I make this statement about the endocrine system because occultists often point out the crucial role played by the pineal and pituitary glands in meditative practices. In a fashion that is very ill-defined both scientifically and occultly, these glands play an intimate role in relation to the kundalini. Unfortunately, not much more than this can be said.

Somehow, the drug confers changes in the endocrine system of the body that result in the stimulation of the kundalini. The kundalini becomes active in an uncontrolled fashion, which is literally the opposite of yoga in which kundalini is slowly and painstakingly controlled over years of meditative practices. The onset of alterations in the LSD user's perception corresponds

with the onset of the kundalini release. As this energy is released in a spontaneous and uncontrolled fashion, any number of psychological and subjective events are possible that would be completely dependent on the circumstances under which the drug was taken. This then is the explanation of Timothy Leary's notion of "set and setting."

Psychedelic Drugs and Inner Exploration

At this point we have completed our overview of psychedelic substances. We've briefly mentioned the history, discussed the subjective effects of these drugs, and gone into some detail of scientific and occult explanations of why these drugs do what they do to human beings. In this last section, I would like to try to tie all of this together in terms of how these drugs provide a tool for the individual interested in exploring his or her own subjectivity, the inner spaces of one's being.

Going off on all the occult chakra theory as I did above has one overridingly important lesson to it, and that is the realization that psychedelics do in one hour what yogis spend their lives trying to accomplish. The release of the kundalini energy is no small or trivial matter. My friend that I mentioned earlier likes to compare LSD and related substances to nuclear bombs. Both are immediate, almost incomprehensively powerful, and can kill a lot more readily than they can heal. LSD is something to be respected, if not revered, because it is indeed a doorway to many divine things. I would not discourage one from taking the drug.

However, I do not advocate the careless use of the drug either. If one is interested in using it as a tool for experiencing realities that current dogma tells us do not exist, well, I recommend that the explorer exercise respect for this particular tool. And then, as an explorer, you can see that current dogma is simply wrong.

Another purpose for going off on both scientific and occult theory is to show that there is way more going on here than meets they eye. In this regard, I have a favorite quote by Leadbeater that says it all: "We must beware of falling into the fatally common error of supposing that what we see is all there is to see." LSD, and psychedelic drugs in general, can be used as a tool to give concrete substance to Leadbeater's statement. The watchful and attentive psychedelic user will learn many things about the hidden worlds that we cannot perceive with our physical senses, ranging from things as unbelievable as seeing the cells inside your brain, to seeing atoms and molecules, to readily perceiving abstractions so glorious as to defy your very being, all the way to—dare I say it—seeing God first hand, and allowing God to talk through your mouth. On this note, I'd like to end this article with a quote by Aleister Crowley, (taken from *The Book Of Wisdom Or Folly*) that absolutely captures the spirit of this article:

"Concerning the Use of Chymical Agents, and be mindful that thou abuse them not, learn that the Sacrament itself relateth to Spirit, and the Four Elements balanced thereunder, in its Perfection."

mind states II
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Fixtion: Ray Soulard, Jr.

*Boxes Redux
(Immutable Phalanx)
[a new fixation]*

*"She stood face to face with the truth and went on living
and endured her life then as now."*

Franz Kafka, The Castle

Yes. No matter the moment, no matter the view, no matter the joy, no matter the woe.

Yes.

Evil, there it is. Red poisons in twilight jungles. Black wings rising over gray and dimming spaces. The kind of cold that does not romance, does not mellow.

TV news. Year in review. Houses carried by floods past grim multiple-murder scenes through towns with watchtowers, each window a sad sniper's last home, place of final exclamations.

Yes.

Her skin softer than any others, her smile skyvast, scripture-wild, looking at me from across a continent, a decade, an insurmountable dump of words and disappointments. Blue eyes, down. Or were they green?

A friend at a bar, at my heart's all-night bar, drinking on my dime, glasses of wine, cheap dago-red, now dancing to the lights on the jukebox

"Mr. Jones and me . . .
we're gonna be big stars . . ."

please listen to me no matter my past or punctuation I know you

pretty soul and I know that smile of yours snowy fields of sugar
you are a Yes you are I believe you are I believe you are
approaching me even now I believe you'll be here soon impossible
like brown hills of sunlight necessary like Godd dripping from
every tree everywhere soon if I just collect my tears and wait
yes there you'll be perhaps visible this time a someone well-
contrived well-invented

a someone, Yes
watching me and waiting
a smile, a curl, ticking--

Where to go, forward, and how to get there, forward, but
what about yesterday, you are Here & Now, what about yester,
yester, Yesterdayland, yes, what about it and where to go and how
to get there?

Here & Now, ragged pilgrim, Here & Now. A lit joint, warm
and dry, on a bowl of night, chilly, wet.

The usual chessplayers with their grim expressions and their
silly humor. The usual collegegirls with their bright mouths,
emotions run dawn to darkness in a dot, Symbol and act,
interpretation and fact, blood hot til music, flesh's passing
moment of best, first hope. The workers who serve and serve and
come and go, and their owners who compile, calculate, and keep.
Cracked Mozart on the broken loudspeakers. Signs that proudly lie:
"Discover the Secret! of our new Sandwiches."

Yes. Fine. Caffeine. Clothes. Seas of gossip and debate for
the price of a cup.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

What?

How to get from here to there. How to recall the illusion
that there is a here and there.

Tick. Tick.

Discover the Secret! of our new sandwiches.

Discover the soft glow behind the ordinary truth behind the
soft glow that is her eloquent face. A She, one of several, many,
pick one, perhaps I have my favorite, perhaps she has long brown
hair, black turtleneck and checked pants. Perhaps my eyes have
spied for me line and curve through a glassed wall between us,
perhaps I remain unreasonable in carefully spying on an arched
back, small hands, the dead air of talk with her girlfriend,
perhaps I have imagined a place I would like to nestle in,
beneath her held breasts, a soft place near breathing, a vertical
drop against which I rest, several small drops of desire,

tickling, reminding--

the Secret of writing to the absolute Moment-Place, revealed now, is that Art cannot be contrived any other way. Time and place are twin dictators, joined obscurely to Human State, telling this useless to the ego'd sprawl of souls blinking earnestly at screens of light, gonna make it right now, typed it last night, gonna make it right now, gonna move and add and subtract and make it right now, uh, now, uh, now, uh, now--

Our new sandwiches, see the bent man buy one with a coffee, see the squat man buy one with a pickle, see the little lovers share one with babytalk and crotch-caresses, our new sandwiches, to fill your hands when love demurs, to fill your mouth when you fear to talk, to fill your stomach while your heart complains--

Sharing a cell with the confessing night, learning the code it embeds in wind and light, loving what I see for its solidness and its absence. Noone can prove that the world exists. Noone can prove that it doesn't.

Soon there'll be a walk along BloomingBabyStreet, a heartspill to the trees and spirits, grass and sky of Bell Rock Cemetery, a bed, a book, a TV, a private shuddering remembrance of tight checked slacks, dreams in ZombieTown of matters ne'er still.

Accepting, as best one can, how far has been travelled from one's original intention, from the place of one's beginnings, origin of empire, origin of soul. How far.

Carrying the trinkets any farflinging pilgrim would possess, and eventually discarding some older ones for some newer ones. Discovering colonies along the way that believe they are carrying out original intent; and yet others that hold that they are the original seat, that entering their environs is returning home.

How the wind keeps blowing, keeps scattering! How tonight's snow falls with neither name nor intent. An act that pronounces the fullness of its identity only upon ceasing.

And this-all inside a box, this sickness inside this pursuit inside this box. Legs like clouds atop mountains like eyes. It never begins. It never ends.

And the souls weary of all this, the good, decent souls in the streets of Boston and Hartford, and Seattle and Macon, and Columbia and Chicago, Paris, Tokyo, Saigon, Persia, Atlantis, Menoa, Eden, Wonderland and Purgatory, fried still and black by questions, doubts, and the late evening's writhing need for an answering body of flesh, a freely given revelation, satisfying, sweet, pure but able, Godd as full moon over warm ocean,

allowing, defining, infinite yet knowable here and now--

yes, indeed. instructions on how to pray, where to masturbate, who to love, when to die.

tell me what good tonight's snowstorm brings--

instruct me how to fly without wings or hallucinogens--

allow me to become the gentle hands I lay upon my lover, to move beneath flesh, within blood, through breathing, into the vibrations each heartbeat generates--

and damned much more

i want to see with the universe's eyes--i want to swathe cosmic consciousness about each of my tears--i want to grow branches and stripes and revolve around supernovas-- i want the gorgeous moments of my past back now, to ride soft currents through, to reinvent and thus carry me elsewhere into a coulda-woulda-shoulda, a new dice-throw this time, a new box, a different pursuit, a changed sickness, i want Heaven to don leather pants and go down on me again and again until i learn and keep this truth, how the music of this moment is infinite, the every-freedom of Here & Now, the blunt smiling truth of tonight's snowfall, every symbol falling is a simple, uncontainable flake, every hill a testament:

no need to say i am godd or you are godd or there is godd or godd is all there is

no need to write or say anything, no need even to write about freedom or necessity, for at the farthest end of consciousness there isn't anything really, one is an omni-existent drop in a non-existent ocean or what-have-you

where stories do not exist

where identities have longago fallen, piled, melted away

returning from there, in a sense, to this story, to its desire to be here and be unique, to its writer's need to continue for awhile approaching the cosmos without stars, the Godd without cosmos, approaching without arriving, without staying

seeking the moment when i can become an empty pen that fills as i write, that renews blank sheets from their inked bondage, that writes the greatest, best, last, only story this world has to give, over and over again until every bookshelf in the world is crowded with blank revealing pages by the millions---

i.

Yes. Yes. Cornered by visible pursuit, become less than one shadow among a thick, thick, thick, possessions abandoned, identities crushed and discarded, enough room in the folds of the night to keep one sentiment, one conviction. Yes.

Perhaps become a riff of dust in the corner for a time. Perhaps become a tuneless voice in a flabby cafe. Perhaps rest invisibly aside a stranger's pain. Perhaps carry on choicelessly.

Peace, or at least a manner of calm, comes only atop an arching wave approaching a beach, without landing, for freeing, erotic moments, not landing 'pon the beach.

Give up. Start again. Life of the pen.

The world is thicker with love than ashes.

Begin without beginning. Begin with no intention of ever ending. Begin like all of creation begins, that is, continuously.

You see, nobody else sees her at that empty table over there, watching me with bright, heavy blue eyes, lit skin, a body like a galaxy, like enthroned and harsh perfection, watching me and making her picture of watching me, a vessel, a scripture, a clock, woman, flower, cream, heat, star, rising, a cup, continuous sunrise--

ii.

It's OK to be happy: I told me acid told me so. But how? asked me acid asked me how. Art! Art! sing loud despair me sing the night.

Sing the night tell the truth sing me tell the truth sings the night

nothing else. the truth. Art! Art! sings the darkbird, the night, lights her jewels, truth her chamber, her house, one-eyed, Art! Art! sing loud despair me sing the night-- acid tell me tell you so

this story will breathe as Art allows it to breathe, teaches it to breathe

Art, beat, Art, beat, Art, beat

this story intends the truth as Art has shown me how and no

other no other for which I am not of which I don't to which I
can't

begin when ready
enter when full
liven when knowing
Gone, thus most certainly here

near 1 a.m., now. Along BloomingBabyStreet, now, sitting on
the 60s Rock, ZombieTown, Ma.

This story continues to begin to begin, and I know that this
is fine because I have bawled and brawled my way into Merry
Muse's bosom and whilst in this soft vast place I know that the
pen can do no wrong because this act in which I am engaged is my
prayer beyond prayer of Art by Art to Art and there is no right
or wrong wheream I right now. A Moment-Place, this, visible, look:
there i am, sitting on a granite block I call the 60s Rock, feet
resting upon frozen, broken snow, the sky not black but deep grey
and partly clouded, the air chilly with a slight wind the street
long and straight and empty and its bleak run lit up from many
streetlamps I am OK right now you see and so this story will get
better and in time will get told

its only reader is its writer who is hands-open to all of
Creation now that is listening to it now what comes later for
this story in the crowded manyeyed world doesn't matter as much
because you see now and its kin of moments when pen licks paper
are this story's brightest lights of existence when the page is
half-filled when the thoughts are becoming words when the hand is
moving the pen, the hand moved by the man, but the man is being
moved by all of Creation as configured in the floating Now--

Now sitting on the steps of Rohm Tech building, getting cold,
breathing hard; doubts gathering? Not in any serious way. Once
aloft, I stay thus for awhile. I fought myself to get to this
moment, and I won, and tomorrow's daylight dullness won't pierce
me like of late because I won't be quite back down so the story
will start soon as it has already started and it will continue to
begin long beyond its last page--

Just inside Bell Rock Cemetery now, having pressed needing
hands to strong, true treetrunks, slipped around on the icy path,
walked amongst the spirits explaining how I need to be near them,
their comfort,
silence and stillness
now a most beautiful potion

thank you, trees
thank you, sky
thank you, iced earth
thank you, ancient spirits

today, my friends, i struggled for meaning, fucked doubt with
silent agony
Merry Muse refusing me til I would be refused no more

Fuck Money
Fuck Loneliness
Fuck Fear
Fuck Doubt

Art is All
She is All----

iii.

She is ready to begin again, is excited with new idea, all
ready, ready to begin again here & now

She is 17 years old but ready to gather the pieces of her
world together here & now, to dust off the canvas, clean it up,
and broaden it and deepen it and make it a big high light in the
here & now

She knows he'll let her do what she wants and how she wants,
knows he wants only his space to make music, his pint for thirst,
his table for thought and his backroom to hide in

She's 17 years old and she's known the environs of Luna T's
Cafe in Hartford, Connecticut all of her life. Since she was 4
years old anyway

Rebecca Dorothy Americus walks around Luna T's Cafe one
night, looking and thinking, and she returns to it almost daily
and surely in dreams and she knows what to do and she also knows
what to leave alone

Mr. Bob the bartender watches her looking and knows she's
about to-- He knows she's had no place to take her artbag and
artbooks and her kinetic fancies since the Arcadia Bookstore &
Cafe burned down a year or so ago.

But now she's looking around Luna T's Cafe.
Readying.

iv.

"Daddy?"

"Yes?"

"I want to start a project with you"

"Yes"

"It has to do with Luna T's"

"Yes"

"And, um, making some changes"

"Yes"

"Don't you want to know which ones?"

"Will you leave me a stage, a table and a drink?"

"Yes!"

"And posters on the wall?"

"Yes!"

"A TV and a radio for Mr. Bob?"

"Daddy!"

"Rebby, Luna T's is as much yours as mine. I'll make you manager if you like. Just tell me what you want to do and we'll do it."

" "

"What's wrong?"

"I want to do this with you, Dad! Not just your permission. I want us to do it together. If it's both ours like you said then shouldn't we do it this way?"

"Yes"

"So you'll help me?"

All he wants to do is load the stage with his musical artillery, load & fire, load & fire, load, load, fire, fire, dance, jump, immolate, love inside the box, vibrate the box til love spills beyond the box, box of sound, box of love

And she knows he wouldn't ever do what she intends--but wants her to yes and to today and to complete dimensionality and to

in the telling of truth, in the singing of light, there is a humble majesty of presence summoned, a weightless ecstasy, a fat sunlight shaft to be ridden into the hidden night-sun, and whatever beyond the prayerful moment, a swaying place, whatever

become a speeding dot, a visible intention, a tree in strength & simplicity, a skyvasteye jewelringing and quite disinterested

galaxies soft but enduring

vi.

Look, it's another brilliant night in the universe, another bright continuance of the morrow, another anticipation of what Yesterday will be like.

Offer a grateful prayer-- hell, light up a cigar and puff victory. I watched him do it, fire up that badass Cuban stogie, rouse the drowsy drinkers with a loud Scotch toast to the Pope

"Hey! Let's get him a hooker!" someone cracks.

"Castro?"

"No. John Paul Eye-Eye. A nice young one. Plant her in schoolgirl white socks and nothing else on in the papal bed, beneath the satin papal sheets"

"Spread her wet and pointed toward Godd!"

"No! let her go down on him! He's old. He might break!"

Yes, fine, yes, order a pint of amber, yes, one for her, too.

"Hey barkeep! Where'd that blonde chick go? The owner's girl?"

"I'm not sure, Son."

"She was a piece!"

"I bet she swallows!"

"Is there a choice?"

Yes, whether they're lampposts or stars above your head, they sure are pretty. And look at those two in particular, the blue ones, close together, they're watching you too, hoping you're a Godd, fearing you're simply a man

are you simply a man?

with her up there redhaired in the ordinary black sky her saying rise! rise! you canna sink! her the best kind of love because the most difficult, the most-often-lonely, the bright dash in grey splashed scape

Practice undifferentiation, just for a moment. I love you most when you're most nearly gone. I'm holding onto you, drop me, let me go, look me in my-- and let me drop so that I have to believe you'll catch me down below, have to believe

Abandon yourself to silent dancing, to the licking of sleeping thighs, to the singing-to-graceful-grimaces, the She-Goddess, the Art-Godd we're moving between time and eternity we'll not be found today

Someone told you there are a billion colors in the world. Someone told you you're beautiful. Someone listened like you meant it. Someone is dreaming of you naked and naughty, twisting, a rough stranger

Begin naming the billion colors begin now begin yesterday
begin when you began count them down tick them off til they are
you and you are gone, begin naming them,
one

after each soul come and
gone in your life, each a dream, each a deepred memory, pretend
you are smoke and float recklessly into the thick trees o'er . .
.

Finally, The Invisibles crowd obscurely about you, waiting.
Each ray of light contains a message, smirks at just how little
you know, Invisibles with fat, prosey tongues and many fingers
liquid and probing, team up, set her to laughing then on fire,
then into the cold darkness of Eternal Love, then beyond that and
back to the only touch that ever mad a damned bit of,
of,

Crossing the moment and the place with eternity and infinity,
apply mortal pen pushed by mortal hand directed by creative
animation, brown-eyed soul, want, colored ghost, and so nearer to
the hot plain that is her pink calm sky, her tight blonde
secrets, her spread mortal laugh, her hands, her liquid wands, her

can you stop this?

*"Wow, Ray, looking down the Sound the irregular but measured
crests of the whitecaps frothing and frisking, tumbling and
tossing, sheeting and silvering--a dynamic, tumultuous, yet
soothing grid whose unspeakable message is one of a fathomless
protective, devastating beauty where devastation isn't a negative
mode but akin to the grace of mental annihilation and transport--
the inner exfoliation of the benign agitation of which vast sea
and/or landscapes induce in the receptive mind . . . God revelling
in the surprising (even to Him!) arrangement of space, color,
light, and motion that trick out the best and most eternal in Him
and Us . . . And this chuff of speculative synergy ends now as I
need to piss, have a smoke, let the wind enliven me direct . . .
Later"*

letter dated Jan. 10, 1998,
Ric Amante-to-Ray Soulard, Jr.
writ on Bremerton-to-Seattle ferry

Leading this into the rumbling underneath, the smoking, pissing,
ferryboat-riding geniuspoetrywriting crazy man's standing behind
you tonight, watching you tomorrow, wishing you from yellowgreen

dreams, continuing to exist, you, by continuing to laugh, and young Rebecca Dorothy Americus and her big box, her fullest canvas yet, and noone knows now what she's about to do, and, oh later when the story's getting along, remembrancing a place, its phalanx, our tribe, your brothersisters but really, but truly,

Or perhaps keep beginning. Begin, Beginning, always in the soft swirling excitement of having-just-begun. More like dreams, or the interior spaces of music, of paintings, boxes and boxes of them, begin here, begin everywhere, begin always

Many things, Be because you are, Many things, begin without ending, many things, where am i? where is this? How high are the stars anyway? How, high are you?

The night touches me, a sweet girl She, a long dress, a poem, a need, but listen her skin soft but bones hard there is a vast interior underneath curls and purple eyes, each time She is a greater sensation than I can ever fully know, she begins, she-night, i am exhausted, questioning smoke in her palm

The universe begins anew every moment, beat, beat, new names for joy all the time scribed on every newborn star, it's not mystical foolery if you really believe it to be so-- not one moment the same as its neighbors but a countless vastness of continuous evaporating, a complete summary of all creation, a perfect bubble with neither top nor bottom, within nor without, start nor finish, nothing, something, everything

we'll get there this universe of every-I, this vastness of here, this undifferentiated girl-night, sweet girl-night,

calm down, we never have to go.

vii.

Sitting in a classroom in Melancholia High School, listening to a face reading a page, drawing interiors of wall and sketches of colored ceiling, sitting in the back of the class, knows the page, heard her Dad drunk and on the floor yelling, his friends Jim Reality and Cecile Grey trying to help him up but he's got to stay down to the passage's last sentence when he allows himself to rise and maybe she'll just damned well stand up and yell the words as they ought: "We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done

otherwise shall give him no peace. It is deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends, no invention, no hope."

"Emerson, yes!"

"He dad is a druggie" sez one to another, watching her smile beyond them all, envying her leather motorcycle jacket and her faith, her willingness, her ability to be afraid

A pretty girl box of night, a flowing inside the night, a filled walking through city of night, Everything's coming now, Everything's here now, Lights & Release--

viii.

"I am surely mad and even now beyond dreaming, I am listening to you there, sitting in that seat, lying in that bed, smoking something natural with the window up. Sit up!"

I sit up, I am awake now.

"Well there is more music coming today but first I want you to look at the sky. Do it! You're sitting up! Look outside. You acidheads especially. Nature's good for you."

I stand at the window, push back the curtains, bushes fill the lower half of the window. Beyond the bushes I can see the street and evergoingsby.

"What do you see, Americus?"

I see the street.

"Who are you talking to? Who am I?"

When I was a kid, there was a show I liked on the radio. The DJ's name was Commander Q.

"How old were you?"

Teenager.

"Did the radio ever talk to you like this?"

No.

"Do you wish it did?"

Yes.

"Did you sing with the radio?"

Yes. Alot. You played alot of Beatles stuff. You said they were better than Mozart and we should hear them often.

"Did I tell you to sing?"

I think so. You said, uh, that's what it was about. You said rock should go there.

"It still should."

I liked your program.

"What do you see out the window?"

Faces.

"What are they doing?"

They're singing my songs.

"How do you know?"

They are. They're performing to me, performing me. I started them. I led them into me and now they're performing me. They're becoming my song and singing it.

"Are you beginning to see?"

It's not over yet, is it?

"No."

I'm not going far enough. I have to go now.

"Yes."

OK.

"Good. Turn my program off. You need to wake up now and go."

ix.

Moving toward a common room, here, toward a sweet box, full of restless intentions;

Time, place, both falling toward one point. Luna T's Cafe.

But the story is just beginning. There's a heap to come.

Immutable phalanx, that's where it's bound.

Moving toward a common room, here, toward a sweet box, full of restless intentions; time, place, both, neither, yes, no, falling toward one point. No-where. Now-here.

Not sick, anymore, yet not well, not returned to sickness's beginning-place, because continued beyond sickness, but neither back nor onward to wellness, neither relevant,

how to say?

a movement through open tunnels, without floors, ceilings, or walls, but tunnels, called tunnels, a careening beyond colors, velocity beyond seeing, velocity beyond eyes

remaking the box that is called Luna T's Cafe, she secretly contrives a door for him, one he'll have to use, one she creates for him to use, but not now, a door awaiting its time, a door that will not fully come to be until its purpose is at hand, not now, not yet

moving toward a common room, here, a sweet box, full of restless intentions and this, frankly is going to involve, eventually, everything

there isn't any design model to lean against here, nothing but intuition and trust, nothing but a trudging into the unknown,

continual, following the music, telling the truth, this moment its own audience, its own revelation, its own means to its own--

Beyond faith, beyond plan, beyond form, beyond compulsion, arrived at the right place exclusively in the sense of having never left--

eventually, it will all be assembled here, they will all be assembled, but not yet. It is winter in New England, Noisy Children isn't playing right now, will eventually, but not now, deep, hard winter, the box not yet remade, not yet newly sweetened, more thoughts and sketches--

x.

"Put these up, Rebbi"

"My pictures?"

"Bring them to Luna T's and put them on the wall"

"Why? They're not really pictures, Dad. They're, um, plans. A lot of them probably won't even happen."

"Put up the ones you want to happen the most"

"What about you?"

"I can't draw"

"No! I mean what are you going to put up? It's us both, remember?"

"I don't know"

"Dad, I know you're working on a musical"

"Oh"

"So put the lyrics up!"

"Now?"

"Yes! Like me. Like you said. Just the good ones that you really want to make into songs"

"That would be fair, wouldn't it?"

"Are you gonna do it?"

xi.

How to contrive a sound, a whirl, a sirocco of sight,
bristling, broad, and about my young artist friend whom I depend
upon, a strolling, a breeze, streets dividing, cacophony by the
category

a beauteous, a thick, a rainfill, cup of ticks, my sweet
muse, Rebecca, sweet muse, Franny, sweet muse, Merry, sweet muse,
bastard under the influence

"What about the old man?"

"Who?"

"Him. The preacher."

"You mean Mr. Knickerbocker?"

"He always loved you, Rebecca? He thinks you're his sister
from when he was a child."

"Well I've always loved him because he's different."

"So you have to account for him."

"How, Mr. Bob? I wasn't going to touch his stool or
anything."

"Is that enough?"

Silence. "I guess not."

"Think about it."

"But I don't know what he likes."

"Are you sure about that?"

How to contrive something beyond contrive . . . how to
recognize the moment, remember having been here before, now,
recall coming visits

if true being, real remembering, is understanding
foreverHere, eternalNow, crushing amnesia, stealing back what's
ours--

Sitting near the slavered wall, cupped in wool & lace.
Folded, clean, seeing, watchful,

clues of restlessness: fingers and curls

i want to ride your back its skin shrouded and burning you
won't know freedom until you allow the danger within to take you
to your smiling demise and past and finally back

i want to stoke your invisibility until you are nearly here
until you watch this filled and noisy room begin to empty until
you are nearly here and

ever more alone

the secret to writing is that
everything rhymes words
stars girls and boys

the secret to the universe is that
there is no secret the lightness
you suspect the prettiness you
occasionally notice the death
you long to feel is all
true

beyond arguing, seeking, explaining,
wondering, even hoping is
the time & place where questions
& answers campaign for followers
but are not allowed to enter

Here.

Now.

Here

Now.

Here. Now.

looking across this noisy room i see the living room where my
sister & I sometimes played, tho often we weren't allowed

and back then i was so less concerned with thens, with
elsewheres at my worst i looked into now and saw inexactly what
it would be

further back, a child, now-here was pretty much all there
was, tell:

an empty lot where we neighborhood kids played football there
was Kevin, Terry, Pumpkin, and others, older than us but the now-
here was often all there was

i watch a blonde girl's sweet breasts and remember the trees
in the back of that lot, led into a forest where i never went and
there is daily my mother's voice calling for me as she never did
again once we family moved elsewhere

blonde girl's sweet neck half dimmed in shadows and the big
willow tree in my childhood's backyard, weeping willow, very tall,
enough space for a childhood clubhouse under its branches

*"It was if I had been shaking all my life, from a chronic
undercurrent of fear. Shaking, running, getting into trouble,*

losing the people I loved. Like a cartoon character instead of a person, I realized. A corny animation from the early Thirties. In back of all I had ever done the fear had forced me on. Now the fear had died, soothed away by the news I had heard. The news, I realized suddenly, that I had waited from the beginning to hear; created, in a sense, to be present when the news came, and for no other reason.

"I could forget the dead girl. The universe itself, on its macrocosmic scale, could now cease to grieve. The wound had healed."

Philip K. Dick,
Valis, 1981.

I may be ready to walk with you tonight, my love. You have always been here with me, never absent, not even for a moment, trusting me, loving me, expecting me to find a way to be happy, and to make you laugh as I can.

The closer I am to seeing you again, the happier, and the room may be empty or full but it doesn't matter

YOU ARE NOT ALONE
I told me acid told me so

The wound, the loss, is delusion for presence & absence are simply not relevant.

Couches. Tables. Messy paintings on the wall. A twenty-foot long window and the street beyond. Shadows and sweets and hot drinks. Ceiling-fans. Tarot cards. Notebooks. Expensive pens. Loud and peppery music. Eyes on some page. Eyes on some piece.

Perhaps that's all for now; you are here, you are waiting, you are visible beyond this page, but this is new truth and i doubt it, wondering if it will stay or fall.

once you have touched and tasted her nipple, felt her body harden and coalesce around your tongue, excited, afraid, and now it is several years later and you are alone, are you ready to allow that memory into this moment, her eyes, used to giving, surprised by your gift, planning, allow them into this place where you seem to sit alone and watch quietly?

her slow movements? her blue eyes? her naked expectations?
the moment when you started becoming an obvious means to an obscure end? Past when others mattered, past when others ceased to

matter, back to here, back to now, where all of this has taken place and here you are as unsure as ever-----

Yes, well, and there are several trunkfuls of soft, rising calm. A large, empty house, lights, bright, irreligious, undivisible. Yes, well, and she is a blurry redhaired creature, a hard, whispering vapor, a blue-eyed recognition, a carnal adjustment in a large pair of eyes, an empty shack watching from a doorless train speeding through a night of grey days. Haggard flags blow. Cement men, back in the city, talk--

High enough? Never!

Shimmering, cold; quiet, inverted fear; skin clear and thinning; we are a cosmetic blankness, near to semiotics & Southern cunnilingus on the bookstore shelves in your area, discounted by the more catholic servants of mankind; if you need to hide it, grow a beard; if a beard won't help, wait til morning, take the bus to the Mass Pike entrance near the corner of Newbury Street and Mass Ave-- you've bought your flask of Kentucky Gentleman's Sipping Whiskey-- go ahead, walk along, get your thumb out, cars passing by you with a slap of wind-- you're on your way . . . you're on your way

xii.

"TRUST GRAVITY--
IT WILL ALWAYS LET YOU DOWN"

was the impromptu graffito on the newly painted men's room at Luna T's Cafe. Painted-- ceiling, walls, floor-- with a substance like that of a chalkboard. And several boxes of chalk, many colors, provided on wall-shelves.

Americus considered this graffito as he let out a hot, delicious morning piss, welcome of day, release of dreams.

Considered the chalk, the walls and floor and ceiling, the graffito, considered them all, and elected not to add his own comment yet.

Returned to the manager's office, closed the door, locking it too, and sat on the floor near the couch.

"I won't leave if you uncuff me"

"No"

"Rich, this isn't like you"

"Yes"

"I know what you want . . . "

"No"

"You know you can't keep me for any longer than I choose"

"Yes"

She is redhaired, thick, long, curly, bright, a soft shawl down her bare shoulders. Knowing his weaknesses perfectly, she doesn't jerk her nude breast around, she undulates even as she struggles, wrists cuffed behind her, legs crossed, ruby pussy soft and perfect, its lips visible and tight.

"I know what you want"

"No"

"I'm your Muse! I'll let you take me if you lie me back"

"Merry, why do you think I captured you?"

"Because I let you? Because the little peach is dead and you've come back, penis in hand?"

"Cunt"

"It's beautiful, isn't it? You should've seen me when I was 16, when Renoir took me in that arbor. I made him cry."

Merry Muse undulates blonder, undulates young and sweet, and real, achingly real.

"Rich . . ." her sweet, low-voiced light drawl . . .

Not thinking, he rears back and smacks her hard. Were she really Franny Salinger, she'd be crushed to the floor with a broken jaw. But Muses don't break.

"You don't believe she's dead, do you?"

"No."

"I'm sorry, Rich."

"No."

"You have me. You know I'm the best."

"You're not real."

"I'm here. She's not. Isn't that enough?"

"It doesn't work that way."

Grimacing, Merry snaps the steel cuffs and throws them at Rich, who dodges them.

Raising her arms, large lovely breasts rising, proclaiming, a long pink dress with red trimming descends on her, followed by a red bonnet with purple grapes.

"Better, Rich?"

"Much."

"You want me more now?"

"A little"

"Why?"

"It's easier to pretend you're not a dirty lying conniving emptyhearted bitch cunt."

"Thanks."

"Where is she?"

"Rich."

"You know I won't stop looking."

Merry sighs. "I know, Orpheus. But why did you let her leave?"

"She didn't"

"What was she doing in Georgia?"

"It doesn't matter."

"The other one's dead, too. Your beloved janitor-poet."

"So I've heard."

"You don't believe that either? Rich--"

"No. I do. But that doesn't matter so much."

"What are you planning?"

"Oh, yknow, Merry. A good time will be had by all."

Merry is no longer blonde. Smiling, she motions Rich over to her. Naked, both of them, they curl into each other on the couch. She strokes his back, her blue eyes holding his auburn ones.

"Merry, how else can you have me?"

"More, boy."

"You need her, too."

"Me? No. I put up with her. It's you. You won't let her go. You're afraid. That just limits us."

"Why?"

Her hand strokes his cock, keeping it limp, but raising his blood. Facing each other, on their sides, She pulls him closer, entangles him in her several legs. suddenly kisses him, her legs part and he sinks penis-led into her pussy and her breasts consume what's left--

"Dad, are you OK?"

Once, there was a day when you hid in the uncut grass of your childhood's front yard and you watched the many clouds go by, nameless sunny day, and imagined, smilingly, that it was the earth you lay upon moving, that by the clouds above you could witness the speed of planetary rotation--

"Dad!"

"Rebby," you sing. She sits with you in complete freedom, her smile trusting and watchful, her face eager to be kissed, her body hoping for embrace, her ears ready for you, her eyes a happy mist upon you.

"I painted the bathrooms," she says shyly.

"Yes. And there's chalk."

"Is that OK?"

I remember hiding in the bushes that ran along the back edge of our backyard. There was a tunnel straight through them that

ended beneath the willow tree, weeping willow tree--there was nothing more important than this, then, now--

"Yes, Rebbi. I love you."

"I love you, Dad."

"I love Franny, too."

"I know, Dad. Don't worry."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. But you're sure, too, if you just think about it."

"You're right. I love you. You take care of me."

"Of course!"

I remember back in 4th grade leaving a note in the school-locker of the girl I loved. I even gave her check-boxes, for yes or no.

"What next, Rebbi?"

"With here? Oh. Well, are you going to play music again soon? I wanted to make some nice posters."

"Noisy Children's on break."

"Only a break?"

"Yes, Reb. I told them that we shouldn't wear each other out. But we're going to play here next spring or summer. They believe me."

"I believe you, too, Dad."

"That's more important."

"You're right."



[To be concluded in Cenacle 46, June 2001]



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Poetry: Ric Amante

After Some Winter

I've decided to move my silence within
where it's spacious and vital—a river of emptiness.
Yet there a rack of candles,
there a packet of lovers,
there a temple cat studying
the cracks in the baseboards.
And should a dusty-blue moth
weave its jerky passage
over these winsome places,
I'll open my eyes smiling.
Love flows sweet and slow
through widening spaces,
hooks and haunts have lost their power--words break off
hope is a word
a gentle hum is all I hear.

Any Port in a Storm

The corners of the front porch are filling with
snow,
small white mounds
nestling at the foot of the columns—
everything brought down to a hush—
no haste no waiting no time before you
but that of the snow—
measured, wind-banked piles of flakes
no two alike in shape or life
dissolving, reforming, leading you home.

A Birthday Toast

Another birthday hits quick and unbidden
from the footpaths, the bedroom, the sky
and should survival get old or resistance weaken,
truth lag or love go south
you'll be troubled anew
with more listening,
more dying,
more now.

Up Above

Basking in quick April air
feathered by drifts of lemon pollen-
yes, look skyward,
a hawk grows in Cambridge
a broad-winged hawk blown in from the woodlands
that winks as it loops over condos undone.
It sees so much so much of our game,
conveys such a sense of mastery achieved-
yet master it has none
save wind and God
and it chooses to speak not of either
just glides over precipice, rooftop, and alley
no past and no future
a speck rising higher.

Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. He forwarded to me the poems included in this issue by electronic mail, a process that proves bedeviling at times for him. He said regarding this: "I really have no patience or affinity and I daresay a great deal of primordial distrust re: the presence of these boxes*hereon in I'll send stuff via mail as well as be more attuned to the deadline and the possibility of an attack of computer weirdness and my annoyance with same . . . ZOUNDS!#*"

Barbara Brannon lives in Columbia, South Carolina. While her cover art, art notebooks, and design work have appeared regularly in *The Cenacle* for years, "The Darkroom" is her first piece of fiction in these pages. Cheers, Brannon! ;)

Joe Ciccone lives in Brighton, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Soon this young fellow will be winging his way to Europe for an artist's jaunt, then back to the trenches of northern New Jersey for a crack at medical school. What poems & visions may come of all this one can only writhe, & chuckle. :)

Donald J. DeGracia lives in parts unknown. The original version of his essay in this issue can be found on the Internet at The Deoxyribonucleic Hyperdimension website (www.deoxy.org) in the section "Chemical Experiences of a Hyperspatial Nature." I have taken the editorial liberty of substituting in his essay the word "psychedelic" for the words "hallucinogen" & "hallucinogenic." LSD is not an hallucination-producing substance as some others are, and while many current thinkers in this field prefer the word "entheogen," it is my feeling that the word devised by Huxley & Osmond back in the 1950s bears its weight in both controversy and sublime accuracy. My sincerest good wishes to Mr. DeGracia wherever he may be tonight. :)

Gerry Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His story in the issue was originally published in 1992 in a periodical called *Sixes & Sevens*, which we co-edited with Jim Gregory. It is a delight to revive this story for a new decade/century and to mention that it will be included in a forthcoming Scriptor Press book of Dillon's fiction. :)

Ralph H. Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His prose & fiction have appeared several times in *The Cenacle* but this is his first time contributing cover art. This fine picture is also of great personal importance to Ralph, which gives me additional pleasure in featuring it. :)

Ray Soulard, Jr. lives in Malden, Massachusetts. The original version of these "notes on contributors" disappeared in what Amante above terms "computer weirdness." They are fucking weird, puters, sometimes wonderfully, sometimes hair-whiteningly. There is no point here save the old Eastern adage Burke once told me: "Beware & Be Aware."



The truth is pleasurable . . .

